

It may be within the recollection of the readers of 'London Society' that last month I made some observations on Mr. A. R. Wallace's experiences of 'Spiritualism,' as detailed in the pages of the 'Fortnightly Review' for May. I stated that, while I was quite prepared to admit that the alleged phenomena had actually occurred, I did not consider that sufficient evidence was adduced as to the cause of those phenomena to persuade me that they were to be attributed to the intervention of the spirits of the dead. I admitted that I had never assisted at a *séance*, and it was objected in a quarter that commands my respect that I ought not to write about such matters without practical acquaintance with so-called 'spiritual' phenomena. I cannot allow that this is a reasonable canon of criticism. The disciples of the spiritualistic theories write papers which are intended to convince the world that their theories are deserving of general acceptance, and they adduce arguments from certain facts which have, they say, occurred within their own experience as proofs of the truth of their theories. These arguments are obviously intended for those who are without the charmed circle of the mediumistic society, and they must deal with the process of reasoning that is submitted for their consideration. Happily for the free ventilation of thought, it is the custom of editors nowadays to admit into their columns both sides of great social questions, and therefore I venture, very briefly, to make a few further observations upon Mr. Wallace's concluding paper on 'Modern Spiritualism,' which may be read in the 'Fortnightly Review' for June.

No one can deny that the circumstances stated to have hap-

pened in Mr. Wallace's two papers are of a sufficiently startling character. Every reader must regret that they are not backed up with the endorsement of recognised men of science. It is true that Mr. Wallace calls upon us 'to consider the long roll of men of ability who, commencing the inquiry as sceptics, left it as believers;' but, unfortunately, he omits to give the names of these able persons—an omission which, with due regard to the occasion, seems to be a great mistake. Mr. Wallace certainly mentions the names of some five or six gentlemen who are said to have confirmed the truth of spiritualism; but unfortunately, again, these names, eminently respectable as no doubt they are, are scarcely of sufficient weight to convince the world of its ignorance. And one witness, who is confidently cited, gives evidence entirely contrary to Mr. Wallace's conclusions. I refer to Serjeant Cox, from whose book, 'What am I?' I shall quote a little farther on.

But if I am not allowed to challenge the mysteries of spiritualism without having passed through the sublime initiations, I presume I may, as a simple catechumen whose place is only on the threshold of the temple, be permitted to make a note or two of those 'Lessons of Modern Spiritualism' which Mr. Wallace conceives to be 'important.' I pass over the paragraph about the 'demon' of Socrates, for it is not necessary to go to spiritualism for a solution of the well-known problem. All men of high-wrought and much-worked intellectual powers have their 'demons' in one shape or another, and Mr. Wallace unconsciously offers an explanation when he asserts that man is a duality. Christian philosophy goes farther, and defines man as composed of body, soul, and spirit. Nor is it necessary

to examine theories as to the ancient Pythoness, or as to the oracles which poetical tradition relates became dumb when the influences of Christianity asserted their sublimer sway. But when we come to the statement, that when Christ fed five thousand men with bread and fish not sufficient for a dozen, He was only exercising a power which is 'still daily at work amongst us,' we may fairly ask if spiritualism can afford for a testimony any such material miracle as that?

Mr. Wallace goes on to say that 'the miracles of the saints, when well attested, come into the same category.' Yes; but what is the attestation worth? The first question to be asked before these traditional miracles can be brought in evidence is, Are these miracles sufficiently supported by the strict rules of evidence so as to command our unhesitating belief? The fact that in the Roman Catholic Church they need only be held as 'pious opinions,' is enough for their dismissal in their character of proofs; and Mr. Wallace rather gets himself into a difficulty when he adds, 'Modern Roman Catholic miracles become intelligible facts. Spirits whose affections and passions are strongly excited in favour of Catholicism produce those appearances of the Virgin and of saints which they know will tend to increase religious fervour. The appearance itself may be an objective reality, while it is only an inference that it is the Virgin Mary—an inference which every intelligent spiritualist would reject as in the highest degree improbable.' Why improbable? Why should the inference be more improbable than the appearance from which it is drawn? If the apparition is not the Virgin Mary, who is it? Are we to fall back upon the

notion of 'lying spirits'? I fear Mr. Wallace leaves us no alternative. And if 'spirits' can be so grossly deceptive, we may well decline any more intimate acquaintance with them.

I now come to Mr. Wallace's statement that 'the recently-discussed question of the efficacy of prayer receives a perfect solution by spiritualism. . . . A striking case is that of George Müller, of Bristol, who has now for forty-four years depended wholly for his own support, and that of his wonderful charities, on answer to prayer. . . . He never asked any one or allowed any one to be asked, directly or indirectly, for a penny. No subscriptions or collections were ever made; yet from 1830 (when he married without any income whatever) he has lived, brought up a family, and established institutions which have steadily increased, till now four thousand orphan children are educated and in part supported. . . . His one and only resource has been secret prayer.' With sorrow I confess that though I have lived in the neighbourhood of Bristol, and have read daily papers as long as I can remember, I never heard of Mr. Müller before; and I agree with Mr. Wallace that this is a case which ought to be investigated by the sceptics of the 'Contemporary Review.' Now Mr. Wallace's explanation of Mr. Müller's success is, that his large-hearted charity attracted a number of spiritual beings towards him, and that they acted upon material wealthy beings, who suddenly felt themselves impelled to send large donations to Mr. George Müller. But is it not much simpler to believe, as apparently Mr. Müller himself believes, that the Almighty heard his prayers and answered them, without our calling in the aid of mediumistic powers for an

explanation? The simplest Christian believes that the Holy Spirit of God suggests good and benevolent thoughts, and the mere reading of the 'Narrative of some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller' may satisfactorily explain the wealth that has flowed in upon him, without calling in supernatural agencies. Without detracting from the efficacy of prayer, we may express a hope that the pecuniary success which has attended Mr. Müller's wrestlings will not at once induce a large number of young men to marry with no more substantial marriage settlement than Mr. Müller could give, or it is to be feared that pauperism will largely increase. Indeed, we should regard Mr. Müller himself with more unfeigned respect if he had followed the example of the Apostle Paul, and had denied himself the luxury of a wife.

But perhaps the best reply that an outside inquirer may make to the rather confident conclusions which Mr. Wallace draws as to the agency of the spirits of the dead in the strange phenomena which are alleged to have taken place, is to be found in the pages of a work by Mr. Serjeant Cox, entitled 'What am I?' This learned gentleman was, as has already been noted in the columns of this Magazine, a member of the committee of the Dialectical Society, which undertook to investigate the phenomena of Spiritualism; and the result at which Serjeant Cox arrives is that there are certain persons in whom a strange and abnormal power is developed, which he calls psychic or soul force. He tells us that the study of psychology begins where physiology leaves off, and he gives us many and adequate reasons for entertaining the belief that there are more things in

heaven and earth than have hitherto been dreamed of in our philosophy. He has witnessed under multiform conditions the remarkable incidents to which Mr. Wallace alludes, and he wholly discards the notion of imposture or legerdemain with which an incredulous generation dismisses the marvels of a legitimate *séance*. Occupying a judicial position, and trained in the severe habits of sifting truth by the strict laws which govern legal evidence, Serjeant Cox has, after investigation spread over some years, arrived at the conclusion that the intelligence that directs these phenomena, which nevertheless are of undoubted occurrence, is *not* that of spirits of dead human beings. And he gives twenty well-argued reasons why he considers such a theory as Mr. Wallace's to be untenable. I recommend all persons who take any interest in these questions to study the two volumes entitled 'What am I?'—for, to the psychological student, they present matter of great interest. From his argument against spiritual agency I have only space to make the following excerpt:—

'Personally, I have been assured many times that some member of my family, or some dear friend who had passed away from earth, was communicating with me by the rapping or writing. I noticed that the alleged spirit was always that of some person whom I had strongly in my mind at the moment, who was not nearer nor dearer to me than many others who did not make themselves known to me. Asked, "Who are you?" the name was rightly given. Usually some commonplace communications were made, such as "I am glad to be with you;" "I am very happy;" "I am often by your side." Desirous to test the identity of my inter-

locutor, I have put questions that were answered readily. Some were right, but some were wrong, and still more were so equivocal that it was obvious the communicant was *guessing*, and not *knowing*. To perfect the test, I have put test questions, such as "Do you remember when you fell from your horse, and broke your arm?" In such cases the answer was always "Yes," although no such accident had ever occurred. This was not an accidental or occasional result of the test; it was invariable. Never once did the alleged spirit of my relative or friend correct me by answering that nothing of the kind had ever happened. I have tried another test. Keeping the idea of a living friend strictly in my mind, I have received answers to my questions as if from that friend; and if, in the presence of the psychic, I have purposely uttered a name as if it had interested me, that name was almost certain to present itself as a present spirit. Moreover, the communications are, for the most part, unworthy of the persons to whom they are attributed, or not in keeping with their characters — unless the psychic has some knowledge of them — and then they express just such characteristics as the psychic might be supposed to attach to such a personage, often being very unlike the original. When the spirits of men who had been distinguished for genius in their earth-life appear, as often they do, I have never in a single instance found them to support their asserted characters in thought or language; proving this, at least, that they must have degenerated sadly since their passage from this life to another. Two or three instances will illustrate this. A communication asserted itself to be by

the late Dr. Elliotson: "Do you remember me?" I asked. "Yes, well." "My name?" answered rightly (it was, of course, known to the psychic). "Do you remember my visit to your two patients?" "Yes, you were much interested." I now bethought me of a test: "Do you remember my asking Elizabeth to bring the book from the library?" "Yes, well." "And reading it to me without opening it?" "Yes." "And what I said?" "You said it was marvellous. It convinced you." Now all this was a pure invention for the purpose of trying the truth of the alleged personality. No such incident ever occurred. It proved that, whatever was the intelligence communicating, it was not the spirit of Dr. Elliotson. Again, sitting with another psychic, communication was declared to be made by a spirit who professed to have prophetic powers. This spirit prophesied of me that in a few weeks I should put on a black cap and sentence a woman to be hung. It was, of course, known to the psychic that I occupied a judicial office, but he did *not* know that the jurisdiction of quarter sessions is limited, and that I had not power to inflict capital punishment. So the ignorance of the psychic was manifestly reflected by the spirit. . . . These are but a few of the facts that appear to me to disprove the theory that the communicating intelligences are spirits of the dead. . . . In the honest pursuit of truth, I am bound to state that not only have I been unable to obtain personally any evidence whatever that any of the phenomena are produced by spirits of the dead, but all the evidence I have been able to collect tends to negative that conclusion.'

FREE LANCE.