

REPLY TO MR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE.

(To the Editor of the JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.)

SIR,—I must confess my surprise—after the various articles relating more or less to slate-writing which have appeared in our *Proceedings* and *Journal*, beginning with Mrs. Sidgwick's paper read on May 3rd, 1886, and published in Part X. of our *Proceedings* (Vol. IV., p. 45) and ending with my article in Part XXII.,—to find Mr. Wallace still affirming that “the important question is, whether the methods which Mr. Davey used in his trick-performances are such as will serve to explain most, or all, of the slate-writing of professional mediums.” It is difficult to conceive a greater misapprehension of the point at issue. The chief object of the investigation with Mr. Davey was to estimate the true worth of testimony to “psychographic” and similar performances,—“to ascertain by definite experiment, *what sort of reports* honest and intelligent persons will make of conjuring performances

carried out in private, without any advantage of conditions, and directed to obtaining results as closely as possible resembling those on which Spiritualists rely." (*Proceedings*, Vol. IV., Part XI., p. 380.) In the Introduction to Mr. Davey's Experimental Investigation I tried to show in detail how far other records of psychographic phenomena "might be misdescriptions, and what were the chief causes of the misdescriptions." It was also pointed out clearly, in describing the object of the notes attached to the reports of sittings, that

"to explain the tricks would in itself be of little advantage to the investigator of the 'physical phenomena' of mediums, since many methods of producing 'psychography' may exist besides those which Mr. Davey has employed; and were all of those in present use to be made public property, others would doubtless be invented, and accidental opportunities for producing successful illusions would still arise";—

that it would be a great mistake

"to suppose that explanations of the methods in use would convince those who have testified from personal experience to the genuineness of the 'psychography' of Eglinton, Slade, etc., that such methods were used for the production of the phenomena which they witnessed. They will scarcely be likely to *remember* the occurrence of events which they perhaps never observed at all, or observed only partially and erroneously; which, whether correctly or incorrectly observed, they have afterwards continually misdescribed or completely forgotten; and which, in many cases, would be distinctly excluded by the acceptance of their testimony as it stands";—

and that the object of the notes was

"to show to investigators the kind and degree of mistakes which may be made by educated and intelligent witnesses in recording their impression of a performance the main lines of which are planned with the deliberate intention of deceiving them, but few, if any, of the details of which can be described as absolutely fixed."

After such explicit declarations as the above, repeated and emphasised in a variety of ways both in the *Journal* and in the *Proceedings* by Mrs. Sidgwick and myself, during the discussions on the subject in 1886-7, and reiterated in my article in Part XXII., where I have again drawn special attention throughout to the fact that the important point to notice is not how the trick was done, but what kinds of errors appear in the report of the witness,—after all this, I say, I am astonished to find Mr. Wallace still completely missing the point of the whole investigation. The obviously important question for him to ask is: *What kinds of mistakes may I expect to find in my own reports of "psychographic" phenomena?* and not the question which he practically does ask, viz., *Assuming my reports to be correct, how can Mr. Davey's methods explain the slate-writing which I witnessed?* This last question is of no importance whatever. The investigation with Mr. Davey establishes that the assumption of the correctness of

records of the kind under consideration is an absurd assumption. If we could get "behind the scenes" in all of Mr. Wallace's experiences, we might find that nearly every differential circumstance which he enumerates was present at one or other of his sittings.¹ In spite of Mr. Wallace's belief to the contrary, it is possible that the medium may have left the room, the slates may have been put under the table, there may have been a duster and a blotting paper, there may have been a long waiting, he may have been in the room an hour before the sitting began, other experiments may have been interpolated, and the sitters may have been asked to change places. There are misdescriptions of all these points in the reports of the sittings with Mr. Davey, and I may add here that misdescriptions of a similar character were demonstrated to occur in the records of sittings with Eglinton (*vide Journal*, Oct.-Dec. 1886). If then, in the light of the reports of Mr. Davey's performances, supplemented by the explanations given of the misdescriptions in those reports, we ask the really important question what kinds of mistakes we should expect to find in Mr. Wallace's and other similar reports of "psychographic" phenomena, we have to reply that although *as the events are described* trickery is not a sufficient explanation of the writing, it is a sufficient explanation of the writing when we correct the record as we are entitled to do; when allowance is made for the same kind and amount of misdescription as we have proved to occur in the accounts of Mr. Davey's

¹ Mr. Wallace's No. 1 is curious. One might almost suppose that he regards it as a special glory to have, very nearly, succeeded in never trying any slates but the medium's. He apparently wishes to emphasise the circumstance that Mr. Davey had a great advantage when he got his sitters to bring *three* slates, and of course it is easier to play tricks with three slates than with two or one. On the other hand it is surely more satisfactory to get writing on one's own slates than on those of the medium, the latter being so much more easily prepared beforehand, as were probably the "*seven* slates filled with writing or portraits" which Mr. Wallace got from Fred Evans. The only detailed (!) account by Mr. Wallace of a psychographic performance which I can remember appearing in our publications was quoted by Mr. Massey in *Proceedings*, Part X. (Vol. IV., p. 84.) The medium was Monck (a detected trickster), and even in Mr. Wallace's account it appears that *four* slates were on the table. It would be interesting to know at how many of Mr. Wallace's sittings he believed that there were *fewer* than *three* slates, and by what kind of search he believes himself to have ascertained this.

Mr. Wallace thinks that it would be harder for the medium to trick when some of the persons present are sitting away from the table instead of being at the table. This depends largely on the trick, on the exact positions of the persons, and various other circumstances. "A yard back" would usually be a much worse position than at the table, especially if the actual sitter came between the onlooker and the medium. In nearly all slate-writing tricks, I think, for purposes of detection, I would rather be as near to the "medium" as possible. At a sitting with a Mrs. Gillett, where I sat about "three yards off," while a friend sat at the table for a sitting, I saw practically nothing from my position, whereas when I was sitting at the table myself I saw all her chief trick movements. (I gave an account of these in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, February 13th, 1892.) The other points of the nine which Mr. Wallace enumerates I have quite sufficiently dealt with above. Most of them are fallacious from other points of view, as will doubtless readily be seen by any reader of the reports who is at all familiar with the performances of professional mediums.

performances, the "mediumistic phenomena" in dispute are perfectly explicable by conjuring.

Besides Mr. Wallace's complete general misconception of the point at issue, I find a special misconception in his acceptance *now* of the challenge in my article more than four years ago that the "experienced Spiritualist" should point out exactly where the difference lies between Mr. Davey's performances and mediumistic phenomena. Surely the meaning of this challenge was obvious? Whoever accepted it was to compare the reports of Mr. Davey's performances with the reports of mediumistic phenomena, and give satisfactory reasons for holding that the one set of phenomena were explicable by conjuring and the other set not; or, as Mrs. Sidgwick put the question (*Journal* for July, 1887, p. 138): if he was able to distinguish conjuring performances from mediumistic ones, he had "an opportunity of showing it by explaining exactly how, if the accounts of Mr. Davey's performances and Mr. Eglinton's [or Monck's, or Slade's, or Keeler's, or Evans'] were presented to him for the first time mixed up and so that he did not know which was which, he would distinguish the genuine from the spurious." Mr. Wallace and other believers in the genuineness of psychography had four years in which to accept this challenge. So far as I am aware, no attempt was ever made to meet it. On the contrary, as appears from Mr. Wallace's letter printed in the *Journal* in March, 1891, he and others substantially confessed that they were unable to make the distinction demanded, and that they believed Mr. Davey to be a medium. Even now, indeed, Mr. Wallace thinks it probable that Mr. Davey possessed "mediumistic power," a term which he distinguishes from "thought-reading and thought-impressing," and by which I suppose he must mean the power of obtaining so-called "independent writing." I must confess that if what I have already said in the *Proceedings* and the further comments which I wish to make here on other but related points are not sufficient to convince Mr. Wallace that Mr. Davey was not a "medium," it seems to me unprofitable to say any more on the subject. As the matter stands, Mr. Wallace still makes no distinction between Mr. Davey's performances and the disputed mediumistic phenomena. To make this distinction, he must give satisfactory reasons for accepting the testimony to mediumistic phenomena as valid, while rejecting the testimony to Mr. Davey's phenomena as invalid. He gives no such reasons, and makes no attempt whatever to compare the testimonies in the two classes of performances alleged by him to be different. Why, for example, should I reject the statement of Mrs. Y.—"I am perfectly confident that my hand was not removed from the slates for one single instant, and that I never lost sight of them for a moment"—as positively erroneous, and accept Mr. Wallace's statement that "any substitution was simply impossible" as absolutely reliable? Mr. Wallace wants to get "behind the scenes" for one set of records and sit in the gallery for the other!

And let me here remind the reader that a similar conclusion as to the unreliability of the testimony to "slate-writing" performances might have been obtained by an investigation of the results of conjuring performances of another kind altogether. We should have reached the

same general conclusions concerning the untrustworthiness of testimony wherever the possibility of a conjurer's operations had to be allowed for, though the criterion would then have been less easy of application than it is now, owing to the close resemblance in all fundamental respects which the reports of Mr. Davey's performances bear to the accounts of those of professional mediums.

Mr. Wallace complains of Mr. Davey's "refusal to exhibit his performances to those Spiritualists who had had a large experience of slate-writing in the presence of mediums." Well, had the contemplated series of experiments to which I referred in *Proceedings*, Part XXII., p. 254, been carried out, I have no doubt that some "experienced Spiritualists" would be now affirming more strongly than ever that Mr. Davey was a wonderful medium, though they probably would not have known him under the name of Mr. Davey. For differences between reports of sittings with a person known beforehand to be a professed conjurer, and reports of sittings with a person regarded as a medium, see the *Journal* for October, 1886, pp. 410, 411; and as regards the supposition which I take to be implied in Mr. Wallace's remarks, that "experienced Spiritualists" would have been less easily deceived than were Mr. Davey's sitters, there are good reasons for thinking that "the presumption is strongly the other way." (Part XI., p. 404.)

So much, then, for the main point at issue, which is not whether the methods used by Mr. Davey will serve to explain most or all of the slate-writing of professional mediums, but whether—to vary the mode of presenting the point—when the reports of such slate-writing are duly corrected for their possible misdescriptions, the phenomena are explicable by conjuring.

There are now one or two subsidiary points which it may be worth while to clear up, if possible, concerning Mr. Wallace's opinion that Mr. Davey possessed some supernormal faculty.

A. Mr. Wallace states that it seems clear to him that Mr. Davey "possessed the faculty of thought-reading and thought-impressing in a high degree." Now, at the time of my investigation with Mr. Davey I considered the instances which Mr. Davey adduced in support of his idea that he had more success in guessing numbers, etc., than could be attributed to mere chance, and I concluded that he much over-estimated his successes. My knowledge of the circumstances is of course less now than then when it included a knowledge of sittings with Mr. Davey, which were never reported at all, but it may be worth while to consider the cases that occur in the detailed accounts given in the *Proceedings* and to ask ourselves whether Mr. Wallace's assertion can be justified.

Let us first look at the book-experiments. Mr. Wallace says: "He calculates on *forcing* a sitter to choose the book he requires. The record of his sittings shows that he tried this experiment with ten different sitters; with four it failed or was inconclusive, but with the other six it succeeded more or less completely." Mr. Wallace's analysis of the experiments is not

quite correct,¹ but it would be superfluous to enter into a detailed calculation of chances where the question is one of *forcing*, of the principle of which, as used in various forms by conjurers, Mr. Wallace appears to be entirely ignorant. In Part XXII., pp. 268-270, I have given a detailed description of the two instances in which Mr. Davey arranged a "force" among my own books; and it is amazing to find Mr. Wallace suggesting that thought-transference is involved in the success achieved in "forcing" a book under the circumstances of Mr. Davey's sittings, where probably not one of the sitters knew any more about "forcing" than Mr. Wallace does. I have frequently forced a card "several times running" on the same person, in the same way. Doubtless Mr. Wallace would have regarded this as evidence of thought-transference. He unconsciously but persistently continues to ignore a fundamental part of the conjuring performance. I have already indicated in the case of Miss Y. (Part XXII., p. 269) how she was led into choosing the required book partly from her very desire to take a book *at random*, not to inspect titles and make a reflective choice. I have shown how little dependence can be placed on the after-impression of the witness that the book was chosen strictly at random, pointing out clearly, as I thought, how it was forced upon her by the conjurer; yet Mr. Wallace quotes Miss Symons as using the phrase "at random" (as she does for only

¹ The ten sitters to whom Mr. Wallace refers are apparently the following, R signifying success and W failure:—

1.	Sitting	II.	Miss Y.	...	...	...	R
2.	"	IV.	Mr. Padshah	...	...	...	W
3.	"	V.	Mr. Block	...	...	...	W
4.	"	VI.	Mr. Ten Brüggenkate				R
5.	"	VII.	Mr. Manville	...	...	...	W
6.	"	VII.	Mr. Pinnock	...	...	...	R
7.	"	VIII.	Mr. Dodds	...	...	...	R
8.	"	IX.	Mr. A. B. T.	...	...	...	W
9.	"	XV.	Mrs. Sidgwick	...	...	...	R?
10.	"	XVI.	Miss Symons	...	...	...	R

Now, in the first place it should be noticed that prior to the successes with Miss Y. there were *three failures*, Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Y. having each taken a book, *not* the one required. Mrs. Sidgwick, as she explains in *Proceedings*, Part XXII., p. 272, failed several times to take the right book, and took the right one finally because she perceived that Mr. Davey wanted that one. This, therefore, counts as a failure. On the other hand, Miss Symons chose three different books, two of which can be counted as right. (I omit the third book, since this was a *Journal* or *Proceedings* S.P.R. and the message "no such page" was apparently written after its choice. It was doubtless known to Mr. Davey that the current number of the *Journal* or *Proceedings* contained no page under 10, and in any odd part of the *Journal* or *Proceedings* the chances are of course that the answer "no such page" would be correct.) This analysis gives fourteen trials and shows eight failures and six successes. Probably we should have to diminish even this percentage of success if we knew in every detail exactly what occurred at the sittings, *e.g.*, Miss Symons may have chosen one or two other books before she took the right one, and Mr. Davey may have objected to these on the grounds that he had read them, etc. Here, again, Mr. Wallace's estimate is open to error because of his assumption that the reports are accurate. And I refer him especially to the *Journal* for October, 1886, pp. 419-421, where I have pointed out just such an omission from the record of a sitting with Eglinton as I here suggest in Miss Symons' account of her choice of a book. Unreliability of testimony again.

one of the three book experiments); he apparently supposes that she is giving an accurate account of what actually occurred, and cannot understand that the book may have been forced upon her in much the same way as the book was forced upon Miss Y. Mr. Wallace's notion of the difficulty of forcing is as naïve as his judgments about conjuring performances generally. Further, he seems to think that there is only one method of forcing a book, namely, that particular method which I described in detail. There are modifications of "conspicuous forcing" and modifications of "inconspicuous forcing." For example, the conjurer moves with the sitter towards the shelves: "Take any book at random. Don't take a book that anybody would take"—touching a very conspicuous book, with a slight wave of the hand further to the right, which helps to lead the eye of the sitter to an insignificant looking book in an obscure position—just the book required. I repeat that it is manifestly Mr. Wallace's ignorance of conjuring that allows him to suppose that Mr. Davey's success in forcing the right book was any indication of thought-transference. The only case in my opinion that deserves any consideration from this point of view is that of Mr. Dodds. It was a "curious coincidence" that Mr. Davey should have placed, in a forcing position, a book by the same author as one which Mr. Dodds had been so recently reading. But we do not know what other books Mr. Dodds had been reading that day, and for every additional book that he had been reading, the oddity of the coincidence is diminished. Conscious reasoning, I believe, *so far as Mr. Davey was aware*, led him to choose the book as a likely one for Mr. Dodds to take if it should catch his eye. The "force" perhaps consisted of a slight displacement of the book, or the book may have been somewhat larger than those in its neighbourhood. Now it was the "force" doubtless which originally drew the attention of Mr. Dodds to this book. Whether he would have finally chosen it had he not been so recently reading another book by the same author we cannot tell. But he was consciously influenced to choose it by his remembrance of the aforesaid reading. Be it observed, therefore, that the remarkable thing is not that *Mr. Dodds* chose that book, but that *Mr. Davey* chose it, and from this point of view the reader will see that the case is less remarkable than Mr. Wallace seems to think. If the incident was telepathic, Mr. Dodds was probably the unconscious agent earlier in the day, and Mr. Davey the percipient, and at the time of the supposed thought-transference they had never met. It is, if telepathic, an unusual type of case, and can hardly be claimed as a proof of thought-transference in Mr. Davey's experience unless we find further evidence distinctly pointing in this direction. Let us then turn to Mr. Davey's selections of numbers and figures. The following table represents all the cases in the detailed reports of experiments in the drawing of figures.

Sitting.

Chosen by Sitter.

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| I. | { | 1. Octagon (and square ?)
2. Octagon (and square ?)
3. Square. |
|----|---|--|

Drawn by Mr. Davey.

- Two indistinct lines.
 Two indistinct lines.
 Two lines perhaps intended to be at right angles to each other, but not at right angles and not touching.

<i>Sitting.</i>	<i>Chosen by Sitter.</i>	<i>Drawn by Mr. Davey.</i>
II.	{ 4. Star. 5. Cross.	No result witnessed.
VII.		Attempt at a cross.
	6. Triangle.	No result witnessed.

This is scarcely a series to prove thought-transference even if we include (5); but as a matter of fact (5) should not be included, since Mr. Davey was aware that a cross had been chosen before he placed the chalks under the tumbler. My remembrance about this incident is that when Mr. Davey assured me (*vide* Part XI., Vol. IV., p. 489) that he intended to draw a cross, I conjectured that he had inferred what the figure was from possibly *hearing* Miss Y. draw it, but that he explained that he had not heard the sound of the drawing, but had heard Miss Y.'s whispered reply "cross" to her mother's whispered query as to the figure chosen. This, again, is another instance of Mr. Wallace's mistake in assuming that the reports are accurate.

The following table represents all the cases in the detailed reports of experiments with simple numbers,—choice being limited to *under 10*.

<i>Sitting.</i>	<i>Chosen by Sitter.</i>	<i>Written by Mr. Davey.</i>
III.	{ 5. 5 and 7. 5 and 7.	6.
XVI.		No answer.
	4.	7.
		4.

What little indication of thought-transference there may seem to some persons to be in this series, vanishes when they know of the old boy's trick with numbers: *viz.*, ask a person to think of a number under 10, and to name it. If it is either 4 or 7 you exhibit to him a piece of paper upon which you have previously written a number which is 4 from one point of view but turned the other way is 7. Here I must confess that I am somewhat surprised at the implication which Mr. Wallace reads in my words. Mr. Wallace says that Mr. Davey evidently calculated on the faculty (of thought-transference) "for Mr. Hodgson tells us that he draws a figure or number that he *thinks* the sitter is most likely to choose." I most assuredly was not thinking of thought-transference when I wrote:—

"While he is making a little heap of the chalks on the middle of the slate, before placing the tumbler in position, he also draws a figure (or a number, as the case may be) that he thinks the sitter is most likely to choose."

I was thinking of Mr. Davey's estimate of the sitter, the conversation, the surroundings, etc. Thus, Mr. Davey might conclude that one sitter would probably choose a very simple figure, such as a square or a triangle, and that another sitter would probably avoid choosing a very simple figure. Usually, indeed, Mr. Davey did not ask the sitter to think of a figure till after the chalks and tumbler had been placed in position and the figure had been drawn.

The following table represents all the cases, in the detailed reports, of experiments with lines and pages.

<i>Sitting.</i>	<i>Chosen by Sitter.</i>	<i>Written by Mr. Davey.</i>
II.	{ Page 8, line 8. Page 8, line 4. Page 7, line 9. Page 1, line 9.	{ Page 3, lines 1, 8, 9. Page 4, line 1. Page 5, line 1. Page 6, line 1. Page 7, line 1. Page 8, line 1. Page 9, line 1.
(The experiment was specially directed towards Mr. Y.'s numbers, viz., page 8, line 8.)		
VI.	Page 5, line 7.	Page 8, line 4.
VII.	Page 12, line 8.	Page 12, line 8.
VIII.	Page 28, line 8.	Page 15, lines 8 (say to) 13.
XV.	Page 9, line 4.	{ Page 6, last line. Page 7, line 1.
XVI.	Page 2, line 7.	{ Page 7, last line. Page 8, line 2. [down." Page 8, "a few lines further
XVI.	Page 8, line 5.	{ Page 8, line 1. Page 8, line 5.

Omitting the case of Sitting VII.—which I shall describe in detail presently,—and taking first the *page* numbers, I find that in Sitting II. Mr. Davey had written passages from pp. 3-9 inclusive.† This case, therefore, may be dropped from our calculation. There remain five cases, in only one of which was the page correct, and in two of these wrong cases there were, so to say, two guesses.

Turning now to the *line* numbers, I find that in Sitting II. Mr. Davey had written passages from lines 1, 8, and 9, thereby increasing threefold his chance of getting one line right. In the remaining five cases, the line was apparently completely wrong in three cases (in one of which, moreover, there were two guesses, and in the other three guesses—apparently all wrong) and partially right in two cases. I say partially right because in Sitting VIII. the line 8 was chosen by the sitter,—and not only line 8 but several succeeding lines had also been written by Mr. Davey, — while for Sitting XVI. he had written words from line 1 as well as from line 5.² It must be remembered, further, that the numbers selected by Mr. Davey were not chosen strictly at random, and therefore that the question of number-habit cannot be excluded from the calculation. Further still, there may have been other lines quoted on the slate unknown to the sitter, just as there were in Sitting II. Taking, however, even the most favourable view possible of all these groups of cases thus regarded as experiments in Thought-transference, the reader may well be surprised that it "seems clear" to Mr. Wallace that

¹ The title of the poem on page 3 of the book chosen (*A Selection from the Poetry of E. B. Browning. Second Series.*) is repeated as a headline on pp. 4-7. The title of the poem on p. 8 is repeated as a headline on p. 9.

² In this case, Mr. Davey had been informed by the sitter what page and line she had chosen and in three other cases he had arranged with the sitters that they should choose numbers under ten.

Mr. Davey "possessed the faculty of thought-reading and thought-impressing *in a high degree.*" We shall rather be content at the most with Mr. Davey's more sober judgment expressed in connection with the "98" incident (Part XI., p. 413, footnote). "This may, of course, have been merely an odd coincidence, but the fact that I have had several somewhat similar experiences with other investigators led me to think that there might be something of the nature of thought-reading in it."

In connection with this I should quote another statement made by Mr. Davey (Part XI., p. 486):—

"In some of my earlier experiments I believed that there were indications of thought-transference between myself and my sitters. My later sittings have offered no support to this view, but, owing partly to my inexperience, I laboured sometimes under considerable nervous excitement in my earlier sittings, and I have not felt this latterly. This may have conduced to what occasionally seemed to me to be a certain amount of community of thought between my sitters and myself, and I hope at some time to make a special series of experiments for the purpose of ascertaining whether my conjecture is well-founded or not."

To return to the incident in Sitting VII., which Mr. Wallace specially instances, I give my not very clear remembrance of the case for what it is worth. It is at any rate one of the explanations obvious to any person at all familiar with "forcing" tricks. Page 12 and line 8 were chosen—by the sitters? No;—by Mr. Davey. First look at the two accounts:—

Mr. Manville writes (p. 456):—

"I took a pinch of crayons from a box, Mr. Pinnock doing the same. On counting, mine came to 6, Mr. Pinnock's came to 11, Mr. Venner's came to 3. Mr. P. and I divided Mr. V.'s, making mine 8 and Mr. P.'s 12, so we decided that it should be p. 12, line 8."

Mr. Venner writes (p. 452):—

"*The medium* requested each of us to take a small handful of chalks out of the box on the table. Mr. P. took 11, Mr. M. six, and I three. *The medium* divided the three chalks I had selected between the other two. We had previously agreed that Mr. P.'s number should represent a page, and Mr. M.'s number a line."

Now Mr. Davey had taken care that the box should contain just 20 (12 + 8) fragments of chalk. He then, let us suppose, begins by remarking that in choosing numbers for page and line it is well to avoid any possibility of thought-transference. The numbers should be taken entirely at random. "Now Mr. P., suppose you take a pinch of these crayons, the number to represent the page; take a good pinch, not too many, of course,—leave some for the line; now Mr. M.;—now Mr. V., suppose you take the rest. . . . 11, 6, and 3. Well, as Mr. V. knows me, Mr. M. had better choose the line and we'll divide Mr. V.'s chalks, 2 to Mr. M. because he has

the smaller number, and 1 to Mr. P. So we get—how many? 12 for the page and 8 for the line,—chosen in a purely haphazard way.” In this connection I refer the reader to my discussion of the records of a sitting with Eglinton, printed in the *Journal* for October, 1886, pp. 418-421, and to the remarks by Mr. Lewis (“Professor Hoffmann”) in the *Journal* for August, 1886, p. 370 : “The expedient of taking a number of bits of pencil, wax lights, or the like, though apparently excluding the possibility of prearrangement, is capable of a good deal of ‘management’ in skilful hands.”

B. Another point in Mr. Wallace’s letter that calls for some comment is the statement referring to the “involuntary movements” by which Mr. Davey found himself affected during his first experiments in the investigation of Spiritualism. Mr. Wallace really almost seems to be arguing that because certain mediumistic phenomena are attended with “involuntary movements,” therefore “involuntary movements”, are apro of of mediumship. Mr. Davey says, concerning these “involuntary movements” that he afterwards had “little doubt they were caused simply by nervous excitement.” He tells us more than this, in a passage which seems to have escaped the notice of Mr. Wallace. He says (Part XI., p. 407, the next page to that from which Mr. Wallace quotes):—

“During séances held privately, I continued to be frequently seized by spasmodic movements when I believed ‘uncanny’ manifestations were about to take place. As a conjurer, I have been since amused sometimes at similar convulsions in others during my conjuring performances, when the sitters have supposed that the writing was being produced by supernatural means; *my own shudderings during these performances being, of course, part of the trick.*”

I have now dealt with all the cases to which Mr. Wallace has made any specific reference in the preceding letter. In my article in *Proceedings*, Part XXII., I had already explained in detail all the cases which Mr. Wallace mentioned specifically in his letter printed in the *Journal* for March, 1891, as being presumably the most difficult of explanation. I am not aware of any other experiments recorded in the detailed reports, which are not so similar to those already explained that any intelligent reader can easily see for himself how they were performed. Whatever difficulty Mr. Wallace finds in understanding Mr. Davey’s performances doubtless arises from the strange inability which he has shown to appreciate the main object of our investigations with Mr. Davey. He still apparently assumes that the statements of the witnesses are reliable instead of allowing for misdescriptions like those which I have so frequently and so variously pointed out. He goes on further to make, about his own experiences, certain statements which the investigations with Mr. Davey prove to be unreliable. Mr. Wallace says,—I repeat the quotation :—“The important question is, whether the methods which Mr. Davey used in his trick-performances are such as will serve to explain most, or all, of the slate-writing of professional mediums.” On the contrary, I say again, this is *not* the important question.

As I have said in Part XXII. (p. 279):—"The question of primary importance concerns the value of human testimony under the circumstances involved. Why do we not accept such testimony? Because it is demonstrably fallible in precisely those particular points where it must be shown infallible before the phenomena can be accepted as supernormal." It has been shown conclusively, for example, that—under the circumstances involved,—intelligent and *bonâ fide* witnesses may affirm positively that a particular slate never left their sight, whereas in truth it did leave their sight, and ample opportunity was given for the conjurer to write upon it by ordinary means. Hence when Mr. Wallace states that in one of his experiences writing was obtained upon a slate of his own "without its leaving my sight or that of my brother," the statement has very little evidential value.

Similarly, there is little evidential value in his statement: "I examined two slates, tied them together, placed my hand upon them on the table, the medium placing his hand on mine, and in a minute or two I opened the slates and found several lines of writing inside. Nothing else whatever happened, and any substitution was simply impossible." Various instances of just this type of statement occur in the reports of Mr. Davey's sittings, and I have discussed several of them in Part XXII. (See pp. 261, 271, 281.)

We now know that under the circumstances involved, human testimony is so fallible as to be untrustworthy for the demonstration required, and that such statements as that of Mr. Wallace just quoted must be regarded as probably misdescriptions, and as practically worthless for proving any supernormal phenomena.

Once more and finally, the important question is not one of how particular tricks are done—or whether Mr. Davey's tricks in whole or in part are the same as those of alleged mediums,—the important question concerns the value of testimony where, in addition to the ordinary sources of error, "the possibility of an exceptionally disturbing influence has to be allowed for—to wit, the influence of a person skilled in particular forms of deception, whose chief object is to prevent the witnesses from perceiving many of the actual occurrences, and to persuade them, by ingenious illusions, to an erroneous belief concerning others." (*Journal* for Jan., 1887, p. 5.) The object of the investigation with Mr. Davey, as explicitly and repeatedly pointed out in our *Journal* and our *Proceedings*, was to obtain some criterion as to the value of testimony under such circumstances. The result of the investigation shows that the sort of testimony hitherto offered in favour of the genuineness of so-called "psychography" is worthless. The testimony is vitiated by the non-exclusion of possibilities of mal-observation and lapse of memory. And no testimony can be regarded as having any claim to serious consideration until such possibilities are excluded.

January 24th, 1893.

RICHARD HODGSON.