MR. ALFRED WALLACE, the distinguished naturalist, who divides in some sense with Mr. Darwin the honour of establishing the principle of ‘natural selection’ as a real and most powerful cause of the variation of species, has written two remarkable papers for the "Fortnightly Review," arraying under various heads the mass of positive evidence for the facts of spiritualism, and reproaching the world with the unreason of its incredulity.

We are not about to dispute the assertion that a great deal of that evidence is of a kind which, in relation to facts less marvelous, few reasonable men would think of doubting; nor that its quantity, even if we limit it strictly to the asseverations of persons whom we should be disposed on ordinary subjects to regard as sound witnesses, i.e., persons of whom the world knows something independently, and that something of a kind tending to establish their trustworthiness intellectual and moral, is very startling.

The opposite extreme of conviction. None of these facts of Mr. Wallace's paper to know simply on his assertion, that the chemists who have taken all the proper precautions and are adequate chemists, who have taken all the proper precautions to avoid either error or fraud? An excellent photographer, who has carefully examined the facts, and found fraud at work again and again, assures us that Mr. Wallace's instances, so far as they are on the science and on the good faith of his photographic investigators, that is another matter. But we cannot be expected to take on trust Mr. Wallace's reasons for moral confidence.

However, all this is by the way. What we want to say something of is Mr. Wallace's remarkable assertion that if Spiritualism writer has attended some twenty seances in his time, many of them with persons like Mr. Home, Mr. Foster, and others, of great reputed power in that capacity which the spiritualists call, evidently more from pure ignorance than from even rational conviction as to what it means, "mediumship," without, however, seeing, hearing, or after any fashion whatever perceiving a single phenomenon which was unaccountable on the most ordinary and humdrum view of life. But he is, nevertheless, quite willing to admit that the facts of which he has been assured, by men of whose acuteness, calmness, and honour he has had every reason to form a very high estimate, are quite remarkable enough to make it, in every sense, a reasonable thing to inquire further into and more carefully into the character and meaning of a class of phenomena which seem to be rather multiplying, and boasting a higher calibre than formerly in the character of the converts, as well as a rapidly increasing number of them, than dying out. And we have no wish, therefore, to meet Mr. Wallace's challenge by a mere exclamation of "Incredible nonsense!" If the belief of Spiritualists be, as, of course, it seems at first, to most people who have had only the ordinary experience of mortals, incredible and nonsensical, investigators will be able to show, on careful cross-examination of some of the leading instances, how the delusion arises; and that result alone would be quite worth a great deal of painstaking investigation. And if not, why, it seems to us as absurd as it seems to Mr. Wallace to say, with Professor Huxley, that the alleged facts are not important only because they are wrapped up in a jargon of at once trivial and pretentious nonsense. If true at all, whatever they mean,—whether they mean only a new physical force, or a new field of volition, or a new evidence of immortality,—they must be of the greatest importance; no wise man will say that because silly persons, embodied or otherwise, rap out very foolish truisms or falsisms by means hitherto unknown to science, the understanding of those means is without importance. As well might you say that because sometimes unmasking, and often silly, and occasionally wicked messages are sent by the electric telegraph, the understanding of the electric agency itself is without importance to us. Still Mr. Wallace is very unreasonable, when he tells us that the reality of his alleged facts is so indisputably proved, that they do not want "confirmation"; and, moreover, he is not consistent with himself, because he ends his paper by saying that "spiritualism makes no claim to be received on hearsay evidence," —and if not, then clearly, for all who have no better evidence than hearsay however good, it does clearly want confirmation. For our own parts, we have seen quite enough of the credulity of intellectual men, in cases where it was clear there was creditability, and not merely willing to be convinced on sufficient evidence, to refuse to accept even the best hearsay evidence without the very important "confirmation" of observing for ourselves that the parapsychic shudder of belief has not cast its spell over the minds of our informants. We know that there is such a thing as incredulity which gives way not step by step, as it is conquered by evidence, but with a sudden revulsion of feeling passing at once into the opposite extreme of conviction. None of these facts of Mr. Wallace's are in any degree conclusive, without that keen lifting of attendant circumstances to which inexplicable and marvellous facts ought always to be subjected; and where the fact is a good way off, either in space or in time, and we have no chance of finding the clue which might elucidate it, the incredulous reserve with which the intellect naturally accepts it, is, we think, most wise and wholesome. If scientific chemists, making their own preparations beforehand to guard against deception, have really found on their photographic plates faces quite unknown to them, invisible to their eyes at the time of the exposure to the sun, and recognized by other persons as those of persons long dead, the fact is undoubtedly in the highest degree curious. But then the whole burden of the marvel lies in the "if," and how is a reader of Mr. Wallace's paper to know simply on his assertion, that the chemists whom he there names as having verified this wonderful statement are adequate chemists, who have taken all the proper precautions to avoid either error or fraud? An excellent photographer, who has carefully examined the facts, and found fraud at work again and again, assures us that Mr. Wallace's instances, so far as they depend on mere scientific guarantees, are absolutely worthless for the purpose for which they are quoted. Of course, if Mr. Wallace can rely absolutely both on the science and on the good faith of his photographic investigators, that is another matter. But we cannot be expected to take on trust Mr. Wallace's reasons for moral confidence. However, all this is by the way. What we want to say something of is Mr. Wallace's remarkable assertion that if Spiritualism...
true be true, it constitutes a "great moral agency, which may yet regenerate the world;" that it is "the only sure foundation for a true philosophy and a pure religion." This is an assertion which, we must say, simply amazes us. That "Spiritualism," if true, and if true in Mr. Wallace's, and not simply in Mr. Jerseyn Cox's sense,—would furnish a powerful additional evidence of continued life after death, and that the soul is immortal, is a statement that is almost its final word, as far as we have read, and we have read a good deal of this drizzly literature,—for most drizzly it is, however we may judge the question of true or false as to the main facts alleged. We should say that, assuming for a moment the theory of the Spiritualists to be true, as well as their facts,—assuming that these phenomena occur, and that they are due to the agencies of spirits which once lived upon this earth,—then we say that ninety-nine hundredths of the communications made to us come from the moral rubbish of the unseen world. And so far, at least, we should not be prepared to feel any surprise, considering that, as Mr. Wallace very justly insists, so many human beings do leave this life in an intellectual and moral condition in which "rubbishy" seems the word that most exactly expresses them. If not, then we must infer that the agency is not personal, but physical, and is caused in every way instead of developing the capacities of the spirits departed, and this would be much more alarming. Of all the bold and dreary moralities, the jejune religious exhortations, the sickly sentiments, the empty and pompous mysticism, the flabby symbolisms, the incoherent parables, and the conceited rhapsodies that we have read in the so-called religious literature of the last ten years, it is Mr. Tappan's "trance-mediums," not heard their living words, but with a large experience of the twaddle of the pulpit, we may honestly say that it bears to the twaddle of the trance-speakers the relation which "moonlight beams to sunlight, or water unto wine." Here, for instance, is something Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan delivered on the religion of Spiritualism,—"delivered, we are told, not out of her own mind but "under spirit influence,"—on Tuesday evening, the 21st of September, 1873:—

"Is Spiritualism a religion? says one. It is not a theology. If religious, it is a religion of facts, that is to say, a religion of spiritual of man's nature; if, indeed, it lifts, elevates, and strengthens, then it has to do with religion; but it has no creed. It has no institu­
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which communicate through mediums are possibly not human at all, but may come from some other race of beings,—Ariels and Calibans, presumably, we should say, below our level, not above it. And, indeed, one of the curiosities of the spiritualistic faith is that no one has ever proposed a mode of either identifying these disembodied agencies with the persons for whom they give themselves out, or proving the impersonation to be a fraud. But be they what they will, this seems to us certain, that the "religion of spiritualism" is nothing in the world but a faith in immortality, plus the excitement of receiving a lot of communications from the other side of the grave, most of which give us a deplorable impression of the intellectual and moral caliber of the creatures which communicate with us. Of any new and regenerating affection in Spiritualism there is not a trace. If it be a great spiritual gain to believe that after death you will be able to knock about your friends' tables, to drown them with flowers, to give them a lock of spiritual hair, to appear in a misty cylinder with your head just dimly discernible at one end, to play an harmonium, to ring bells, and to untie knots, then Spiritualism may be a great gospel for the million. But as we do not feel any great desire for these exalted functions in our immortal state, we must say that to us the interest of the investigation of Spiritualism is not spiritual, but mainly physical. Immortality we hold, on higher evidence than that of Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan or Mr. Peebles. Still no doubt, if all these things could be established, the multitude would have a new and physically-grounded belief in it. But whether it would do them more harm or good would depend on what the average character of future "spiritual" communications should be. For our parts, we do not desire to be put into constant communication with a world so noisy, purposeless, and fraudulent as the world of communicating spirits at present appears to be. Mr. Wallace's facts should be inquired into, for scientific and other reasons. But even if substantiated, they would imply not a new religion, but in the main a new manifestation of what St. John meant by the world, the flesh, and perhaps even the devil.