

MR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE AND THE
MEDICAL PROFESSION.

MR. WALLACE, despite the manner in which at different times he has suffered pulverisation at the hands of Dr. McVail, and in his cross-examination before the Royal Commission on Vaccination, has written yet another pamphlet, in which, under the title of "Vaccination a Delusion; its Penal Enforcement a Crime," he reiterates all his old arguments, all his old fallacies, and, be it added, all his old sins of omission. On this occasion he takes up an altogether independent attitude and he "appeals from the medical and official apologists of vaccination to the intelligence and common-sense of his fellow countrymen." So strong, indeed, seems his bias against the profession as a whole that he has, we infer, not even condescended to seek the most elementary assistance of those members of it whose names are household words amongst the anti-vaccinationists, and alone he sets forth to tread the thorny paths of medical science. Before the bottom of the very first page is reached a serious calamity befalls him and he tells his "fellow-countrymen" that typhus (obviously not a misprint for "typhoid") fever is believed to be communicated by specifically contaminated water. Surely after this we see why he deemed it inexpedient to appeal to the medical profession. In the next page or two Mr. Wallace flounders badly and under the heading of "Vaccination and the Medical Profession" he urges the old but obviously illogical argument that "as the profession has a pecuniary interest in perpetuating vaccination it can form no unbiased opinion upon the value of the operation." Can the author support this charge against the profession? Would nothing accrue to it if vaccination were abolished and small-pox substituted, as the medical profession believes it undoubtedly would be, in its stead? Would not the treatment of one case of small-pox for, say, three weeks more than counterbalance in a pecuniary sense the vaccination of many children? What, too, has Mr. Wallace to say as to the action of the medical profession as a whole in promoting in such an obviously self-denying fashion the growth of sanitary reform, which has done so much, according to the anti-vaccinationists, to check small-pox? Will he charge the profession with obstructing sanitary progress and with specifically polluting water-supplies in order that typhus (!) fever may flourish? But we cannot, Mr. Wallace tells us, even count properly. There is much evidence, he says, to show that "doctors are bad statisticians and have a special faculty for mistaking figures" — and he implies that his own mental processes are in an altogether peculiar degree fitted for accurate statistical research. Let us verify this implication by reference to the evidence given by Mr. Wallace before the Royal Commission, noting, by the way, that at his first interview he committed

so many errors that he asked to be allowed a second interview in order to correct and amplify some of his statements. His final leave-taking of the Commission may therefore be regarded as his ripened judgment and the acme of his knowledge upon all points relating to vaccination. It is generally accepted that the evidence with regard to small-pox and vaccination as illustrated in our small-pox hospitals is at least of some value, but Mr. Wallace seems to think such a study, to say the least of it, inconvenient. Here is a question put to Mr. Wallace by the Chairman on the occasion of his first examination:—

(Q. 7069.) "Have you examined the statistics with regard to the Metropolitan Asylum Board's hospitals?" (A.) "I have not paid much attention to them."

Similarly upon his second visit to the Commission, when he returned especially to supplement his evidence he was asked by Sir William Savory—

(Q. 9729.) "Have you gone into the question of the Fever Hospital?" (A.) "I daresay it would be instructive, but as I say, the subject would be so tremendously vast, and the time required to hunt up evidence would be so enormous, that unless one lived in London one could not do it; and I live 120 miles away."

(Q. 9730.) "But you have made your reputation by thoroughly sifting evidence before you came to a conclusion?" (A.) "Some kind of evidence."

Does this mean that it is Mr. Wallace's custom to omit such evidence as tells against any thesis he may be interested in developing? All Mr. Wallace's evidence may be found in the third report of the Commission and we commend it to our readers. They will then understand why Mr. Wallace speaks of the report as a "feeble report," and why vaccination "never saved a single life." It is narrated in Sir John Simon's "Papers Relating to the History and Practice of Vaccination" that a certain Prince Kaunitz forbade two words to be uttered in his presence: the one was "small-pox" and the other "death." We expect Mr. Wallace's best friends omit all reference to Dr. McVail or to the Royal Commission on Vaccination when in the presence of this distinguished expert on inductive and deductive methods.