

Light:

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"LIGHT! MORE LIGHT!"—Goethe.

"WHATEVER LOTH MAKE MANIFEST IS LIGHT.—Paul.

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THE HARMONY OF SPIRITUALISM AND SCIENCE.

A REJOINDER TO MR. ALFRED RUSSEL
WALLACE, LL.D.

BY FREDK. F. COOK.

Speaking after the manner of the world, I recognise in Spiritualism no voice equally authoritative with that of Alfred Russel Wallace. None, in my opinion, has brought to the investigation of Spiritualistic phenomena better disciplined faculties, a freer or less prejudiced spirit of inquiry, and, above all else, none has been truer to his lights. Behind the great scientist has always been clearly discernible the greater man—the lover of justice. Feeling thus, it is with considerable reluctance that I constrain myself to withhold unqualified approval from any public utterance or statement of his. While I may differ from him somewhat as to the relation subsisting between Spiritualism and science, no difference of opinion in that regard could induce me to utter a word of dissent, were it for no other reason than that it would not be becoming in one who is not a scientist, in the legitimate sense of that term, to enter the lists against so distinguished an authority in science. And even along lines of deduction and speculation (where the terms on which we might meet would be much nearer equal), I should still hesitate to take issue with him, were it not for what I trust is a pardonable concern, that Spiritualism and all that flows from it shall not be judged at less than its best, its profoundest revelations, its deepest and completest explanation of the mystery of being.

Spiritualism was never so live a subject in this country as at the present time, and, consequently, the article from the pen of Mr. Wallace, published in the *Boston Herald* some time ago, is attracting an unusual amount of public attention. The whole tone of the statement is admirable, the scientific presentation of the case is remarkably conservative in comparison with the "claims" usually put forward in behalf of Spiritualism by pseudo-scientific believers, and it is only when Mr. Wallace enters upon the deductive or purely philosophical aspects of his subject that he fails to be at his best. Nothing, for example, could be finer than this:—

"Modern science utterly fails to realise the nature of mind, or to account for its presence in the universe, except by the mere verbal and unthinkable dogma that it is 'the product of organisation.' Spiritualism, on the other hand, recognises in mind the cause of organisation and, perhaps,

even of matter itself, and it has added greatly to our knowledge of man's nature by demonstrating the existence of individual minds indistinguishable from those of human beings, yet separate from any human body."

This is the true Spiritualistic position, and the line that demarcates it from the ordinary scientific point of view could hardly be more clearly drawn. If this statement of Mr. Wallace means anything, it must mean that spirit is superior to matter, was therefore before matter, and perforce possessed all that matter does not possess—the essentials of being. Yet, on reading further, I find that this is not at all what Mr. Wallace means, for he has this to say:—

"On the spiritual theory man consists essentially of a spiritual nature and mind intimately associated with a spiritual body or soul, both of which are developed in, and by means of, a material organism.

To my mind this is a plain case of spiritual suicide. And when he regards the idea apart from the particular application of it, Mr. Wallace thinks so too; for have I not already quoted him as saying "Modern science utterly fails to realise the nature of mind, or to account for its presence in the universe, except by the mere verbal and unmistakable dogma that it is the product of organisation"? Let us bear in mind that we are not now dealing with phenomena, but with an everlasting and eternal verity—with the essence of being. Has matter this essence? Obviously no. Is it then permissible for us to assume that it is the one thing in the universe that is able to go outside of its own nature, and impart what it has not itself, i.e., the essence of being, consciousness? Phenomena modify phenomena, but do they also modify essences? When we speak in terms of evolution of things-in-themselves, are we not bound to presuppose a process of involution freighted with all that evolution under the most favourable conditions is able to express? The case is plainly this: Either matter does it all, or matter does essentially nothing but call out what is already in. Now, what is it that rests at the basis of being? Obviously it is consciousness. Therefore, if spirit is the essence of being, it must be in and of itself conscious. When we say "man is a spirit," what do we mean? Does mortality give consciousness to spirit, or does spirit give consciousness for a limited period to mortality? Here we have plainly the whole distinction between Materialism and Spiritualism in a nutshell, and the day is not far distant when the terms in which the distinction is expressed cannot be juggled with. This new wine is not for old bottles. Immortal things are eternal things, eternal things are unchangeable things; what is called out of being into phenomena must not by any confusion either of terms or of ideas be put into being. From being nothing can be wrested—to being nothing can be added. However being may exhibit itself phenomenally, essentially it must ever remain unchanged. Potential energy in essence has nothing added to it through any phenomenal exhibit such as we have in active energy. And what is not potential can never become active—and, by a parity of reasoning, what is not in the spirit consciously can never be put into it by any process that is admittedly unconscious. Plainly, then, consciousness must be for us a yield of the spirit and not of matter. Man is neither more nor less than the momentary battle-ground between the two. Spirit informs matter for

the purpose of overcoming it. Matter resists. This conflict, realising itself in consciousness of spirit, gives us the phenomena called Man, and when the conflict is over there is an end of man—thereafter you realise yourself as spirit only, and what gives you the larger stature is that as spirit you realise yourself in your entirety—as a *complete consciousness*, instead of as a succession of states of consciousness. To express spirit in terms other than consciousness is to express it in terms of matter or in terms of nothing—the Unknowable of Unknowables.

Far be it from me to dogmatise about what is possible and what is not possible in the universe. Yet among thinking men, among men thoroughly grounded in the fundamental conceptions of science and philosophy, a few things are posited as fixed starting points, and one of these determinations is that time and eternity are not interchangeable terms, and that a time product can in no wise be translated, or transmuted, or transubstantiated into an eternal verity. Yet we have this passage from Mr. Wallace :—

“This world-life not only lends itself to the production, by gradual evolution, of the physical body *needed for the growth and nourishment of the human soul*, but by its very imperfections tends to the continuous development of the higher spiritual nature of man. In a perfect and harmonious world perfect beings might possibly have been created, but could hardly have been evolved, and it may well be that *evolution is the great fundamental law of the universe of mind as well as of matter.*”

I believe I am not in error when I assume as a fundamental position of science this: that nothing essential or indestructible can ever be added to or taken from the universe. Now we all agree that through the processes of evolution something is added to the phenomenal universe, and we account for it by assuming that the type or idea as an eternal principle exists in essence, and all that evolution means is that the principle is clothed with materiality or otherwise brought to outward cognition. The strength of the evolutionary idea rests in this, that it admits of an illimitable background of real and eternal verities, and hence is the widest possible gateway through which to make excursions into a world of ideas. But this vantage ground, this highway to spiritual realities, Mr. Wallace not only ignores, but in effect cuts away, when he gives utterance to the purely materialistic thought that “it may well be that evolution is the great fundamental law of the universe of *mind as well as of matter.*” So long as mind is conceived as merely a congeries of sensations, and the product of mind is assumed to be the ephemeral apprehension of external facts which we comprehend under the term knowledge, the evolution of mind is not only possible but an absolute necessity to thought. But when mind is conceived as an eternal principle (and nothing less than this can be predicated of it, if it be endowed with immortality) there can clearly be no talk of evolution. Even in this material world there can be no satisfactory, no complete understanding of evolution, except as it is conceived as working towards a definite reality—otherwise it is clearly a miracle. In some manner all forms must be eternal existences. Now mind is one of these eternal forms; and what distinguishes its form is *consciousness*; and it is nothing less than a materialistic vagary to hold or declare that consciousness, the one thing that constitutes mind, can be added to or subtracted from. That of which we have at any time been conscious, though outwardly forgotten, must for ever remain in consciousness, or it is eternally lost. Unless the soul is a conservator of consciousness by reason of its indestructibility, there can be no spiritual awakening in realms supernal. And consciousness in and of itself can be expressed only *in terms of consciousness*; whatever you may or may not be, the soul must ever know itself and all its belongings, and being immortal it can be conceived only as for ever in eternity. Mind may readily be conceived as the measure of the man, but to hold that the obverse of this proposition is also true, and

that man is the measure of his mind, or spirit, or soul, is to give the entire case to the Materialist. For the Spiritualist nothing remains, not an iota. That matter discretely being in time—*i.e.*, gives limitation to its consciousness—there is no denying; but to conceive that the outward product so established—a clear limitation, realising itself only under time and space conditions—shall be its form eternally, is an ontological conception so primitive that one may well ask in alarm if it is to this that Spiritualism is bringing us. Happily, the answer is far otherwise, and “the continued actual reception of teachings from it” (*i.e.*, the world of souls), to which Mr. Wallace so confidently refers as destined to work mighty changes in the world, is gradually but surely, pushing forward into harmony with the thought that life is not an accident but an eternal verity, and that man is but a temporary expression of that which in its fullness is an eternal background. The soul does not exist for man's satisfaction, but man exists for the soul's satisfaction. This is the order of involution in contradistinction to the order of evolution, and when they are set over against each other as complementary processes, then not only have we a perfect whole, but a philosophy of eternity that brings the idea within human comprehension.

So much for the metaphysical aspect of the contention. Now a word or two bearing on its moral relation. Mr. Wallace writes :—

“Finally, these teachings of Modern Spiritualism furnish us with the much needed basis of a true ethical system. We learn by it that our earth-life is not only a preparation for a higher state of progressive spiritual existence, but that what we have usually considered as its very worst features, its all-pervading din and suffering, are in all probability the only means of developing in us those highest moral qualities summarised as ‘love’ by St. Paul, and ‘altruism’ by our modern teachers, which all admit must be cultivated to the utmost if we are really to make progress toward a higher social state. [Then follows an admirable dissertation on the utter inadequacy of modern philosophy as an incentive to duty, after which Mr. Wallace continues,] But when men are taught from childhood that the whole material universe exists for the very purpose of developing beings possessing these attributes, [demanded by altruism] that evil and pain, sin and suffering, all tend to the same end, and that the characters developed here will make further progress towards a nobler and happier existence in the spiritual world, *just in proportion as our higher moral feelings are cultivated here*, and when all this can be taught, not as a set of dogmas to be blindly accepted on the authority of unknown ancient writers, but as being founded on *direct knowledge of the spirit world*, and the continued *actual reception of teachings from it*, then, indeed, we shall have in our midst ‘a power that makes for righteousness.’”

Mr. Wallace here starts out with an admirable premise, that this earth-life is a school of preparation for higher out-workings, that suffering and sin are the real things that make for progress, and that the characters developed here will make further progress towards a nobler and happier existence in the spiritual world; but when he adds a necessary corollary that this progress towards a nobler and happier existence in the spiritual world is in “proportion as our higher moral feelings are cultivated here,” he not only slaps his premise (as to the office of sin and suffering) equally in the face, but destroys the entire ethical basis which he seeks to establish. From Mr. Wallace's position an ethical out-working is an utter impossibility. The ethical structure of Christianity is falling to pieces because it is not builded on the eternal principle of justice and equality, and Mr. Wallace's scheme labours under the same defect. If in consciousness of soul I choose a certain human expression, then the responsibility for existence rests with myself, and the principle of justice and equality are in

volved in the very idea of being. But if my existence is due to purely accidental conditions in matter, there is, to begin with, no element of responsibility involved in any existence that goes to myself; all responsibilities are thus either imposed upon me, or voluntarily assumed by me, as may happen; and there is, furthermore, an utter denial of the element of justice or equality. The Christian scheme, while it fails to throw any moral light on the inequalities visible here, at any rate throws open the door to perfect equality in Heaven, if you are inclined to accept the terms on which it is granted; but the Spiritualism of Mr. Wallace cuts away justice and equality to the very root. What we are, in so far as we are known to ourselves through present consciousness, is the product of forces over which we have little or no control. If my parents are wicked and dissolute there is small hope for my being anything else—and however much this oppressive order of nature may be necessary to the up-building of the race, it cannot be applied to the individual, unless it applies equally to all individuals. But we know it does not so apply—we know that the difference in natural endowments is enormous, and if it be true, as Mr. Wallace affirms, that our “progress toward a nobler and happier existence in the spiritual world [is] just in proportion as our higher moral feelings are cultivated here,” then the injustice, the cruelty, the discrimination, is doubly refined, and the order of the universe a hideous mockery of any conceivable Divine economy. Obviously then, we must look deeper than that which we know as discretized existence for the harmony of the differences which we observe all about us. If you answer that all will be equalised in the end, I have a right to ask for an explanation of the difference in the beginning. I am not now discussing physical existence, but moral existence—and yet between the two there must be an exact correspondence. Whatever I suffer must be a necessity to my being, and, inevitably, to avoid invidious distinctions, it must be in one form or another, necessary to all beings. Yet the infant dies without any experience whatsoever. And the good man dies without any of those experiences that come to the bad man, and, broadly speaking, the good man is good because he cannot help it, and with the bad man it is much the same as to badness. Obviously the inequalities we here observe must have their moral as well as their physical meaning, and whatever happens to any one must be a necessity to him in his divine nature. If, however, our beginnings are here, if spirit is evolved into discrete existence through matter, then obviously no moral necessity can by any possibility be predicated of the human differences that we know. Eternal life will not permit itself to be conceived under the form of chance, yet chance it is, if evolution be not complemented by involution, if whatever goes to human experience is not the inworking of the sovereign soul for its own satisfaction, and if a moral necessity does not inform and impel each act toward the goal of transfiguration.

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