

L I T E R A T U R E.

THE WONDERFUL CENTURY: ITS SUCCESSES AND ITS FAILURES.

By ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE. (Swan Sonnenschein, 1898. 7s. 6d.)

No book by this author can fail to command attention, and the volume before us will not disappoint the expectations of the reader in respect of the charm of its manner or the interest of its matter. It has an added value in the excellent portrait of Dr. Wallace himself, which seems to incorporate for the many who do not know him the gentle character and many-sided genius which have, through his works, won the hearts of two generations of readers.

But on this subject—the achievements of our century—he may claim to speak as one having authority, for thereanent he can put forward the proud boast of the Homeric hero, "*Quorum pars magna fui*"; and he may still more fitly claim our attention to the double theme of this book, since he has for many years devoted much attention to the economic questions of our age, as well as to the purely scientific matters with which his name is more generally associated.

It is invidious to find fault in such circumstances, but one blemish "springs into the eyes", as the Germans say, so obtrusively that it is impossible not to comment upon it. It is surely not far short of marvellous that an author of such experience of wide questions and the balancing of relative claims to importance and consideration as Dr. Wallace, should so far forget the elements of mental perspective as to give one-fourth of the space of this book to the question of the failure of vaccination. Granting its immediate seriousness, and even the completeness of the evidence in favor of the thesis that it is a delusion, as he says, can any one for a moment contend that the question bulks so largely in the scales of history as to warrant the devotion to it of 100 pages, while the whole of the rest of the vast achievements and failures of the century (including the economic fiasco of capitalism) are entitled

to only 300 between them? Or that the question is so vastly more important than that of the colossal war expenditure, for instance, as indicated by the allotment to it of ten times the space? And will it be believed that in this same book the vast matter of the theory of evolution by natural selection, which has practically revolutionised human thought in almost every department, is disposed of in eight pages? Such are the methods of the faddist or crank all the world over—to swamp the ha'porth of bread in a deluge of sack; but such is not, or should not be, the method of science.

But this is a defect which makes the work no less valuable in itself, while its value is peculiarly great to social reformers of all grades for its damning indictment of militarism and capitalism as developed in our time, since it is very exceptional that a scientific man should be able to pass judgment of any weight on questions of economic evolution. But they are, after all, scientific problems, and a trained observer of natural phenomena and a great apostle of the evolution doctrine is entitled to all respect when he speaks, after years of study, on questions of social evolution as manifested by economic facts. And in this matter Dr. Wallace speaks with the fervor of a Ruskin. It is especially desirable that attention should be called to and fixed upon the grievous and obvious failures of our civilisation at a time when we are hearing—and are likely to hear even *ad nauseam*—of our wonderful achievements; and if anyone is to obtain a hearing, when speaking of the skeleton at our feast, surely Dr. Wallace, as one of those who have mightily achieved, may certainly claim our ear. Let us all, who dream of social amelioration, hope he will succeed to some purpose. The smugly "successful" classes, who have reaped the harvests made possible by science, are already uneasy in their "golden houses", even though, like Tennyson's Olympians,

"They smile in silence, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring
deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights and flaming towns, and sinking
ships and praying hands."

Especially interesting is the account of the vitally important functions of dust in the earth's economy, which, though mentioned in part in a variety of text-books, we do not remember to have seen dealt with in any paper, or even paragraph, collecting the whole of the scattered evidence into a statement such as this, at once convincing and surprising.

The chapter containing an estimate of achievements is truly a wonderful record, and the table on p. 154 comparing the 19th with all previous centuries together, to the manifest advantage of the former, is, perhaps, too flattering to our vanity, for it takes no account of the vantage ground from which our age started, and we must in fairness remember that a dwarf on a giant's shoulders may see farther

than the giant without great credit to himself. This is especially to be noted by us—

"The latest seed of time,
New men that in the flying of a wheel
Cry down the Past"—

and to us, therefore, the humble-pie offered in the second part should be specially beneficial.

It is also interesting to note that Englishmen hold a splendid pre-eminence on the scientific roll of fame. Besides the great names of Stephenson, Dalton, Darwin, and Wallace, Faraday, Young, Lyell, Simpson, Lister, and Thomson, there are a series of names which, if not those of actually the first inventors and discoverers, stand close to these, and certainly share their glory. Among these are Wollaston and Huggins in spectrum analysis, Davy and Crookes in chemistry, Joule and Tyndall in physics, Aitken in meteorology, Huxley in biology, Adams and Tait in astronomy, and, above all, the great philosophic mind co-ordinating and concentrating the work of all the rest—Herbert Spencer. Can any other nation show a like record?