

DR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE TELLS HIS LIFE STORY.

The career of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, who discovered the theory of Natural Selection simultaneously with Darwin, is naturally the subject of great popular interest. In "My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions" (Chapman and Hall. Two vols. 25s.), this distinguished man of science tells us all about himself in the simplest and most unaffected manner possible. Born at Usk, in Monmouthshire, in 1823, he went to Hertford at the age of five, where he spent his schooldays. One curious reminiscence of this period is connected with cricket. At that time overhand bowling was only just commencing, and there was a good deal of controversy as to whether it should be tolerated or not. In the meantime, a substitute for the human bowler, a kind of catapult, was invented, very much after the fashion of those old instruments of warfare by which stones were hurled into besieged cities.

At school.

It is curious to find this man of European reputation looking back on little incidents in the far-off school days and recalling them with such vivid distinctness. Here is an episode which one would expect to be woven into the woof of such books as "David Copperfield" or "Le Petit Chose" rather than in a volume from the pen of Darwin's large-minded rival. Like most school-boys, young Wallace was very hard on his clothes, with the usual consequences. As they were expensive articles, his mother determined to save his school jackets by making covers for the sleeves. "These," he tells us, "were made of black calico, reaching from the cuff to the elbow, and though I protested that I could not wear them, that I should be looked upon as a guy, and other equally valid reasons, they were one day put into my pocket, and I was told to put them on just before I entered the school. Of course, I could not do it; so I brought them back and told my mother. Then, after another day or two of trial, one morning the dreaded thunderbolt fell upon me. On entering school, I was called up to the master's desk; he produced the dreaded calico sleeves, and told me that my mother wished me to wear them to save my jacket, and told me to put them on. Of course, I had to do so." The author, whom scientific investigation has led to many parts of the earth's surface, whose reputation has for so long been established amongst the most eminent thinkers of his period, records this petty incident as being, while it lasted, the most severe punishment he endured. Apropos of the stupidities forced upon youth, whether from harshness or from kindness, the author cites the case of the famous Jack Mytton, who received four hundred a year at school, and was said to have spent eight hundred. Expelled both from Westminster and from Harrow, he became a cornet in the 7th Hussars, which he joined in France with the army of occupation, after the battle of Waterloo. Some time afterwards, when he had left the army, he was

arrested at Calais on bills which he had accepted in favour of a professional man with whom he had dealings. As soon as he was out of prison—his solicitor had come to his rescue and paid the debt—Mytton took his creditor by the arm and walked with him through the town so that the affair might not in any way injure his professional reputation. The author comments on this act of rare generosity on the part of a man who from first to last never did any good to himself, and then protests against "our ignorant and often disastrous rule" by which young lives are so constantly being spoilt.

St. George Mivart.

Dr. Wallace comments on the fact that, like Darwin, St. George Mivart was almost self-taught, so far as biology was concerned, and it was only at the age of twenty-five that he turned his attention to anatomy. He had been educated for the bar, and when he announced his intended change of profession his father said to him, "Well, you never have earned a penny yet, and I suppose you never will." Dr. Wallace considers St. George Mivart's case very similar to that of Darwin, who, on leaving school, was considered both by his masters and by his father "a very ordinary boy, rather below the common standard in intellect." As for the author's own opinion of Darwin, it can best be expressed in the words of Huxley, which he quotes with unqualified approval:

One could not converse with Darwin without being reminded of Socrates. There was the same desire to find someone wiser than himself; the same belief in the sovereignty of reason; the same ready humour; the same sympathetic interest in all the ways and works of men. But instead of turning away from the problems of nature as wholly insoluble, our modern philosopher devoted his whole life to attacking them in the spirit of Heraclitus and Democritus, with results which are as the substance of which their speculations are but as anticipatory shadows.

Lowell's Latin.

A good deal of space is given in this book to his lecturing tours in the United States and Canada. On one occasion, when dining with the Naturalists' Club in Boston, he found himself sitting next to Lowell, and was rather awed, as he knew little of the distinguished American's writings, and imagined that Lowell had never heard of him at all. "The condition of things," he tells us, "was not improved by his quoting some Latin author to illustrate some remark addressed to me, evidently to see if I was a scholar. I was so taken aback that instead of saying I had forgotten the little Latin I ever knew, and that my special interests were in Nature, I merely replied vaguely to his observations." I quote this little incident because it is typical of the profound humility which runs all through this book. Another distinguished man who is sketched in the autobiography is the French geographer, Elisée Reclus. "He was," says the author. "a rather

small and very delicate-looking man, highly intellectual, but very quiet in speech and manner. I really did not know that it was he with whose name I had been familiar for twenty years as the greatest of geographers, thinking it must have been his father or elder brother; and I was surprised when, on asking him, he said that it was himself."

Spiritualism.

Dr. Wallace's conversion to spiritualism was not approved of by his scientific friends, and "The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural" was the object of sharp criticism. For example, we find Professor Tyndall admitting in a letter to the author that it was he who had reproached Thackeray for allowing a certain article about "Home" to appear in the "Cornhill." "Poor Thackeray," continues Professor Tyndall, "was abashed by the earnestness of my remonstrance regarding the lending the authority of his name to 'Stranger Than Fiction,' my great respect for Thackeray rendering my remonstrance earnest." Some time afterwards the author narrates in a letter to Tyndall, "One of the scores of equally remarkable things I have witnessed":

The place was the drawing-room of a friend of mine, a brother of one of our best artists. The witnesses were his own and his brother's family, one or two of their friends, myself, and Mr. John Smith, banker, of Malton, Yorkshire, introduced by me. The medium was Miss Nichol. We sat round a pillar-table in the middle of the room, exactly under a glass chandelier. Miss Nichol sat opposite me, and my friend, Mr. Smith, sat next her. We all held our neighbours' hands, and Miss Nichol's hands were both held by Mr. Smith, a stranger to all but myself, and who had never met Miss N. before. When comfortably arranged in this manner the lights were put out, one of the party holding a box of matches ready to strike a light when asked. After a few minutes' conversation, during a period of silence, I heard the following sounds in rapid succession: a slight rustle, as of a lady's dress; a little tap, such as might be made by setting down a wineglass on the table; and a very slight jingling of the drops of the glass chandelier. An instant after Mr. Smith said, "Miss Nichol is gone." The match-holder struck a light, and on the table (which had no cloth) was Miss Nichol seated in her chair, her head just touching the chandelier.

The author did not imagine for a moment that his correspondent would be satisfied with this evidence. "Of course," he adds, "I did not expect Professor Tyndall to accept such a fact on my testimony; on the contrary, I described it for the very purpose of arguing that, if he himself had been present, he would probably not have been satisfied that it was not a trick, unless he could have it repeated under varied conditions."