

ARE THERE OBJECTIVE APPARITIONS?

This article, by Alfred Russel Wallace, was briefly noticed a few weeks ago in "LIGHT." It appeared in the January number of the "Arena." Anything written upon Spiritualism or kindred subjects by a man of such great talent and experience must be more than ordinarily worthy of perusal, and I regret that the publication in which the paper appears will be seen by few in England who take an interest in psychical phenomena, as it is published in America, besides being too high priced to be generally attainable. I propose to make a few extracts from the article which, I think, cannot fail to interest those readers of "LIGHT" who are unable to obtain the "Arena."

The object of Mr. Wallace's essay is to prove the *objectivity* of many cases of apparitions, as well as of other spiritual manifestations or phenomena, in contradistinction to the theories so persistently advocated by the Society for Psychical Research that such apparitions are almost entirely to be accounted for by subjective hallucination or by telepathy.

Mr. Wallace commences by recognising with gratitude the work done by the Society for Psychical Research both in England and America, in collecting such a vast number of cases of psychical phenomena, the evidence for which they thoroughly sift and examine before allowing an account of them to appear in their "Proceedings." But he deprecates their method of discussing all the classes of phenomena separately by themselves, without correlating them with other kindred phenomena. Still, the mere fact of bringing such subjects prominently before the public must advance the cause of truth, and stimulate personal interest and inquiry into matters of such deep moment.

Mr. Wallace writes:—

The number of men eminent in literature, art, or science who have joined the society and have contributed to its "Proceedings" has given the objects of its inquiry a position and status they did not previously possess, while the earnestness, the thoroughness, the literary skill, and philosophic acumen with which the evidence has been presented to the world has compelled assent to the proposition that the several classes of apparitions known as doubles, phantasms of the living or dead, spectral lights, voices, musical sounds, and the various physical effects which occur in haunted houses, are real and not very uncommon phenomena, well worthy of earnest study, and only doubtful as regards the interpretation put upon them. . . . The only explanation of the various classes of apparitions suggested by the more prominent working members of the society is that they are hallucinations due to the telepathic action of one mind upon another. These writers have, as they state they felt bound to do, strained the theory of telepathy to its utmost limits, in order to account for the more important of the phenomena which they have themselves set forth; and the chief difference of opinion now seems to be whether all the facts can be explained as primarily due to telepathic impressions from a living agent—a view maintained by Mr. Podmore—or whether the spirits of the dead are in some cases the agents, as Mr. Myers thinks may be the case. But in order to give this telepathic theory even a show of probability, it is necessary to exclude or to explain away a number of the most interesting and

suggestive facts collected by the society, and also to leave out of consideration whole classes of phenomena which are altogether at variance with the hypothesis adopted.

In reading several numbers of the "Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research," with which I have been favoured by the kindness of one of the members, I have been almost amused by the desperate efforts made by the writers to adapt their telepathic theory to all the facts they have collected, and when they find this impossible, they take refuge in another of their pet theories, the action of the "unconscious secondary self," a marvellous personage, who appears to be capable of supporting any number of characters, imitating exactly their handwritings and modes of expression, as well as being conversant with the smallest details of their lives. Only do the aforesaid writers admit of the possibility of the communicating intelligence being other than this secondary self or some telepathic influence emanating from members of the circle when some bald fact is stated which cannot by any possibility be known to anyone present, and which, therefore, it is most difficult to corroborate, though this has frequently been done.

Mr. Wallace next proceeds to enumerate those phenomena which he thinks distinctly suggest or afford direct proof of the objectivity of apparitions. These he classes under five heads, as follows:—

(1) Collective hallucinations, or the perception of the same phantasmal sights or sounds by two or more persons at once.

(2) Phantasms seen to occupy different points in space, by different persons, corresponding to their apparent motion; or the persistence of the phantasm in one spot, notwithstanding the observer changes his position.

(3) The effects of phantasms upon domestic animals.

(4) The physical effects apparently produced by phantasms, or connected with their appearance.

(5) The fact that phantasms, whether visible or invisible to persons present, can be and have been photographed.

Mr. Wallace then proceeds to give numerous examples of each of these groups of cases. Those included in the first four categories are almost entirely selected from the published "Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research" and from "Phantasms of the Living," and are therefore cases which have been thoroughly examined into and sifted by experts, who have spared no trouble in the work. The fifth class of phenomena, that of transcendental photography, has not yet received attention at the hands of the society, and the account which Mr. Wallace gives of it is compiled from well authenticated sources, and in many cases from facts within his own knowledge. Having myself some practical and satisfactory experience of this phase of spiritual phenomena, I have read Mr. Wallace's account of it with special interest, and do not think it will be waste of time on my part to copy it *in extenso* for the benefit of those who have not an opportunity of seeing the original, as I do not wish to spoil my copy by cutting out portions of it.

It runs as follows:—

(5) *Phantasms can be photographed, and are, therefore, objective realities.*

It is common to sneer at what are called "spirit photographs," because imitations of some of them can be so easily produced; but a little consideration will show that this very facility of imitation renders it equally easy to guard against imposture, since the modes by which the imitation is effected are so well known. At all events, it will be admitted that an experienced photographer who supplies the plates and sees the whole of the operations performed, or even performs them himself, cannot be so deceived. This test has been applied over and over again, and there is no possible escape from the conclusion that phantasms, whether visible or invisible to those present, can be and have been photographed. A brief treatment of the evidence in support of this assertion will now be given.

The first person through whom spirit photographs were obtained was a New York photographer named Mumler, who, in 1869, was arrested and tried for obtaining money by trickery and imposture, but who, after a long trial, was acquitted, because no proof of imposture or attempt at imposture was given. A professional photographer, Mr. W. H. Slee, of Poughkeepsie, watched the whole process of taking the pictures, and though there was nothing unusual in Mumler's procedure, shadowy forms appeared on the plates. Mumler afterwards visited this witness's gallery, bringing with him no materials whatever, yet the same results were produced. Mr. J. Gurney, a New York photographer, of twenty-eight years' experience, gave evidence that, after close examination, no

trickery whatever could be detected in Mumler's process. Yet a third photographer, Mr. W. W. Silver, of Brooklyn, gave evidence to the same effect. He frequently went through a whole process himself, using his own camera and materials, yet when Mumler was present, and simply placed his hand on the camera during the exposure, additional forms besides that of the sitter appeared on the plates. Here we have the sworn testimony in a court of law of three experts, who had every possible means of detecting imposture, if imposture there were; yet they all declared that there was and could be no imposture.*

It would be easy to give a score or more of cases in which persons of reputation have stated in print that they have obtained recognisable photographs of deceased friends when they themselves were quite unknown to the photographer, and even when no photograph or picture of the deceased person existed. In all such cases, however, the objection is made that the figures are more or less shadowy and that the supposed likeness may be imaginary. I, therefore, prefer to give only the evidence of experts as to the appearance on the plate of other figures besides those of the visible sitters. Perhaps the most remarkable cases of experiments ever made on this subject are those carried on during three years by the late Mr. John Beattie, of Clifton, a retired photographer of twenty years' experience, and Dr. Thomson, M.D. (Edin.), a retired physician, who had practised photography as an amateur for twenty-five years. These two gentlemen performed all the photographic work themselves, sitting with a medium who was not a photographer. They took hundreds of pictures, in series of three, taken consecutively at intervals of a few seconds; and the results are the more remarkable and the less open to any possible suspicion because there is not in the whole series what is commonly termed a spirit photograph—that is, a shadowy likeness of any deceased person—but all are more or less rudimental, exhibiting various patches of light undergoing definite changes of form, sometimes culminating in undefined human forms, or medallion-like heads, or star-like luminosities. In no case was there any known cause for the production of these figures. I possess a set of these remarkable photographs, thirty-two in number, given me by Mr. Beattie, and I was personally acquainted with Dr. Thomson, who confirmed Mr. Beattie's statements as to the conditions and circumstances under which they were taken. Here we have a thorough scientific investigation undertaken by two well-trained experts, with no possibility of their being imposed upon; and they demonstrate the fact that phantasmal figures and luminosities quite invisible to ordinary observers can yet reflect or emit actinic rays, so as to impress their forms and changes of form upon an ordinary photographic plate. An additional proof of this extraordinary phenomenon is, that frequently, and in the latter experiments always, the medium spontaneously described what he saw, and the picture taken at that moment always exhibited the same kind of figure. In one of the pictures the medium is shown among the sitters gazing intently and pointing with his hand. While doing so he exclaimed: "What a bright light up there! Can you not see it?" And the picture shows the bright light in the place to which his gaze and pointing hand are directed.

Very important, as confirming these results, are the experiments of the late Mr. Thomas Slater, the optician (of Euston-road, London), who obtained second figures on his plate when only his own family were present, and in one case when he was perfectly alone; and of Mr. R. Williams, M.A., of Hayward's Heath; of Mr. Trail Taylor, the editor of the "British Journal of Photography"; and of many other professional or amateur photographers, who all agreed that with everything under their own control, phantasmal figures, besides those of the sitter, appeared on the plates without any apparent or conceivable mechanical or chemical cause.

In the cases hitherto given, the phantasms or figures photographed have been invisible to all present except the mediums, and sometimes even to them; but we have also examples of the photographing of a visible form or apparition in the presence of a medium. A very successful photograph of a spirit-form which appeared under strict test conditions, with Miss Cook as the medium, was taken by Mr. Harrison, then editor of the "Spiritualist" newspaper. An engraving from this photograph appears as a frontispiece to Epes Sargent's "Proof Palpable of Immortality," with an account of the conditions under which it was taken, signed by the five persons present. Later on Mr. Crookes obtained numerous photographs (more than forty in all) in his own laboratory with the same medium; and had every opportunity of ascertaining that the phantom, which appeared and disappeared under conditions which rendered doubt impossible, was no human being, and was very different in all physical characteristics from the medium.

This long series of photographic experiments and tests, of which the briefest abstract only has been given, has been hitherto not even alluded to by the investigators of the Society for Psychical Research. But they cannot much

* A report of the trial appeared in the *New York Times* of April 22nd, 1869, and in many other papers.

longer continue to ignore it, because they have entered on the task of collecting the *whole* of the evidence for psychical phenomena, and of fairly estimating the weight of each of the group under which that evidence falls. Now I submit that this photographic evidence is superior in quality to any that they have hitherto collected, and for two reasons. In the first place, it is experimental evidence, and experiment is rarely possible in the higher psychical phenomena; in the second place, it is the evidence of experts in an operation, the whole details of which are perfectly familiar to them. And, I further submit, this evidence can no longer be ignored, because it is evidence that goes to the very root of the whole inquiry and affords the most complete and crucial test in the problem of subjectivity or objectivity of apparitions. What is the use of elaborate arguments to show that all the phenomena are to be explained by the various effects of telepathy, and that there is no evidence of the existence of objective apparitions occupying definite positions in space, when the camera and the sensitive plate have again and again proved that such objective phantasms do exist? Such arguments, founded on a small portion only of the facts, remind one of that literary *jeu d'esprit*: "Historic doubts as to the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte"; and to those who are acquainted with the whole range of the phenomena to be explained are about equally convincing.

I have now very briefly summarised and discussed the various classes of evidence which demonstrate the objectivity of many apparitions. The several groups of facts, while strong in themselves, gain greatly in strength by the support they give to each other. On the theory of objective reality all are harmonious and consistent. On the theory of hallucination, some require elaborate and unsupported theories for their explanation, while the great bulk are totally inexplicable, and have, therefore, to be ignored or set aside, or explained away. Collective hallucinations (so-called) are admitted to be frequent. That phantasms often behave like objective realities, in relation to material objects and to different persons, is also admitted. This is as it should be if they *are* objective, but it is hardly explicable on the subjective or telepathic theory. The behaviour of animals in the presence of phantasms, the evidence for which is as good as that for their appearance to men and women, is what we might expect if they are abnormal realities, but involve enormous difficulties on any other theory. The physical effects produced by phantasms (visible or invisible) afford a crucial test of objectivity, and are far too numerous and too well attested to be ignored or explained away. And, finally, comes the test of objectivity afforded by the photographic camera in the hands of experts and physicists of the first rank, rendering any escape from this conclusion simply impossible. "V."
