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 hominis 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 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 the possible; whereas the latter term is to contravene the force of Hume's argument. So far as this ability permits us to discern, Hume's "wonders are unwrong." When Mr. Wallace, in all seriousness, narrates "that Lord Orrery and Mr. Valentine Gatreath both informed Dr. Henry More and Mr. Glanvil that at Lord Conway's house, at Ragley, in Ireland, the gentleman's butler, in their presence, in broad daylight, rose into the air and floated about 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 Gatreath 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 arises, if such really constitutes a miracle has been so absurdly 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 excelled, we had always thought (sceptics that we were) that the earlier recorded doings of the "spirits" were by no means of an imposing, much less of an undeniable nature. To Mr. Wallace it is only a good deal that the denizens of earth might have achieved, so far as mere outward manifestation was concerned: for what 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 photographs there could have been no psychical intervention. The explanation rests on the theory of "illusions, whatever else might be conceived in their production. But, what need of photographic pictures, when spiritually-manufactured hands, visible and palpable, bearing Flora's gifts, so often come among the "assistants at the sciences"; or when, according to Mr. Crookes, the lovely form and indescribable charm of manner of "Katie King" graces the scene? To our regret to 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, and observe, without our special wonder! "We are willing to admit the reality of some of the phenomena of numerous witnesses, both in this country and abroad—we not mentally exclaim, "Can such things be, and overcome us like a summer's dead, 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 so, 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" agencies. The question is, whether a circle of persons under some peculiar psychical condition. It is mainly with the conclusion drawn, with an acute 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 supposed to be inhabited by a spirit, so in the present 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 spirits! *Formed simply from our actual scientific standpoint,* it is a pseudo-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 Sophroniscus and Phoenarete.

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? We respect 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 causâ 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.

May 29, 1875.