LITERATURE.

THE WONDERFUL CENTURY: ITS SUCCESSES AND ITS FAILURES.

By Alfred Russel Wallace. (Swan Sonnenschein, 1898. 7s. 6d.)

No book by this author can fail to command attention, and the volume before us will not disappoint the expectations of the reader in respect of the charm of its manner or the interest of its matter. It has an added value in the excellent portrait of Dr. Wallace himself, which seems to incorporate for the many who do not know him the gentle character and many-sided genius which have, through his works, won the hearts of two generations of readers.

But on this subject—the achievements of our century—he may claim to speak as one having authority, for thereanent he can put forward the proud boast of the Homeric hero, "Quorum pars magna fui"; and he may still more fitly claim our attention to the double theme of this book, since he has for many years devoted much attention to the economic questions of our age, as well as to the purely scientific matters with which his name is more generally associated.

It is invidious to find fault in such circumstances, but one blemish "springs into the eyes," as the Germans say, so obtrusively that it is impossible not to comment upon it. It is surely not far short of marvellous that an author of such experience of wide questions and the balancing of relative claims to importance and consideration as Dr. Wallace, should so far forget the elements of mental perspective as to give one-fourth of the space of this book to the question of the failure of vaccination. Granting its immediate seriousness, and even the completeness of the evidence in favor of the thesis that it is a delusion, as he says, can any one for a moment contend that the question bulks so largely in the scales of history as to warrant the devotion to it of 100 pages, while the whole of the rest of the vast achievements and failures of the century (including the economic fiasco of capitalism) are entitled
to only 300 between them? Or that the
question is so vastly more important than
that of the colossal war expenditure, for
instance, as indicated by the allotment to it
of ten times the space? And will it be
believed that in this same book the vast
matter of the theory of evolution by natural
selection, which has practically revolutionised
human thought in almost every department,
is disposed of in eight pages? Such are the
methods of the faddist or crank all the world
over—to swamp the ha'porth of bread in a
deluge of sack; but such is not, or should not
be, the method of science.

But this is a defect which makes the work
no less valuable in itself, while its value is
peculiarly great to social reformers of all
grades for its damning indictment of militarism
and capitalism as developed in our time, since
it is very exceptional that a scientific man
should be able to pass judgment of any
weight on questions of economic evolution.
But they are, after all, scientific problems, and
a trained observer of natural phenomena and
a great apostle of the evolution doctrine is
entitled to all respect when he speaks, after
years of study, on questions of social evolu-
tion as manifested by economic facts. And in
this matter Dr. Wallace speaks with the
fervor of a Ruskin. It is especially desirable
that attention should be called to and fixed
upon the grievous and obvious failures of our
civilisation at a time when we are hearing—and
are likely to hear even ad nauseam—of our
wonderful achievements; and if anyone is to
obtain a hearing, when speaking of the skele-
ton at our feast, surely Dr. Wallace, as one
of those who have mightily achieved, may
certainly claim our ear. Let us all, who
dream of social amelioration, hope he will
succeed to some purpose. The smugly " suc-
cessful" classes, who have reaped the harvests
made possible by science, are already uneasy
in their " golden houses", even though, like
Tennyson's Olympians,

"They smile in silence, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring
deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights and flaming towns, and sinking
ships and praying hands."

Especially interesting is the account of the
vitaly important functions of dust in the
earth's economy, which, though mentioned in
part in a variety of text-books, we do not
remember to have seen dealt with in any
paper, or even paragraph, collecting the whole
of the scattered evidence into a statement
such as this, at once convincing and surprising.
The chapter containing an estimate of
achievements is truly a wonderful record, and
the table on p. 154 comparing the 19th with
all previous centuries together, to the manifest
advantage of the former, is, perhaps, too flatter-
ing to our vanity, for it takes no account of
the vantage ground from which our age started,
and we must in fairness remember that a
dwarf on a giant's shoulders may see farther
than the giant without great credit to himself.
This is especially to be noted by us—

"The latest seed of time,
New men that in the flying of a wheel
Cry down the Past"—

and to us, therefore, the humble-pie offered in
the second part should be specially benefi-
cial.

It is also interesting to note that Englishmen
hold a splendid pre-eminence on the scientific
roll of fame. Besides the great names of
Stephenson, Dalton, Darwin, and Wallace,
Faraday, Young, Lyell, Simpson, Lister, and
Thomson, there are a series of names which,
if not those of actually the first inventors and
discoverers, stand close to these, and certainly
share their glory. Among these are Wollaston
and Huggins in spectrum analysis, Davy and
Crookes in chemistry, Joule and Tyndall in
physics, Aitken in meteorology, Huxley in
biology, Adams and Tait in astronomy, and,
above all, the great philosophic mind co-
ordinating and concentrating the work of all
the rest—Herbert Spencer. Can any other
nation show a like record?