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### ‘Modern Spiritualism.’

A new religion, with mediums for priests, the movements of chairs and tables for a liturgy, and a choir of departed spirits for ministering angels, seems to be gaining ground upon more established beliefs. We are scarcely sure that the better plan would not be to leave the delusion to run its course, and die out of itself, unnoticed by us. We should do so, were it not that it counts among its votaries men worthy of every respect, to whom something more than a contemptuous silence is fairly due. Let us note, however, in passing, that the mere fact of some eminent men attaching themselves to a particular way of thinking does not necessarily give evidence of its truth. If a man distinguished for reasoning power comes to a given conclusion, the chances are he is right, unless it appears that his emotional nature has been strongly roused in the process of the inquiry; in which case his conviction may be very little worth. Much in the same way many a man of scientific eminence continues to believe in an effete religion; the fact being that early prejudices have prevented him from applying his scientific methods to that one subject. Now to many minds spiritualism possesses immense attractions, especially to those who have shaken off the form of belief in which they were educated. They have found it impossible to give credence any longer to the legends which had seemed to throw light on our union with another world; and for a time they have lived without any belief in such connection. They have thought that we know nothing of any rational beings other than ourselves; that we have no certain evidence of the prolongation of our own existence beyond death. Yet the craving for such further knowledge engendered by their early education has remained with them; and, thinking they see in spiritualism the means of such knowledge, they have embraced that belief. We say therefore, that, in view of the breaking down of old creeds, there is an intelligible reason why many men should have their judgment taken by storm of emotion on this subject.

But spiritualists will ask whether we have examined for ourselves into the supposed proofs of spiritualism; if not, why, in the name of fairness, we condemn it as a delusion? We answer that we have not so examined it, neither do we care to do so. In order to explain our position we must first refer to the enormous presumption against such phenomena. We leave on one side phenomena which may be supposed to have a physical explanation. If tables move according to some hitherto unknown law, it will of course be important to discover that law. Yet, as such occurrences appear to result in nothing, we venture to think the inquiry more curious than important. But we believe that spiritualists will agree that either these phenomena are the indications of spiritual action, or they are nothing worth. We deal therefore with the supposition that the spirits of the dead can and do appear to living eyes and work sundry miracles in living presence. If this be proved, of course we will accept the proof. But such proof would upset the whole conception we have formed of the universe. In the world in which we have been in the habit of living, moving, and having our being the dead do not reappear; they do not move tables; flowers cannot be produced out of nothing; and nothing occurs without having a natural and knowable antecedent to it. If then we are to be compelled by proof to accept the spiritualist phenomena as facts, we shall have to admit that our world will vanish and “leave not a rack behind;” and, as far as we can see, all certainty in the sequence of phenomena will vanish with it. In order to prove the spiritualist position, therefore, a weight of evidence must be adduced sufficient to counterpoise that on which we have

accepted our present theory of the universe. What then is this mighty force of evidence which is to drag us from our firm standing ground and plunge us into chaos? Of the stories of moving furniture, of flowers being produced by unseen agency, &c., &c., we make very little. Such things can be done without calling "spirits from the vasty deep," and to us it seems rather derogatory to the spirits' dignity, that they should be summoned from their repose in order to do so little. It is of much more importance to know what the spirits say or do when they appear. Do they throw light on the mysteries of being? Do they discover unknown laws of nature? Do they enlarge our knowledge in any way? It does not appear that they do. The spirits of great men of old are called up; and so far from adding to our stock of science, they appear to have lost the culture with which they possessed when on earth. In no single instance, that we are acquainted with, has any spiritualist experience resulted in anything of permanent

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value or general interest. Truly it is claimed that believers have enjoyed intercourse with those from whom death had parted them, and this undoubtedly would be of immense interest and value to them. But the interest in, and the proof of the fact are confined to themselves; if the departed relative had enabled the survivor to impart a knowledge, for example, of the actual nature of gravitation, the intercourse would have become general in its value.

In the present number of the *Fortnightly Review* an article appears on "Modern Spiritualism," by Mr A. R. Wallace. The writer is a man of scientific eminence, distinguished not only for knowledge of the methods of scientific research, but by the possession of a remarkably fair and candid mind. We turned, therefore, to his paper with some hopes that evidence of a tangible nature would be adduced; but we fail to find any such. He brings forward a good many stories of the ordinary type, the more remarkable of which might easily be paralleled from the lives of the saints. With every respect for Mr Wallace, we must say that in this matter his right hand has lost its cunning; it seems as though contact with spiritual phenomena had robbed him of the power of valuing evidence which otherwise distinguishes him. He relies, for example, on the assertion that a Mr Livermore, "during five years, on hundreds of occasions, saw, felt, and heard the movements of the figure of his dead wife in an absolute, unmistakable, living form." This is undoubtedly a most extraordinary assertion. But what proof is offered to the outside public of the reality of such apparitions, at all capable of rebutting the presumption against them? Fortunately we are able to test the kind of evidence accepted by spiritualists in one instance, which may serve for the rest. Mr Wallace appends, in a note to his paper, an account of an apparition, to which he appeals as "a final test." A young lady, Miss Florence Cook, was bound in one room, while a figure, resembling her, but differently clad, appeared in the next. An individual, suspecting that the apparition was in fact Miss Cook herself, seized it, when "its perfect solidity and the vigorous struggles it made to escape from him convinced him" that his suspicions were correct. On subsequent occasions, however, Mr Varley and Mr Crookes contrived delicate and apparently sufficient tests to prove that Miss Cook actually remained bound while the form appeared, and that the latter was actually distinct from the medium. This much we are willing to accept as proved. But it is most instructive to find that Mr Wallace accepts such proof as conclusive of the fact that the apparition was a spirit. We are told that "Mr Crookes, by permission clasped the figure in his arms, and found it to be apparently a real living woman;" while it was evidently proved that it was not Miss Cook. Who on earth, whose mind was not preoccupied and judgment obscured by emotional disturbance, would not have concluded that the apparition was, in fact "a real living woman," with whose nature and name Miss Cook was probably very well acquainted. Of course it

may be that precautions were taken absolutely precluding any addition to the company, though such precautions are very apt to be delusive. What we have to remark is that Mr Wallace—while claiming this as “a final test”—tells us nothing whatever of such precautions. We are quite certain that Mr Wallace is perfectly persuaded in his own mind of the truth of spiritualism. But it is clear that he accepts evidence on this subject which would satisfy him on no other, and asks us to accept proof which in other matters he would be the first to declare faulty. Mr Wallace’s paper is to be concluded in the next number of the *Fortnightly*. If we may judge of the whole from the first instalment, we do not think that his “proofs” will induce many dispassionate men to waste time in examining the subject.

But once more, spiritualists will say, why, when you admit that honest and able men have, after inquiry, become convinced of the truth of spiritualism, will you not examine the matter? We answer, because any such examination would be probably delusive; and must be unnecessary. It would be probably delusive, because all the apparatus of dark rooms, mediums, &c., is contrived to produce a state of spiritual exaltation. If we were to give up our minds to the subject, to allow our nerves to be highly excited, and a strange expectation to creep over us, we might, probably enough, see visions and dream dreams like the rest. We distrust all mediums. We mean nothing insulting in saying so. We should equally distrust ourselves if we submitted our minds to the conditions of a medium. But it is unnecessary to do so. By the hypothesis the spirits of the departed can appear, and can move solid substances. In one instance, Mr Wallace assures us, a gentleman “has seen a pencil rise of itself on a table and write” a whole sentence. The Spirits have, therefore, the means of convincing us, if they are disposed to do so. Night after night we sit alone with paper, pens, and pencils before us. If the spirits desire communication with us, let them write on the paper lying on the table under our eyes; there is no need for mediums or other paraphernalia. In the meantime, unless the spirits will take the trouble to convince us by this, or some other method, we fear we must remain unbelievers. The manner in which spiritualist inquiries are conducted excites our profoundest distrust; the proof they offer is faulty; the stories they tell for the most part childish. We will ask their pardon for addressing the propagators of spiritualist doctrine in the words of Mr Weller, senior, “If I don’t get no better light than that ’ere moonshine of yours, it’s wery likely as I shall continey to be a night coach, till I’m took off the road altogether.”

M. W. Moggridge.

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*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2015.