

WOMAN AND NATURAL SELECTION.

Alfred Russel Wallace has been interviewed by a representative of the "Daily Chronicle" on the question of the future influence of woman on the race. Mr. Wallace hopes much from this future, and he founds his hope upon the principle of the survival of the fittest. It is just a little odd to observe Mr. Wallace answering his inquisitor from the material or quasi-material standpoint, and one cannot help wondering whether he felt that he was in a way translating spiritual meanings into material forms. For a beautiful body ought to mean the possession of an equally beautiful spiritual part. Speaking of the improvement of the race generally, Mr. Wallace says:—

I believe that this improvement will be effected through the agency of female choice in marriage. As things are, women are constantly forced into marriage for a bare living or a comfortable home. They have practically no choice in the selection of their partners and the fathers of their children, and so long as this economic necessity for marriage presses upon the great bulk of women, men who are vicious, degraded, of feeble intellect and unsound bodies, will secure wives, and thus often perpetuate their infirmities and evil habits. But in a reformed society the vicious man, the man of degraded taste or of feeble intellect, will have little chance of finding a wife, and his bad qualities will die out with himself. On the other hand, the most perfect and beautiful in body and mind, the men of spotless character and reputation, will secure wives first, the less commendable later, and the least commendable latest of all. As a natural consequence, the best men and women will marry the earliest, and probably have the largest families. The result will be a more rapid increase of the good than of the bad, and this state of things continuing to work for successive generations, will at length bring the average man up to the level of those who are now the more advanced of the race.

One cannot help feeling that Mr. Wallace is very largely right, but how are the spotless character and the perfect and beautiful body to be got "together"? And what is a spotless character? The spiritual element seems here to have been a little lost sight of by Mr. Wallace, for if it be admitted, the passage quoted means the gradual elimination of the evil influences surrounding us by the material process of natural selection. But that does not seem to be intended, and so the difficulty of the gradual improvement of the race spiritually is not touched by the principles of selection and of the survival of the fittest.

Mr. Wallace anticipates that woman will have a far greater choice as to marriage than hitherto, for he says:—

On the whole, then, it is probable that in the society of the future the mortality of males will be less, owing to preventive measures in connection with dangerous and injurious occupations, so that the number of marriageable men will be equal to that of women; add to this that there will be an increasing proportion of women who will prefer not to marry, and it is clear that men desiring wives will be in excess of women wanting husbands. This will greatly increase the influence of women in the improvement of the race. Being in the minority, they will be more sought after, and will have a real choice in marriage, which is rarely the case now.

But even the interviewer seemed to see that Mr. Wallace was narrowing down rather seriously, for he asked if Mr. Wallace thought that the women would always choose wisely:—

Broadly speaking, I think we may trust the cultivated minds and pure instincts of the women of the future in the choice of partners. The idle and the selfish would be almost universally rejected. The coarse and sensual man, the diseased or the weak in intellect, those having a tendency to insanity or to hereditary disease, or who possess any congenital deformity, would rarely find partners, because the enlightened woman would know that she was committing an offence against society, against humanity at large, in choosing a husband who might be the means of transmitting disease of body or of mind to his offspring. Thus it will come about that the lower types of men, morally, and the physically diseased, will remain permanently unmarried, and will leave no descendants; and the advance of the race in every good quality will be ensured.

Now one would like to ask Mr. Wallace why he can trust the cultivated minds and pure instincts of the women of the future to reject the idle and the selfish. In fact, unless the progress of woman is to outstrip that of man, why are we to expect that there will still be idle and selfish men while there are no longer any idle and selfish women? At present there are at least as many of the latter class as of the former, and one hardly sees why their peculiar characteristics should disappear in the one case and not in the other. But surely the spiritual side of our humanity should count for something, and that does not appear in Mr. Wallace's estimate of the future. And, indeed, we say at once that the future of the race depends quite as much on the higher development of man as independent of woman, as it does on that of woman herself. Men may stretch out their hands to God as much as women, and they will—despite all the wire-drawings and surmises suggested by the advocates of natural selection.