

Wallace (Alfred Russel), SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND MORAL PROGRESS, 3/6 net.

Cassell

In forming an opinion concerning this latest work of a truly great man it is necessary to remember his very advanced age. If we properly appreciate this, we shall discount some notes of pessimism as to the intellectual and moral advance of our time. The mere fact that he uses such words as "insoluble," "always," and "never" proves, perhaps, that he is feeling the effects of a limit. He fails chiefly, we think, in mistaking a greater cognizance of and discussion about evil for an increase of evil itself; nor does he attach sufficient importance to the fact that the coming generation are willing, in their search after truth, to face facts, however disturbing those facts may be. He is also overdogmatic in appraising the virtues of past times and peoples. One might fairly contend that to-day virtue is more founded on reason, and, in so far as that is so, more assured. However, we are glad of the opportunity afforded to read in a succinct form the views of a master of science on "Selection," "Heredity," and "Environment," and there is some straight speaking which we commend to those who should, from the position they hold, be leaders. We can only quote his opinion of gambling:—

"Its evil nature, socially, depends upon the fact that whoever acquires wealth by such means contributes nothing useful to the social organism of which he forms a part. If it were taught to every child, and in every school and college, that it is morally wrong for anyone to live upon the combined labour of his fellow-men without contributing an approximately equal amount of useful labour, whether physical or mental, in return, all kinds of gambling, as well as many other kinds of useless occupation, would be seen to be of the same nature as direct dishonesty or fraud, and, therefore, would soon come to be considered disgraceful as well as immoral."