It is a wonderful achievement for a man eighty-eight years old, to write a book of 400 pages on Life and to maintain from the first page to the last a high standard of noble thought and of clear language. Besides, there is a singular distinction about books written by men who have grown old in the service of Science. Such books recall to the reader what Socrates said of his "law of recession towards mediocrity" and of his "law of inheritance," and of his "high pressure search for food". Dr. Wallace mostly gives to the exposition of arguments, as to the production of the several species with their special organs. Taking these words as a sort of text, and feeling sure that the wonderful beauty of created forms is explicable in religion, and wholly inexplicable in science, he confesses the ancient faith in a Divine Mind ruling the universe and administering it, in the interests of man, and for the final advancement of man to spiritual perfection.

It was inevitable that Dr. Wallace should fall, near the end of the book, into a trap of his own setting. Anti-vaccination, anti- vivisection, and spiritualism are part of his creed; and, confessing it, he feels bound to confess them. At the very end of the book they suddenly turn up, all three of them at once, like the three King Charles's heads in the picture by Van Dyck. Happily they come too late, and vanish too soon, to spoil the general harmony of the book.

Some of the numerous illustrations are very bad. This poverty is no great fault in a book written by a man of science. It is not a "gift-book"; and there is enough, and more than enough, of books enriched with better illustrations than they deserve. The bison, the lemming, the grey plover, he is talking of them, and he wants a little picture just to show what they are like, and an old woodcut satisfies him. That is as it ought to be: books of science ought not to be over-dressed. It is a grand book for a veteran to have written; it has that character which we call in books lovable. He is pleasantly beautiful? He does not really spoil the general harmony of the book. His figures are interesting, and he has a sense of poetry. He is pleasant haunted by the greatest of all questions: Why is the world beautiful? He makes a passing suggestion that the beauty of butterflies' wings and peacocks' tails may be an outlet for vital energy, a surplus of vital energy for breeding, a sign of sexual maturity and vigour; but he would hardly like it if we took this conventional explanation as his final answer to the question. Why is the world beautiful? He does not really care twopence for any naturalistic answer; and, after all, there is no reason why he should.