

Dr. A. R. Wallace, F.R.S., is well entitled to speak about "The Wonderful Century," since he shares with Darwin the honour of having demonstrated the epoch-making doctrine of the evolution of species. His book is concerned chiefly, though not exclusively, with the scientific and mechanical achievements of the age—the great forward march the human race made in the nineteenth century in all that concerns the material resources of civilisation. He emphasises the social revolutions brought about by the swift methods of travelling, the new facilities for the conveyance of thought, the vast industrial changes which have followed the invention of labour-saving machinery, the new conquests of fire and light by the invention of lucifer matches, gas, and electric illumination, to say nothing of photography, spectrum analysis, and the Röntgen rays, with their untold possibilities. He lays stress on a number of theoretical discoveries in physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, and physiology, and speaks of the merciful conquest, in some measure at least, of pain by the use of anæsthetics in surgical operations. He thinks that, in order to estimate the full importance and grandeur of the discoveries of the nineteenth century, more especially as regards man's increased power over nature in the application of that power to the needs of modern life, we must compare it, not with any preceding century, however brilliant and fruitful, but with the whole historical period of the world's progress. "We find only five inventions of the first rank in all preceding time—the telescope, the printing-press, the mariner's compass, Arabic numerals, and alphabetical writing, to which we may add the steam-engine and the barometer, making seven in all, as against thirteen in our single century." Less satisfactory is Dr. Wallace's treatment of what he calls the failures of the century, in the forefront of which he places the neglect of phrenology, which he stoutly maintains has been caused by the incredible narrowness and prejudices of men of science. He is indignant also at the prevailing opposition to hypnotism and psychical research, and, amongst other things, he takes up his parable against vaccination, which he calmly dismisses as a delusion, whilst denouncing in energetic terms its penal enforcement as a crime. If the truth must be confessed, Dr. Wallace, in the closing half of the book, is a doughty defender of what some people would call lost and others hopelessly discredited causes, and by doing so he imperils the general verdict on his book.