June 13, 1896.

"Miracles and Modern Spiritualism."

Sir,—The new edition of Dr. A. R. Wallace's 'Miracles and Modern Spiritualism' is an important and opportune contribution to the literature of Spiritualism. I venture to express a hope that it will be both widely read and carefully studied. Chapter VIII., on the Theory of Spiritualism, has a special interest to all investigators. It indicates an important change on Dr. Wallace's part since 1891, unless I fail to attach the right meaning to his expressed views. In his work on 'Natural Selection,' published in 1891, he says (p. 188), 'The brain is universally admitted to be the organ of the mind; and it is almost as universally admitted that size of brain is one of the most important elements which determine mental power or capacity.' It by no means follows, however, that this means that the brain thinks. Still it gives one the idea that Dr. Wallace would agree with Professor Huxley's statement ('Collected Essays,' Vol. VI., p. 94) that, 'what we call the operations of the mind are functions of the brain, and the materials of consciousness are the products of cerebral activity.' Professor Huxley quotes, with a measure of approval, Cabanis's expression that 'the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile,' though he calls this 'crude and misleading phraseology.' There has been general agreement in the past that the brain is 'the sole organ of thought.' Sir William Hamilton, quoted by Huxley, with marked disapproval, 'affirmed that there is no reason to deny that the mind feels with the finger points, and none to assert that the brain is the sole organ of thought.' This apparent exception still leaves the general statement that the brain is the organ of the mind.

But, since 1891, Dr. Wallace has adopted another hypothesis. On p. 107 of 'Miracles and Modern Spiritualism,' new edition, he says, 'According to this hypothesis, that which, for want of a better name, we shall term "spirit," is the essential part of all sensitive beings, whose bodies form but the machinery and instruments by means of which they perceive and act upon other beings and on matter. It is "spirit" that alone feels and perceives and thinks—that acquires knowledge and reasons and aspires—though it can only so by means of, and in exact proportion to, the organisation it is bound up with. It is the "spirit" of man that is man. Spirit is mind; the brain and nerves are but the magnetic battery and telegraph, by means of which spirit communicates with the outer world.'

More than three years ago I was led to a similar conclusion, and find my hypothesis expressed, in a letter to a friend, thus: 'We are dual; a spirit body co-ordinated with a physical body. This physical body is the apparatus by which the spirit body acts upon, and is acted upon by, its environment. The brain is the battery and the nerves are the channels of communication by which the apparatus is worked. My brain does not think—does not reason—I reason.' I have called this a similar hypothesis, but it is not identical. The spirit may feel, perceive, and acquire knowledge 'only by means of, and in exact proportion to, the organisation it is bound up with'; but I cannot regard the thinking, reasoning, and aspiring as similarly conditioned and limited by 'the organisation it is bound up with.' The death of the physical body does not stop thinking, reasoning and aspiring. It may modify, but does not destroy, the capacity to feel, perceive, and acquire knowledge. When
set free from the physical body the spirit will still be able to
feel, perceive, and acquire knowledge, though in a modified
sense. For the present I assume that my friends who have passed
on not only survive, but actually communicate with me. This
assumption seems the simplest, and is, as I take it, capable of jus-
tification. In these communications they distinctly claim certain
powers. They do not feel heat, nor cold, nor resistance as they did
while in the body. They enter my study through the door, or
wall, or roof, or closed window; but they are conscious of some
measure of resistance, and this varies with the substance through
which they pass. But while feeling is largely modified in one
way, sight is modified in another. They claim clearer sight
than in earth life—direct spiritual vision—and more perfect than
ours. Dr. Wallace (p. 108, new edition) says, 'The spirit, like the
body, has its laws and definite limits to its powers. It
communicates with spirit more easily than with matter, and in
most cases can only (perceive and) act on matter through the
medium of embodied spirit.' This sentence needs the omission
of the bracketed words, 'perceive and,' to make it express
what I take to be the truth. Their power of acquiring know-
ledge must be modified and limited in some ways, and yet
largely extended in other ways, for they claim to be able
to pass through space with great rapidity. They say that
they move by volition; that gravity does not prevent their
movement in our atmosphere, but prevents them from ascen-
ding above the sphere for which they are fitted. This suggests
that the spirit body is subject to the law of gravitation only to
a small extent, and that this susceptibility diminishes in pro-
portion to their progress. The spirit survives as an etherial
body with larger opportunities of acquiring knowledge and with
perfect freedom from the limitation of the physical body. The
thinker survives. That part of man which thinks, reasons, and
aspires, survives in its integrity, more perfect in form, more
etherial, and as recognisable by their friends as they were on
earth. The brain cannot be the organ of thought, if by that
expression it is meant that the brain thinks. I have more to
say on this subject than can be said in one letter, so, with your
permission, I will resume some other day.

There are some misprints in Dr. Wallace's new edition, and
one in an important passage—on p. 124, line 6 from the top, the
word 'infinite' should be finite.