

REVIEWS.

Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism. By WILLIAM CROOKES, F.R.S. Reprinted from the *Quarterly Journal of Science*. London: J. Burns, 15, Southampton-row, Holborn, W.C. 1874. Pp. 112.

On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism. Three Essays. By ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE, author of "The Malay Archipelago," "Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection," etc. London: James Burns, 15, Southampton-row. 1875. Pp. 236.

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 hominum novitatis avida*, and philosophers are but men, and many among them have a "heel 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 at all times strong—nay, the very strongest—convictions 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.

Modern spiritualism has hardly existed, at least 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 magnetism, 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 as it is 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, inasmuch as the actual phenomena detailed are common to both works—indeed, to all the works hitherto published on the subject. And as all the theory is based thereon, they form the most fitting subject for investigation.

The work of Mr. Wallace is larger, more ambitious, embodying a much fuller amount of general spiritualistic *material*. A considerable portion is devoted to the subject of miracles. He states, however, that spiritualism "abolishes the terms 'supernatural' and 'miracle' by an extension of the sphere of law and the realm of nature." His own immediate object is to contravene the force of Hume's argument. So far as our ability permits us to discern, Hume's "wonders are unwrung." When Mr. Wallace, in all seriousness, narrates "that Lord Orrery and Mr. Valentine Greatrak both informed Dr. Henry More and Mr. Glanvil that at Lord Conway's house, at Ragley, in Ireland, a gentleman's butler, in their presence and in broad daylight, rose into the air and floated above the room above their heads," we would ask our readers which they consider the more probable, the truth of the miracle, or the falsity of the testimony? When we remember, moreover, that Mr. Valentine Greatrak was a reputed miracle-worker, we might, perhaps, appositely quote Hume's own remarks, "The many instances of forged miracles and prophecies, and supernatural events, which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind." But the question as to what really constitutes a miracle has been so ably and sufficiently treated in the first volume of the work on "Supernatural Religion," and in the posthumous "Essays" of John Stuart Mill, that it is quite superfluous to reopen the discussion.

The eventful history just detailed excepted, we had always thought (sceptics that we were) that the earlier recorded doings of the "spirits" were by no means of an imposing, much more of a proselytising, character. There seemed a good deal that the denizens of earth might have achieved, so far as mere outward manifestation was concerned: for what can be said of such prosaic doings as scratching, rapping, table-lifting, bell-ringing, accordion-playing, and the like—the veriest drudgery for those untrammelled spirits who, from their attributed power to control and direct the indestructible forces of the universe, may be called upon to set this poor machinery in action? 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 entranced gazers below, or resting, like the fabled tomb of the "Prophet," unsuspended in mid-space, or even borne bodily many miles away. These are feats, indeed, rivaling 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 numeri-

cally of the "faithful"), be transferred from Arabia to America. Phantom-forms even appear, though these are considered a sort of *rara avis*.

The first President of Cleveland University, Asa Mahan ("Modern Mysteries Explained and Exposed," Boston, 1855, p. 294), records the experience of a well-known American convert:—"Judge Edmonds, for example, affirms that the spirits which he has seen are from three inches to twenty feet in height—the largest that he has seen being a majestic and well-proportioned female, twenty feet high; that he has seen spirits who have been 18,000 years in the celestial spheres, and yet retain the form of monkeys, while others have hoofs and horns, such as he has seen in pictures." This remarkable experience is not included by our authors in their historical summary of phenomena. Perchance they may have thought that the brains of the learned judge at the time he penned it might have been somewhat muddled by the too laborious discharge of his judicial functions, or they may have remembered the old line beginning "Quem Deus," etc.

Greatly more has been heard of late of spirit-photographs. It has struck us as singular that in the numberless impressions of "mediums" taken in former years the spirits made no earlier sign. One point, however, seems tolerably clear: that in such impressions there could have been no psychical disturbance on the part of the observer—no subjective illusion, whatever else might be concerned in their production. But, what need of photographic pictures, when spiritually-manufactured hands, visible and palpable, bearing Flora's gifts, so often move among the "assistants at the *science*"; or when, according to Mr. Crookes, the lovely form and indescribable charm of manner of "Katie King" grace the scene? To read his glowing description is to excite our envy and regret that such sweet visitants, of supernal mould, will be so exclusive, and not visit outside the charmed circle. What losses 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 once so novel, startling, and impressive. When it is indubitably affirmed that mental questionings are correctly answered by a real though invisible agent; that we can hold direct communion with the spirits of departed friends; that spirit-forms appear in photographs, and phantom forms without such need; that "Katie King" is an incarnate reality; that not inanimate bodies alone, but even human bodies, may float in space unsuspended, or even 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 intelligent power, "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 things be,
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder!"

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 "odyle" or "psychic" force (call it as we will) developed and intensified in 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 made his supposed abode (fetichism), so even in our day 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.

Disembodied spirit! Viewed 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 (dæmon) 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 “dæmon” 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 Sophroniscus and Phœnarete.

But let Mr. Wallace proceed (“Moral Teachings,” etc., p. 213):—“1. Man is a duality, consisting of an organised spiritual form evolved coincidentally 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 their later 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 causa* 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.