

NEW BOOKS.

THE WONDERFUL CENTURY. Its Successes and Failures. By ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE. (London, 1898: Swan Sonnenschein.)

As an "appreciation of the century" for the general public this book may pass, as a scientific treatise it is of no value.

The title indicates that the work is not intended for the student, who should learn the *nil admirari* before penetrating into the mysteries of science and life.

In the author's opinion the nineteenth century, as far as its intellectual achievements are concerned, is superior, not only to any that have gone before it, but it may be best compared with the whole preceding historical period. This may be true in reference to mechanical and chemical inventions, but it is a grave error to believe that the intellectual development of humanity practically dates from the year 1800. We need not dwell on the failures which Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace exposes, like the neglect of phrenology and hypnotism, or on the failure of vaccination; these are of minor importance if we study the intellectual progress of humanity.

Of much greater importance seems the question whether the nineteenth century has freed our mind from superstition, and from its inherent misery, whether the majority of the people is possessed of higher intellectual power than our ancestors of the eighteenth century, and whether we can compare the brain work done in this century with the intellectual achievements of all former centuries. The student of ancient philosophy, the admirer of Greek thought, as well as the impartial observer of contemporary development, will hesitate to decide this question in the way Mr. Wallace has done.

The author in fifteen chapters describes the successes of the century, and in six more he deals with the failures. Amongst the latter he devotes an unreasonable space to an appreciation of phrenology and so-called psychical research, and in a long treatise he tries to prove that vaccination is a crime. All these subjects are alien, or at least irrelevant, to the issue. The successes of which we may boast, are well set forth. Steam and electricity in their different applications, the improvement in our modes of travelling, in labour-saving machinery, in the conveyance of thought, find a clever exponent in the author, and an interesting chapter deals with cosmic theories, another with evolution and natural selection. Mr. Russel Wallace surveys also the popular discoveries in physiology, and the critics would have had no cause to grumble if he had omitted to write on the failures. However, the essays on militarism—the curse of civilisation—and on the demon of greed, are well written, and show the writer's enthusiasm for true progress.