

## REVIEWS OF RECENT BOOKS.

**Wallace, ALFRED RUSSEL.** *Social Environment and Moral Progress.* London, New York, Toronto, Melbourne. Cassell and Co.; 1913; price 3s. 6d.; pp. 164.

MEMBERS of the Eugenics Education Society will regret that the celebrated author of this little volume, who has so recently passed away after a long life of generous labour and great achievement, expresses no sympathy with the aims of the Society, and that all his references to eugenics are disparaging. The following passage strikes the keynote of the book: "Nature—or the universal mind—has not failed or bungled our world so completely as to require the weak and ignorant efforts of the eugenists to set it right, while leaving the great fundamental causes of all existing social evils absolutely untouched. Let them devote all their energies to purifying this whitened sepulchre of destitution and ignorance, and the beneficent laws of human nature will themselves bring about the physical, intellectual, and moral advancement of our race" (p. 149). This thorough-going condemnation of "eugenists" by so eminent a biologist calls for some examination of its grounds and of the attitude maintained by him towards the questions with which "eugenics" is concerned. Dr. Wallace's peculiar views on human evolution are well known; but it is perhaps worth while to give the briefest possible summary of them. He believed that the higher intellectual and moral qualities of the human race were bestowed upon it at some definite date in its history by a creative act of God; these qualities being superadded to all those lower or simpler mental powers which it had, and still has, in common with the higher animals. This process of endowment, which is described as a "divine influx," is supposed to have been of a nature entirely different from the slow processes of natural selection by which all the rest of the marvels of life and mind were (in the author's view) brought into being.

This is no doubt a defensible hypothesis; but eugenists will perhaps be helped to bear up under Dr. Wallace's strictures if it is pointed out that the arguments by which he seeks to establish and elaborate this doctrine are in some respects confused and inconsequent. For his contempt of eugenics derives from his faith in this doctrine. Dr. Wallace rightly contends that we have no evidence which could justify us in believing that the intellectual or moral powers of the human race have undergone any progressive evolution since the time of the earliest civilisations of which any traces survive. Alongside this fact he places the extreme diversities of the great groups of languages, arguing that these imply the separate endowment with higher mental powers of several distinct branches of the prehuman ancestral stock.

Now, in drawing his conclusion from these facts, Dr. Wallace seems to ignore the immense duration of the periods of human life which preceded the few thousands of years of recorded civilisation. For, when we remember that man was a highly intelligent tool-making creature during a period measured in thousands of centuries, and that we may reasonably suppose the evolution of his higher powers to have been going on throughout these long ages, the argument from the lack of racial progress in the historic period is seen to be of no weight. But Dr. Wallace himself undermines his argument in another way. He points out forcibly enough that, throughout much or all of the period of civilisation, the conditions of human life have been such as must have tended to bring about degeneration of the race by reversed selection rather than any further

progress of its innate powers. So strongly is he impressed by the picture he draws of human degradation under civilisation, that he infers from the continued existence of examples of human virtue (still to be found in out of the way corners of our civilised countries) that the higher powers conferred upon the race by the "Divine influx" must be regarded as incapable of being degraded by processes of reversed selection.

Nevertheless, he regards these powers as capable of undergoing further improvement through natural selection, and he confidently anticipates that such progress of the race will result from socialistic legislation of a kind which will secure material well-being for all persons, but will strictly abstain from eugenically intended measures. The mode of selection on which he chiefly relies for the advancement of the human species is the wise choice of husbands by women. And he believes that this can be brought into effective operation by legislation of the type he favours. For, he argues, such legislation would produce a surplus of marriageable males (by putting an end to war and diminishing the other agents, disease, accidents, and emigration, to which the present surplus of females is due), and would render women economically independent; which again would increase the surplus of males, because under such conditions a certain proportion of women would prefer to remain celibate. Women could then be relied upon to choose for their husbands the better endowed males only, leaving a sterile surplus which would consist of the males least fit for fatherhood. This in brief is the train of reasoning which leads the author of *Wallaceism* or neo-Darwinism (the biological doctrine which denies all transmission of the effects of use and environment) to range himself upon the side of those who look solely to the betterment of the conditions of social life for all advance of the human race and who commonly take their stand (whether explicitly or not) on the assumption that the Lamarckian doctrine is true.

It appears, then, that Dr. Wallace was himself a eugenicist; for he looked forward to the improvement of the human breed through the intelligent purposeful action of human beings. And, unless he was prepared to maintain that the mothers of the race under his socialistic scheme would exert their choice of husbands no less wisely if they were to give no thought to the future of the race and the quality of their offspring than if they were guided by an enlightened forethought for these things, then he was logically committed to approve of the aims of the Eugenics Education Society and morally bound to support it. And it appears that he differed from us other eugenicists, chiefly in the two following ways: (1) he had an absolute confidence in the practicability and beneficence of social legislation of the type he favoured; (2) he felt no urgent need for action to arrest the processes of reversed selection that seem to be making (and always to have made) for racial degeneration among the most highly civilised peoples; because he believed that the work of the "Divine influx" cannot be undone; the sudden advance of the race brought about by that process is irreversible; and so the race is secured against degeneration and can afford to wait, marking time with what patience it may, until the Socialists shall have demonstrated the harmlessness and practicability of their schemes, without presupposing any radical transformation of human nature by the green gases of a comet or by any other miraculous occurrence.

Although it may, then, be admitted that if the socialistic scheme of society were otherwise workable and desirable, sexual selection would probably become once more under it a eugenic factor, we cannot find in Dr. Wallace's book any justification for his hostile attitude towards eugenics. For, in the first place, if we were to grant all his premises and to accept all his conclusions, we should still have to recognise the work of eugenic education as important for the guidance of sexual selection by women. Secondly, since the doctrine of the insusceptibility of man's higher nature to degeneration is so slenderly based, we cannot re-

concile ourselves to the continuance of the conditions which seem to threaten to destroy our civilisation as they seem to have destroyed so many others, namely, by bringing about deterioration of our stock. Thirdly, although reasonable men may perhaps regard the socialistic plan of society as a hopeful experiment and as one that ought to be given a trial, no impartial person will regard the success of the plan as so well assured that we can afford to stake upon it the whole future of our race, holding ourselves absolved by the hope of it from the duty of giving careful consideration to all other eugenic possibilities. W. MCD.