

## A NOTABLE LIFE.

### I.

The writing of an Autobiography is a perilous proceeding. It needs a scarce blend of courage, wisdom and noble simplicity; and, behind all, it needs an eventful and useful life whose story is worth telling. It should be a kind of summing up of experiences, motives, services and forecasts: and it is obvious that it is difficult for a man to sit in judgment upon himself. And yet, if the story of an eventful and useful life could be self-told, with courage, wisdom and simplicity, the chances are all in favour of its value, interest, utility and charm. Especially is this the case when the life has been one of adventure, investigation and discovery, in untrodden or almost untrodden ways. Then the self-told life-story may be the best vehicle for transmitting a general view of results.

It seems to us that Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, in his new work, 'My Life: a record of events and opinions' (London: Chapman and Hall), has very nearly, if not quite, come up to our ideal, and in it we certainly find all the characteristics we have named,—courage, wisdom and a very notable and noble simplicity. In his case, we do not see that the Life could have been written by anyone else. It is practically a *résumé* of his prolonged and varied investigations in fields far and wide apart, and dealing with subjects of vast and profound importance in Natural History, Sociology, Political Economy, and Things Occult, with a strong infusion of the personal element which gives to the work special piquancy and interest, notably in connection with the references to men of the day like Huxley, Tyndall, Mivart, Owen, Darwin, Romanes and Herbert Spencer,—all highly entertaining, and often important.

The work is splendidly produced in every way and its charm is greatly increased by the addition of a great number of excellent illustrations including several portraits of the author, at different periods of his life, and very pretty views of his various residences, and notably his present home at Broadstone. The serious vein which runs through these two volumes is lightened by many glimpses of humour, and by a simple style of story-telling which gives to the whole work a peculiar vivacity and grace.

For us, of course, the chief interest of the work centres in the seventy-five pages in Volume II. which tell the story of Dr. Wallace's experiences in relation to Spiritualism, a subject which the various reviewers of this work touch with a very timorous, tricky, or well-guarded hand. The

writer's testimony, however, is there, and is as fresh and resolute as ever.

Not much is told by way of personal experiences but frequent references are made to his invaluable work, 'Miracles and Modern Spiritualism,' which still holds the field as one of the sanest and most scientific presentations of the Spiritualist's case. Such experiences, however, as are related in this work are on perfectly familiar lines; but a Section on 'Predictions Fulfilled' opens up a somewhat novel form of test. One of these fulfilled predictions is curious.

Eight or nine years ago, Dr. Wallace, then living at Parkstone, in a house which he had purchased and adapted for himself, and with a choice garden which he had created, was told at a séance that he would soon remove, and that 'the third chapter' of his life was to come, described as 'Satisfaction, Retrospection and Work.' Nothing seemed less likely. At that time he was seventy-three years old, in poor health and subject to chronic asthma, with palpitations and frequent bronchitis from which he never expected to recover. He had given up lecturing and had no expectation of writing another book, and certainly never expected to leave his home.

About a year after, he was induced to join some friends in trying to found a kind of home-colony of congenial persons in some beautiful and healthful spot. This effort came to nothing so far as others were concerned, but it led to the discovery of a most tempting site for a house, and upon that he built his present home, with the result that he has had eight years of renewed health and constantly interesting work. Surely, he says, 'all this was well foretold in the one word "Satisfaction."' This Autobiography, the work that has chiefly occupied him in the new home, 'is admirably described by the word "Retrospection": and the whole of this process has involved, or been the result of, continuous and pleasurable "Work."' Dr. Wallace adds, and it makes this fulfilment the more remarkable, 'during the whole of this "third chapter" of my life I had entirely forgotten the particular words of the prediction which I had noted down at the time, and was greatly surprised, on referring to them again for the purpose of this chapter, to find how curiously they fitted the subsequent events.'

Dr. Wallace, we are glad to say, not only maintains his ground with sturdy persistency, but turns his guns upon our scientific critics and our pseudo-scientific scoffers, as we shall see in the second part of this review. His connection with the subject goes back at least forty years, and it was through Mesmerism that he ultimately found his way to the Promised Land. To-day he is more persuaded than ever of the truth and value of Spiritualism. It brought him out of the darkness of Agnosticism into 'the marvellous light' of larger experiences and brighter hopes. It made him charitable and sympathetic. It made him a better man, and gave him the key to much that seemed dark if not hopeless in human life. He awoke to the beautiful discovery that there are 'no absolutely bad men or women, that is, none who, by a rational and sympathetic training and a social system which gave to all absolute equality of opportunity, might not become useful, contented and happy members of society.' He became more tolerant, and learnt to 'enjoy the society of people whose appearance or manner had at first repelled' him, and, 'even in the most apparently trivial-minded, was able to find some common ground of interest or occupation.' This was not entirely owing to the influence of Spiritualism, but, in a touching passage, he says: 'I feel myself that my character has continually improved, and that this is owing chiefly to the teachings of Spiritualism, that we are in every act and thought of our lives here building up a

character which will largely determine our happiness or misery hereafter; and also that we obtain the greatest happiness ourselves by doing all we can to make those around us happy.' A heavenly creed!

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## II.

Dr. Wallace's insight into Spiritualism, as we have seen, does not end in a speculation or a theory. It influences character; it opens the eyes to what is interesting in our fellow-men; it enlarges the view, and sheds over all the light of a glorious hope. It does more. In his case, it clearly modified his 'Darwinian' view of the origin of man. As to this, he says:—

On this great problem, the belief and teaching of Darwin was, that man's whole nature—physical, mental, intellectual and moral—was developed from the lower animals by means of the same laws of variation and survival; and, as a consequence of this belief, that there was no difference in *kind* between man's nature and animal nature, but only one of degree. My view, on the other hand, was, and is, that there is a difference in kind, intellectually and morally, between man and other animals; and that, while his body was undoubtedly developed by the continuous modification of some ancestral animal form, some different agency, analogous to that which first produced organic life, and then originated consciousness, came into play in order to develop the higher intellectual and spiritual nature of man.

In this passage, some originating and directing power in and from what we know as 'the spirit world' is undoubtedly indicated: and, if we once grant the existence of that world, it is perfectly easy to pass on to the belief that the slight and subtle changes which lie at the back of variations may be due to directing agencies which work from 'beyond the veil.'

In another but similar direction, Dr. Wallace's Spiritualism has practical issues. Referring to events in his life which determined his career, he says:—

All this may have been pure chance, as I long thought it was, but of late years I am more inclined to Hamlet's belief, when he said,—

'There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.'

Of course, I do not adopt the view that each man's life, in all its details, is guided by the Deity for His special ends. That would be, indeed, to make us all conscious automata, puppets in the hands of an all-powerful destiny. But, as I shall show later on, I have good reason for the belief that, just as our own personal influence and expressed or unseen guidance is a factor in the life and conduct of our children, and even of some of our friends and acquaintances, so we are surrounded by a host of unseen friends and relatives who have gone before us, and who have certain limited powers of influencing, and even, in particular cases, almost of determining, the actions of living persons, and may thus in a great variety of indirect ways modify the circumstances and character of any one or more individuals in whom they are specially interested.

A good deal of the Chapters on Spiritualism turns upon the opposition of scientific men, and many instances are given of their childish conduct with regard to it. Dr. Wallace's own path was through Mesmerism to Spiritualism. Early in life he found that he had considerable mesmeric power, and that he could produce all the chief phenomena on some of his patients: and he found something else,—that the almost universal opposition and misrepresentations of the medical profession 'were founded upon a combination of ignorance and prejudice.' Later on, he found the same thing was true of them in relation to Spiritualism. But he himself, hearing, during his travels in the East, of 'the strange doings of the Spiritualists in America and England,' regarded some of them as 'too wild and *outré* to be anything but the ravings of madmen.' Other happenings, however, appeared to be so well authenticated that, like a sensible man, he inquired into the matter when he had the opportunity. In this he took the course of an honest man of science. He got into communication with all the old guard,—S. C. Hall, C. Maurice Davies, Mrs. Catherine Berry, William Howitt, Miss Marshall, Mrs. Guppy, Professor de Morgan, Serjeant Cox, Cromwell Varley and others, and became convinced, and he can now say: 'I have reached my present standpoint by a long series of experiences under such varied and peculiar conditions as to render unbelief impossible.'

People can believe in things extraordinary only when there is a place for them in their existing 'fabric of thought'; and, when Dr. Wallace began his inquiry, the testimony of Spiritualists and the facts of Spiritualism did not fit in with his 'then existing fabric of thought.' He says:—

All my preconceptions, all my knowledge, all my belief in the supremacy of science and of natural law, were against the possibility of such phenomena. And even when, one by one, the facts were forced upon me without possibility of escape from them, still, as Sir David Brewster declared, after being at first astounded by the phenomena he saw with Mr. Home, 'spirit was the last thing I could give in to.' Every other possible solution was tried and rejected. Unknown laws of nature were found to be of no avail when there was always an unknown intelligence behind the phenomena—an intelligence that showed a human character and individuality, and an individuality which almost invariably *claimed* to be that of some person who had lived on earth, and who, in many cases, was able to prove his or her identity. Thus, little by little, a place was made in my fabric of thought, first for all such well-attested facts, and then, but more slowly, for the spiritualistic interpretation of them.

The behaviour of most of the men of science to whom Dr. Wallace introduced the subject was almost too petulantly unscientific for belief, and we need Dr. Wallace's emphatic personal testimony to secure that belief. He invited Dr. W. B. Carpenter to attend a séance with himself, his sister, and Miss Nichol. The results were poor. Dr. Wallace urged him to try again at least two or three times, but he never went again. As is well known, Tyndall and Huxley behaved with astonishing levity—and worse. Tyndall went once, at Dr. Wallace's invitation, behaved more like a schoolboy out for a lark than a sober inquirer, and never went again. Huxley did not attend at all, and simply chaffed Dr. Wallace about his 'worthy ghosts,' telling him that he was not disposed to issue a Commission of Lunacy against him. Mr. G. H. Lewes accepted an invitation to attend a series of séances but he never attended at all, and yet wrote to the 'Pall Mall Gazette,' making various accusations against mediums and Spiritualists. Dr. Wallace sent a reply to this which the editor declined to publish. Darwin had 'no time' to spare for it. John Stuart Mill excused himself on the strangely unscientific ground that he would find it very difficult to believe in Spiritualism 'on any evidence whatever,' and he added the tart and warm remark that he was in the habit

of very freely expressing this opinion whenever the subject was mentioned in his presence:—truly a very ardent and enthusiastic obscurantist on this subject! Dr. Wallace kindly lets him off with the suggestion that this pre-judgment was 'very unphilosophical.' Sir David Brewster attended a séance with Mr. Home and afterwards contradicted himself very badly concerning what happened:—first expressing intense interest and practical conviction, and then, later, wriggling out of his first admissions. Samuel Butler, the author of 'Erewhon' and 'Life and Habit,' shrank with real or affected horror from the very idea of spirit intercourse. He wrote: 'I had a very dear friend once, whom I believed to be dying, and so did she. We discussed the question whether she could communicate with me after death. "Promise," I said, and very solemnly, "that if you find there *are* means of visiting me here on earth—that if you *can* send a message to me—you will never avail yourself of the means, nor let me hear from you when you are once departed." . . . If ever a spirit form takes to coming to me, I shall not be content with trying to grasp it, but, in the interest of science, *I will shoot it.*'

Dr. Wallace gives other instances of similar queer behaviour on the part of men who passed for philosophers: but these will suffice. And yet people quote the world of science as against us, and refer us to it!

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