

‘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 do 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 justification. 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 knowledge 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 ascending 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 proportion to their progress. The spirit survives as an ethereal 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 ethereal, 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*.
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