REVIEWS.


When men of scientific eminence quit, even for a time, the special field of action on which their spurs were won, and venture the perilous attempt to pass the mystic portals of the "spirit world," a feeling akin to regret steals over us lest their own science might lose by their absence, and one, also, of fear lest the treasures expected to be brought to light might ill
reward the time and attention expended in the search. *Est natura humana novitati avide,* and philosophers are but men, and many among them have a "feet of Achilles." We do not doubt that the authors of the works before us are most thoroughly sincere in their profession of faith. Indeed, it demands a "soul of calculation"—a well-propor tioned, well-audited soul—to enable us to brave scientific opinion; and immense faith in a mission, when, as a duty, we undertake at all risks—even loss of golden opinion—to promulgate and to defend it. History furnishes multiplied instances of such militants being not only as enthusiastic, but as numerous as the varied forms of faith engendered by the progress of the ages. "We have been all in the region of speculation, and in any dogmatic form, much longer than thirty years, or thereabouts.

From near the time of the "Poughkeepsie seer and clairvoyant," the floating traditions and current tales of witchcraft, apparitions, dreams, second-sight, strange and inexplicable noises, luminous appearances, bell-ringing, etc., were by degrees collected, classified, and systematised, and then connected with the accredited phenomena of "Od"-force, bio-mesmerism and clairvoyance. These phenomena, with the recent immense additions and daring inferences, form a tolerably comprehensive body of doctrine. It is the object of the authors of the works at the head of our page to obtain for this doctrine an impartial hearing, additionally strengthened and supposed to be by the results of their own proper experience.

The little work of Mr. Crookes, mostly controversial, is confessedly a reprint, and therefore need not specially occupy us, insomuch as the actual phenomena detailed are common to both works—indeed, to all the works hitherto published on the subject. And all the theory is based thereon, they form the most fitting surd-space for those untrammeled spirits who, from the too laborious discharge of his judicial functions, or the need of photographic pictures, when spiritually-manufactured hands, visible and palpable, bearing Flora's gifts, so often move among the "assistants at the sciences"; or when, according to Mr. Crookes, the lovely form and indescribable charm of manner of "Katie King" grace the scene? To us, inasmuch as the actual phenomena detailed are common to both works—indeed, to all the works hitherto published on the subject, we would ask our readers "which they consider trustworthy sources for our secular guidance and information."

Ask of physiology—ask of the sister-science, psychology,—as singular that in the numberless impressions of lost spirits and the false, the veritable, the trustworthy, let us again endeavour critically to seize the thread of this strange narrative of phenomena, at the beginning, and in the course of the narrative, we have seen in the Arabian Nights Entertainments—alike the machinery and the actors, the "faithful," be transferred from Arabia to England. Now that we have arrived at the results of our research, we ask the question: "Do we not sustain from feeble faith!"

But, *au sérieux,* let us again endeavour critically to seize the thread of this strange narrative of phenomena, at the beginning, and in the course of the narrative. We ask the question: "Can such be said of such proaic doings as scratching, rapping, table-lifting, bell-ringing, acrdination-playing, and the like—the veriest drudgery for those untrained spirits who, from the time of the "Poughkeepsie seer and clairvoyant," have directed the indestructible forces of the universe, may be called to such a service?"

Our astonishment, however, fairly sets in when we hear of what, in Spiritualistic terminology, is termed "levitation."—i.e., of persons lifted from their seats by unseen hands, and floated around high above the entombed ghosts, as if by wrapping the sheet of the "Prophet," unsuspected in mid-space, or even borne bodily many miles away. These are facts, indeed, rivalling those recorded of the Genii in the "Arabian Nights Entertainments"—alike the wonder and delight of our, at times, too credulous boyhood. But the land of wonder must now, it seems (judging numerically of the "faithful"), be transported to far distant localities,—in short, that the laws of nature (as we are accustomed to conceive them) may be not only modified, but even completely violated, almost at our bidding, by invisible powerful, "disembodied spirit," and all this not on the actual testimony of one, but on that of numerous witnesses, both in this country and abroad—may we not mentally exclaim, "Can such be said of such proaic doings as scratching, rapping, table-lifting, bell-ringing, acrdination-playing, and the like—the veriest drudgery for those untrained spirits who, from the time of the "Poughkeepsie seer and clairvoyant," have directed the indestructible forces of the universe, may be called to such a service?"

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May we not inquire in what category such assertions are to be included—in that of sober fact, or in that of illusion? If in the former, we have, indeed, much to unlearn, and unreservedly to confess that there are more things on earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. And it may be so.

We are willing to admit the reality of some of the phenomena included under the head of "Spiritualism"; willing even to admit that they may be produced by some "psychic," or "psychical," or "psychic," or "psychical" power, to form a circle of persons under some peculiar psychical condition. It is mainly with the conclusion drawn, with the *ab extra* hypothesis, that we join issue.

If in the category of illusion, Time but repeats its old errors.  
As, in barbarous ages, every unusual phenomenon was attributed to the direct agency of some deity, and almost every inanimate object was ascribed to his influence, so, in these times, certain occult phenomena, probably dependent on some heretofore ill-recognised natural force, reproduce the belief in the "supernatural," and are, in like manner, attributed to the direct operation of the invisible intelligence postulated by "Spiritualism." But increasing knowledge may in this department bring eventual enlightenment.

Discarded spirits! "Toward simply from our actual scientific stand-point, it is a pseud-term, one of mere word-jugglery. At the very name we instinctively turn to the most available and trustworthy sources for our secular guidance and information. Ask of physiology—ask of the sister-science, psychology—"
even at this moment that we write, if they have one tittle of positive evidence to offer in support of the existence of conscious mind or spirit apart from a material substrate? If not altogether silent, the probable confession would be that the answer to such a question came not within the pale of their teaching. And—apart from our Faith—within the pale of what teaching is the reassuring answer to be found?

Some—many—unsatisfied by orthodox doctrine, have found this answer so needed for their unrest in the teaching of Spiritualism. For the theory of "disembodied spirit" is its theory par excellence. Confident in its power at such a juncture, it offers a remedy for at least our scientific impotence. Hear Mr. Wallace ("Theory of Spiritualism," p. 102)—"Under certain conditions disembodied spirit is able to form for itself a visible body out of the emanation of living bodies in a proper magnetic relation to itself; and under certain still more favourable conditions the body can be made tangible. Thus all the phenomena of mediumship take place. Gravity is overcome by a form of life-magnetism, induced between the spirit and the medium; visible hands or visible bodies are produced, which sometimes write, or draw, or even speak."

In some such manner ("Historical Teachings") he would explain the nature of the intelligent spiritual being (daemon) which Socrates believed attended him through life. Without raising the question anew as to whether such belief were of a truly sane character or partook of that of hallucination, we may hazard the remark en passant that the cursory allusion made hardly aids the cause of "Spiritualism." It is not even clear that the "daemon" might not have been the "inner voice" intensified. On the other hand, our author leaves entirely unnoticed what history further records as to the real religious attitude of the son of Sophronius and Pherecrate.

But let Mr. Wallace proceed ("Moral Teachings," etc., p. 213):—"1. Man is a duality, consisting of an organised spiritual form evolved coincidently with and permeating the physical body, and having corresponding organs and development. 2. Death is the separation of this duality, and effects no change in the spirit morally or intellectually. 3. Spirits can communicate through properly endowed mediums."

Should these views be accepted, of course the entire ground as to the agency of the phenomena is covered. We demand, and with instance, that crucial test which shall lay the ghost of our distrust, and compel even an unwilling allegiance to a creed now professed by many millions, and believed as destined more or less rapidly to supplant our old one. But let us not forget that this latter, too, teaches us to believe in an unseen universe, where, also, spirits dwell; to believe, also, in an immortal destiny, not by means of waltzing tables, or of rapping mediums, but by the solemnity of its appeal to our reason and our conscience. Which shall we choose? Whatever our choice, whatever our convictions, one thing is certain—they confer no possible right to quarrel with the conscientious belief of other people; enough that we maintain our own inviolate. But we are quite entitled to inquire as to how far the ground for any new form of belief is valid. While claiming this right we may once again state (and it is just to do so) that we are persuaded the authors hold a perfectly honest belief as to the preterhuman character of the phenomena they have witnessed, and that neither self-deception nor complicity had any share in their production. Messrs. Crookes and Wallace have done quite enough of good and original work in their own particular departments to entitle them to our respect, however widely we may dissent from the latter views on the subject of Spiritualism.

They imagine that, by cumulative proof, they have brought their argument to its logical culmination, and that the fact of a constant preterhuman communication with this nether world is the legitimate outcome. But we may hint that that awkward material fallacy of the non-causa pro causu still looms in its background; and until the subject-matter the premises of the argument affirm is placed upon a much less doubtful and assailable basis, we opine that the conclusion attempted to be drawn will not be accepted by those accustomed to sift and to weigh the evidence which is to enforce conviction in such grave matters as those submitted for our consideration.