

NELLIE MORRIS.

[The following correspondence has been placed in my hands by Mr. Vaughan Jenkins (Associate of the S.P.R.), with a view to its being printed here. It relates to the case of Nellie Morris, communicated to the June number of this *Journal* by Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace. I am unable to find room for the whole correspondence, but I have thought it best to print Mr. Wallace's letters in full,—partly on account of his scientific eminence, partly because I disagree with his arguments and conclusions, and should therefore be afraid of not doing justice to the former, if I attempted to abridge them. Of the other letters only portions are printed.—ED.]

The correspondence begins with a letter addressed by Mr. Vaughan Jenkins to Mr. Wallace.

Englynn, St. Margaret's-road, Oxford.

June 21st, 1888.

DEAR SIR,—

* * * * *

Until I read General Lippitt's statements my conception of the Spiritualistic theory of materialisation was—that taking it for granted that we shall live after death, in a spiritual body . . . why cannot these spirits in the form of *apparitions* or spectres return as they are alleged so to have done by many—to visit their friends whom they have left behind them? Such appearances, subject to the premise, would be conceivably possible, and the objection to the physical obstruction of stone walls, &c., would not arise. But the young ladies who “came” to the General came in their own prior natural bodies fully *organised*, and in violation of all known cosmic laws and conditions. . . . There is nothing in their actions or conduct that differs from any ordinary human beings, they conversed freely on all mundane subjects, they answered all ordinary questions, they sang when requested, and Nellie even stood to compare measurements. She conversed for a long time, two or three members of the circle taking part therein. She actually shivered at the recollection of her having died on a cold day “in January.” She was sensitive to flattery. She modestly shook hands, and to crown all—to prove her identity and her identification with her own former earthly self . . . Nellie, with her own “hand, before retiring,” (?) “cut off for me a lock of her hair, which I have carefully preserved.” . . . Materialised Nellie does not altogether vanish, or retire! She leaves a permanent sample portion of her corporeal entity behind her. . . . Still the anomalous fact remains that Nelly's mortal body, her hair included, was at the time of her alleged materialisation, and for four years previously, slowly being resolved into its original elements to unite with and form new physical combinations.

* * * * *

I know and feel that I ought to obey the law of evidence, and to accept the General's confirmed unimpeachable testimony, but my inability to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable is my present stumbling-block. . . . Personally, I dismiss from my mind any idea of personation, psychic illusion, or hallucination, or collusion of any kind whatever in connection with General Lippitt's manifestations—hence my greater difficulty. If, therefore, at any time that may be convenient to you, you would kindly favour me with any helpful information in my struggle for a belief, I shall be very grateful to you.

E. VAUGHAN JENKINS.

MR. A. R. WALLACE'S REPLY.

Firth Hill, Godalming.

June 26th, 1888.

E. VAUGHAN JENKINS, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—You have evidently formed erroneous ideas of what “materialisation” is. No Spiritualist believes it to be “the real body” of

the individual, or even "a real body" in one sense of the term. It is *something* temporarily material for purposes of identification; but what exactly no one can tell. All the information we can get shows that it is formed partly (often chiefly) from the body of the medium, partly from the bodies of the persons present, or from their "atmosphere" or emanations and that the likeness to any individual is produced by an *effort* which is not always successful, since, during the same evening, the same spirit-form sometimes appears in very different degrees of likeness to his mortal body; sometimes more like the medium, hence many of the accusations of imposture. A little book called *Materialised Apparitions*, by Mr. E. Brackett, published at Boston, and which you can probably get from Burns, Southampton-row, will give you much information on the nature and peculiarities of these forms and the conditions under which they appear. I met Mr. Brackett in Boston, and can testify to the honesty, ability, and earnestness of the man and of his book. The *permanent materialisation* of hair and portions of garment is very extraordinary. Sometimes such things *do* vanish away, either rapidly or gradually, but in other cases both remain. The *hair* I had here, but have now returned it to General Lippitt. All we can at present do is to make sure of *the facts*. The laws of the phenomena we may never know till we are spirits ourselves, and not, perhaps, even then. Can we tell, *really*, how we move our hands and fingers to write and express our thoughts? Spirits do not appear to be able to tell us *how* they materialise. It is a faculty exercised by the will-power of *some* spirits, and is probably quite as rare and remarkable and inexplicable among them as physical mediumship is among us.—Believe me, yours faithfully,

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

P.S.—The appearance of the double of any living person, sometimes to two or more witnesses, seems analogous to materialisation, and the person whose double appears has no conception *how it is done*. Neither have the spirits who materialise, except that it seems to be more directly a matter of *will* with them. See *Phantasms of the Living*.—A. R. W.

Copies of these letters having been forwarded to Mrs. Sidgwick, she replied to Mr. Vaughan Jenkins.

* * * * *

I quite agree with you as to the great difficulty of fitting in a belief in materialisations with our knowledge either of matter or of spirit. If materialisations be proved, we must accept them and arrange our theory of the universe to suit them. But it does not appear to me that at present they have been proved . . . that is, it does not appear to me that in the evidence hitherto presented there is sufficient proof that the supposed materialisation is neither the medium nor an accomplice, and that no trick is being played upon us. I am impressed with the fact that such men as Mr. Wallace and General Lippitt should be convinced, but I cannot perceive that the evidence brought forward by them is any exception to this general rule, as I have tried to explain in the July number of the *Journal*.

ELEANOR M. SIDGWICK.

* * * * *

Firth Hill, Godalming.

July 15th, 1888.

E. VAUGHAN JENKINS, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—Mrs. Sidgwick is right from *her* point of view—that nothing is to be accepted that can possibly be explained away by imposture, however complicated and difficult. But she is not fair in passing over the evidence of facts, and especially the evidence of the genuineness of the mediums as opposed to the mere accusations and assertions against them. The best thing to be done is to adduce more *facts* proving the reality of the phenomena, and I have fortunately just received from General Lippitt copies of a pamphlet by him which does this admirably for one of the mediums concerned. As I feel sure it will interest you, I send it you by post, and you can return it to me at your leisure. A copy of the pamphlet was sent to Mr. Gurney, so most likely Mr. Myers and Mrs. Sidgwick will be able to see it. I am, however, doubtful whether they will admit either article. What they ought to do, if they want to put the evidence fairly before the members of the Society, would be to reprint the General's pamphlet entire, *as it contains a mass of valuable facts*, and shows besides how *utterly untrustworthy* are the reports of the Seybert Commission, which, in the last part of the *Proceedings*, Mr. Myers commends as valuable and conclusive.—Believe me, yours faithfully,

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

Hill Side, Chesterton-road, Cambridge.

July 18th, 1888.

E. VAUGHAN JENKINS, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—I am much obliged to you for letting me see Mr. Wallace's letter, which I return. I do not feel that I quite understand his statement that I "pass over the evidence for facts, and especially the evidence of the genuineness of the mediums as opposed to the mere accusations and assertions against them." It was, I thought, the evidence for facts that I examined in my letter to the *July Journal*. And the second part of the sentence I have quoted seems to me to involve a certain confusion. I will try to explain what I mean. All mankind is for each of us divided into three classes. There is a small class, differing for each of us, about whom we feel that the hypothesis of conscious fraud is absurd. There is another small class about whom we feel sure that they have been guilty of, or might be guilty of, deliberate fraud. There is a third and much larger class, about whom we cannot tell whether if temptation came in their way they would cheat or not. Now, some people think that they have positive evidence placing Mrs. Beste and others of the mediums employed by General Lippitt in the second—or known-to-be-fraudulent class. Mr. Wallace distrusts the facts and assertions brought forward by these witnesses, and does not think the fraud proved. But, supposing his distrust were well-founded, that would not place the mediums in the class above suspicion, as Mr. Wallace, in the sentence I have quoted, seems to imply. It would only place them in the large class about whom we cannot tell whether they would cheat or not, while it is known that they have strong pecuniary inducements to cheat.

In my letter I was careful to base no argument on the assumption that fraud had been proved against the mediums in question, only on the assumption that they are not above suspicion.

* * * * *

I think that Mr. Wallace and General Lippitt do not allow enough for the ease with which one's senses may be deceived, and that, in consequence, they would probably have been equally convinced by the séance for materialisation described in our *Proceedings*, Part IV., pp. 482-485, if they believed Mr. Davey to be a medium: and indeed you may remember that Mr. Wallace was convinced that certain performances, under the auspices of Dr. Lynn (at the Westminster Aquarium, I think), were Spiritualistic.

ELEANOR MILDRED SIDGWICK.

E. VAUGHAN JENKINS, Esq.

July 31st, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Mrs. Sidgwick's exposition of her point of view is very interesting, but there seems to me a weakness of fallacy in it as she applies it. If we assume, to begin with, that mediums are *all* imposters, and that no fact in Spiritualism has been proved, I admit that Mrs. Sidgwick is right. But she puts forth this argument *while ignoring* the *direct evidence* for the facts, and it is of this that I complain. While urging the possibility of imposture in General Lippitt's case she ignored Mr. Lyman's direct evidence of phenomena with one of the mediums concerned (Mrs. Beste), which cannot be explained by imposture, and she ignores the whole mass of test evidence in private houses, where confederates and machinery are excluded, and yet where things occur which only confederates or machinery could produce if there is no reality in the phenomena. Now, we have other evidence in General Lippitt's pamphlet of the genuineness of another medium (Keeler). Yet we are asked to believe that these mediums, who are proved to have *power* to produce genuine phenomena, yet systematically conspire with imposters to produce sham phenomena. This, I urge, is contrary to human nature. The person who possesses exceptional powers of any kind does not enter into elaborate collusion for fraudulent purposes with others who only pretend to have these powers. Their interests are all against it. Why should they risk their reputation, on which their living depends, by entering into elaborate conspiracy with many other mediums, involving constant correspondence and systematic records, on the *chance* of being able to deceive certain persons? And the chance is very slender, for how could any of these seven mediums (except, perhaps, one or two) tell that General Lippitt would ever visit them, or how could they have the necessary preparations made against his chance visit—the presence, for example, of the two girls who are supposed to have represented his daughter and Nellie Morris? And all this to produce by fraud that which they have power to produce by genuine means! Once demonstrate that genuine mediumship exists in any case, and the whole argument of assuming imposture in every case falls to the ground. Again, skilful imposture carried on for years requires faculties of an exceptional kind and long practice. But, almost without exception, mediums begin as *children* or young persons; their powers are at a maximum in *youth*, and usually diminish with mature years. This is directly opposed to the fact as to skill in jugglery—which is a rather rare

faculty, never seen in perfection in youth. Mediums, on the other hand, are often very ignorant, commonplace and clumsy persons. Their whole lives are often known. They usually begin by exhibiting their powers in other people's houses, where imposture and confederacy would be most difficult, and only when they have thus obtained a reputation find it more profitable to give séances chiefly in their own houses. All these, and many other facts, Mrs. Sidgwick ignores in order to uphold her assumption of the absence of evidence and the extreme probability of imposture. I maintain that the existence of the *power of mediumship* being proved, there is no more special presumption of imposture here than in regard to other faculties. As I said in my preliminary note, the evidence in the case of "Nellie Morris" will have no weight with those who deny that any mediumship *exists* or is *possible*; but if the *fact* of mediumship is held to be proved in any cases, then the evidence in this case becomes very strong if not conclusive.

I do not think I ever said I was *convinced* that some of Dr. Lynn's exhibitions (through another performer) were Spiritualistic, but it seemed to myself and others probable that he had engaged the services of a remarkable physical medium. I know a young man who combines thought-reading and conjuring very skilfully.—Yours very truly,

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

E. VAUGHAN JENKINS, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—Mr. Wallace's letter makes me think that I have somewhat misunderstood his position. I had thought that he brought forward the Nellie Morris case as evidence of the genuineness of materialisations and of spirit communications, adapted to convince persons whose judgment on the general question was still in suspense, and it was from this point of view that I criticised it. This case, so regarded, still appears to me evidentially valueless, because the possibility of trickery was not adequately excluded. But if Mr. Wallace brought forward the case as an interesting one to those who feel able to start with the assumption that the mediums concerned are genuine, I am ready to admit that it does not in itself contain positive proof of imposture, any more than it contains proof of the absence of it.

I do not, however, think that the hypothesis of trickery requires so elaborate a conspiracy with correspondence, &c., as Mr. Wallace suggests. The mediums in question seem to go about a good deal and may not improbably have met and imparted the required information in casual conversation.

ELEANOR MILDRED SIDGWICK.

P.S.—With regard to the conjuring performance at the Westminster Aquarium, Mr. Wallace, I think, will find that his exact words were, "I must say I believe" the performer to be a real medium.—See *Spiritualist*, August 17th, 1877.

The following letter relates to the same subject.

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

SIR,—I think the members and associates of the Society for Psychical Research have great reason to be grateful for the publication of Mr. Wallace's communication.

Nothing could bring out more clearly, on the one hand, the willingness of the Society to listen to any evidence that may be offered, and, on the other hand, the total contrast that there is between those phenomena which form the ordinary staple of the journals ; those phenomena, that is to say, which are the subject of the researches prosecuted by the Society, and such occurrences as those which are detailed by General Lippitt.

It appears very odd that it should not have struck General Lippitt that whereas it was very possible for any medium to ascertain his first wife's birthday, it was not possible for his departed daughter to have a recollection of the way in which he and she used to keep her mother's birthday, because (as he informs us) they had not ever kept it in any way whatever since the child had been two years old, and that this made it very curious indeed that the first thing his daughter's spirit wanted to say to him was that they *went on doing* in the other world what they had *not done* in this. (See pp. 285, 287.)—I am, sir, yours truly,

E. B. BIRKS.

Trinity College, Cambridge, *July 13th*, 1888.
