

REVIEWS.

SPIRITUALISM AND SCIENCE.*

WHEN two men of a certain degree of scientific eminence, like Messrs. Crookes and Wallace, come forward in defence of so bizarre a doctrine as that of Spiritualism, every one must recognise the necessity of according them a fair and impartial hearing: and it is a feeling of this necessity which has prompted us painfully and conscientiously, and with much weariness of the flesh, to wade through a couple of the most amazing books that it has ever been our misfortune to be compelled to peruse. Closing the second of them, we are half tempted to speculate whether, by some miracle a shade less than the majority of those which crowd their pages, we have not been spirited back some five hundred years, and are not now living in some way incomprehensible to us, in the latter part of the fourteenth century, instead of in this Year of Grace 1875. Verily, if the schoolmaster be abroad, these books suggest that he might just as well, if not better, have stayed at home!

We are puzzled with which of them to begin, so thoroughly are they on a par as specimens of the blindest and most fanatical credulity; and so utterly do they outrage common-sense. Inasmuch, however, as Mr. Wallace's is the larger and more pretentious of the two, we may as well commence with that. In its introductory chapter, the author addresses himself to the task of proving the antecedent credibility of miraculous phenomena, and he does this by the simple (if to logicians, slightly insufficient) method of the *petitio principii*; assuming, as for example (p. 7), that the childish legends of the "levitation" of S. Francis d'Assisi, S. Theresa, &c., are indisputable historical facts. And this brings us to the remarkable obtuseness of Mr. Wallace with reference to what really constitutes evidence. There is a canon which would be accepted as valid by every judge now on the Bench, and which our author puts in this form: "there are certain things so absurd and so incredible, that no amount of testimony could possibly make a sane man believe them." Surely this is so, but, as it stands, it places almost an insuperable barrier in the way of the reception of so-called "spiritual" evidence; so, of course, it must be either evaded or answered. Mr. Wallace's reply (p. 14) is this—that "it never has been proved, and never can be proved. . . . that a large number of independent, honest, sane, and sensible witnesses, can separately and repeatedly testify to a plain matter of fact which never existed at all"! This, we confess, staggers us. Why, some hundreds of people see, twice every day, at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, Dr. Lynn twist off the head of a live pigeon, which forthwith reappears from a glass bottle, out of which he has but a single moment previously, poured a glass of sherry! They see this (*or believe they see it*) as distinctly as they see their own hands, or the lights in the chandeliers over their heads; and, but for the fact that they have paid to see a conjuring entertainment, and are told in the outset that they are to be deceived, would, doubtless—that is, a very considerable proportion of them would—unhesitatingly state on oath what they imagined they had witnessed. Mr. Wallace goes throughout upon the monstrous assumption that honest evidence must of necessity be conclusive as to what actually did happen—and not, as is really all that can be claimed for it—as to what *seemed* to those giving it to have happened. Surely any one pretending to discuss a psychological question should familiarise himself with the extent to which inference enters into every observation we make. The mere bona fides of a witness by no means necessarily renders his testimony irrefragable.

Enough though of this; let us follow our author into his essay on "The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural," and here we have our first serious charge to bring against him. It is that of (what looks like) the deliberate *suppressio veri*. In the list of books he quotes as authorities, he begins with Reichenbach on the "Od force," but is absolutely silent as to the well-known fact that Mr. Braid and others have since shown how all Reichenbach's results can be produced by purely subjective means. (Braid on "Magic and Hyp-

notism," &c., pp. 82, et seq., ENGLISH MECHANIC, Vol. XX., p. 11, &c.) Again, he gives Professor Hare's work as another trustworthy one; carefully suppressing the circumstance that poor Mr. Hare was latterly a lunatic, and that the American Association for the Advancement of Science expressly refused to receive a paper from him on account of his insanity. While lastly, he mentions that scandalously impudent book, Home's "Incidents of my Life," as though it were an entirely reliable one! Of his list of public men who have "been convinced of the truth and reality of most of these phenomena," we shall have something to say presently.

We need linger on the rhapsodical chapter, "Miracles and Modern Science," no longer than is necessary to advert to a statement on p. 49, which, for downright coolness, is not surpassed by anything in the whole book. The sentence to which we refer is this: "Not one single individual has carefully investigated the subject without accepting the reality of the phenomena"! We are entirely prepared to give a flat and positive denial to so barefaced a statement as this, and to assert, as a matter within our own knowledge, that people, at the very least the intellectual equals of Messrs. Wallace and Crookes, have, after the most deliberate investigation, only gone away sadly wondering how Media can find people such hopeless simpletons as to believe in their super- or extra-natural powers: while as for Mr. Wallace's further assertion with reference to "Media," that "not one has ever exploded the imposture, if imposture it be," we need only refer to a statement made publicly in these columns by a gentleman whose veracity is absolutely above any suspicion, that Home did once explain to him, *viva voce*, how an opposition "Medium," Forster, did the "spirit-writing" trick (ENGLISH MECHANIC, Vol. XIX., p. 199) to show how utterly baseless such an assertion is.

The same one-sided treatment is apparent in the chapter on "Od-force, Animal Magnetism, and Clairvoyance," where a series of wild assertions are made without the faintest hint that any of the alleged marvels to which they relate have ever been explained or refuted. We are told how some clairvoyant of Dr. Gregory's read mottoes inclosed in nuts! but are *not* told how a fifty pound Bank of England note was securely sealed in an envelope and offered freely to any "Medium" or Clairvoyant who would read its number without breaking the seal—and that, of course, the challenge was never accepted. We read of blindfolded "Clairvoyants" reading through pasteboard, &c., but the author forgets to add—or possibly does not know—how Mr. Braid detected Mademoiselle Prudence Bernard's mode of deciphering writing, cards, &c., while her eyes were covered thickly with cotton wadding, and this further secured by a several times folded white handkerchief.

A word or two will suffice for the "Evidence of the Reality of Apparitions;" the evidence being generally Mr. Robert Dale Owen's second, third, fourth, and fifth-hand versions of a few ghost stories. Here, too, we have the old nonsense about haunted houses repeated by a writer who is apparently in sublime unconsciousness of the exposures which have continually taken place from the time of the Stockwell Ghost down to the present day. And the mention of the Stockwell Ghost, whose history may be read in "Hone's Everyday Book," Vol. I., p. 62, et seq., is really most pertinent to the whole matter; because here were the circumstances corroborated by a perfect crowd of independent and conscientious witnesses who actually *did* "separately and repeatedly testify to a plain matter of fact which never happened at all," as was afterwards proved by the confession of Mrs. Golding's servant, Ann Robinson, who detailed the mode in which she, single-handed, had performed the miracles at which scores of people had stood aghast!

Then we have the "Evidence of Men of Science." And who, does the reader conceive, are those selected as its representatives? Crochetty and (save in his own specialité of Mathematics) most unscientific Professor de Morgan, poor mad Professor Hare, and . . . Judge Edmonds! Anticipating, however, a little, in the next chapter we do find Professor Challis, of Cambridge, set down as a believer "in some of these phenomena;" which he had "no grounds from personal observation for giving credit to"! This, we venture to think, is the last straw which breaks the camel's back. Messrs. Trollope, S. C. Hall, fatuous Mr. Howitt, &c.,

are names familiar to all who have ever wasted any time over "Spiritual" literature; but we protest against the gross disingenuousness of classing the late Mr. Thackeray as a believer in this rubbish, on the strength of a second-hand alleged conversation (which appears on p. 96 of the book we are reviewing) in the teeth of the three articles by his own hand in the *Cornhill Magazine* for May, 1862, June, 1863, and October of the same year. It is, we may add, curious to notice the proportion of *dead* men who are quoted as converts to so silly a superstition. Certainly they tell no tales; and, as the sane part of mankind believe, are now past cross-examination.

It is not worth while to follow our author through his discussion of the hysterical ranting of Mrs. Emma Hardinge and other "trance mediums;" nor should we notice what he says concerning his personal experiences in phrenomesmerism were it not that he seems quietly to ignore that Flourens and other physiologists have shown how utterly baseless were the divisions of the brain mapped out by Gall and Spurzheim. They placed, to take a single example, the seat of amativeness in the cerebellum; which recent research has shown to have an absolutely different function.

We will pass on then to what he says about certain known "Media"; and, firstly, Mrs. Marshall, of whose integrity Mr. Wallace seems quite assured. What, however, says Dr. Edmunds, at least as skilled and competent a witness as Mr. Wallace himself? "I sat next to Mrs. Marshall, and felt her strike the foot of the table with her toe in the most business-like manner, so as to produce every rap that was made. Yet, while I deliberately watched this proceeding, I witnessed most intelligent friends at the other side of the table in a state of solemn perturbation, and in the full conviction that they were conversing with the spirits of departed relatives" (Report of the Dialectical Society on Spiritualism, pp. 69 and 70.) Is it not abundantly obvious that these "intelligent friends" would have been perfectly ready consentaneously to "testify to a plain matter of fact which never happened at all"? Then we have Mrs. Guppy, whom Dr. Edmunds detected in a pretty little attempt to obtain spirit drawings on a "blank" sheet of paper on which he discovered that an angel had previously been elaborately drawn in pencil! (Report of Dialectical Society on Spiritualism, p. 65), and who since has come to grief through the ingenuity of some Irish sceptics, who adopted the simple expedient of dropping a few crystals of potassium ferrocyanide into all the water to which the "medium" had access in the house, and, subsequently, discovered that salt in abundance is the "dew," upon the flowers which the "spirits" brought through her mediumship. (Vide ENGLISH MECHANIC, Vol. XX., p. 96.) How Mr. Spiller caught Mr. Home in the act of tilting his chair, when he was supposed to be rising, and pushing the table when the "spirits" were imagined to be moving it, has also been told before in these columns and elsewhere; while the case of Lyon v. Home in the Vice-Chancellor's Court will not have faded wholly from public recollection. Before quitting this division of our subject it may not be uninteresting to notice, apropos of Mr. Wallace's persistent reference to American wonders, that one of the most famous of the American media, and one in whose presence the most stupendous marvels occurred, was a certain "Mr. Stuart," in New York, who did all that the cleverest performers have ever effected, and then exposed the whole matter! He is now, or was a few days since, playing Lord Dundreary at the Haymarket Theatre.

A remarkable chapter is headed "Evidence of the Facts." In it we have the well-known Kate Fox and Livermore Story over again. In connection with it, by the bye, we are struck with the fact that when a portion of the dress of Mrs. L.'s ghost was cut off, it was found to be "at first of strong and apparently material gauzy texture, yet in a short time melted away and became invisible." "Nous avons changé tout cela;" for now pieces of a ghost's gown not only remain permanently, but are "found to be dressed with lime after the Manchester fashion!" We are told, too, how Sir David Brewster was *not* converted, of Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, of Serjeant Cox, and Mr. Crookes (of whom we shall have something to say further on), of "Judge Edmonds" (always Judge Edmonds), and of Dr. Sexton! If report speaks truly of this last-named gentleman, he would seem to have been converted from an extremity of scepticism to a condition of such child-like confidence as actually to believe in Dr. Kahn!

* Phenomena of Spiritualism. By Wm. CROOKES, F.R.S., (reprinted from the *Quarterly Journal of Science*). London: J. Burns, 1874.

Miracles and Modern Spiritualism. By ALFRED RUSSELL WALLACE. London: J. Burns, 1875.

"Spirit photographs" introduces us to a mass of wild nonsensical assertions as to circumstances in which trickery is pretty obviously latent in a great variety of ways, while the "Summary of Physical Phenomena" simply reiterates succinctly what the author imagines he has proved by merely asserting it. It is the old thing over and over again, and it could only be tedious to the reader to reproduce it. Moreover, our very rapidly failing space reminds us that we have yet to notice Mr. Crookes and his contributions to the question.

Mr. Crookes's work opens with an exordium, of which it is needless to say more than that the real views of its author are but thinly veiled indeed in it under an ostentatious affectation of impartiality; and that the second chapter will be found in its entirety, engravings and all, on pp. 403. et seq., of our own XIIIth Vol. and p. 85 of our XIVth; while on p. 432 of Volume XIII will be found letters reproduced on p. 17 of Mr. Crookes's book. Later on we get a modification of Home's very clever trick with the board and spring-balance (described and illustrated in p. 569 of Vol. XIII. of the ENGLISH MECHANIC). The "Spiritual" value of this, however, as a piece of evidence, has been most seriously diminished by an offer made in these columns by "Anti-Humbug" to repeat, for a wager of £50, Home's dexterous feat, with apparatus, and in a room provided by his opponent; a challenge from which that opponent shrunk most ignominiously (Vide Vol. XIX., pp. 248, 304, 331, &c.) These experiments with Home detailed, then does Mr. Crookes rise and read the *Quarterly Review*, and devotes a third of p. 58 and nearly all p. 59 to showing what an intellectual and scientific Goliath Mr. Crookes is. He avails himself of this opportunity too to abuse poor Mr. Spiller for, *inter alia*, not having at once put Home on his guard by objecting straightway when he detected him pushing the table. A great deal he would have found out had he done so!

Having thus, thoroughly to his own satisfaction, demolished Dr. Carpenter, extinguished Mr. Spiller, and shown indisputably his own ineffable pre-eminence over them both, Mr. Crookes treats us (under the title of "Notes of an Inquiry into the Phenomena called Spiritual, during the years 1870-73") to a series of "facts" cognate—and in some cases identical—with those spoken of by Mr. Wallace; and concludes his volume with a paper on "Miss Florence Cook's Mediumship." We will not weary and disgust our readers by reiterating all the dreary stuff about the appearance of "Katie King." "Katie" is now as much an item in the performances of "Media," as is the corded-box trick in the entertainments of those who more honestly call themselves by their right names. Let any one read the paper by Mr. Robert Dale Owen in the number of the *Atlantic Monthly* for January, 1874, in which, after describing the appearance of "Katie King," through the mediumship of a Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Holmes, he goes on to say in effect, that human beings cannot pass at will through the substance of a brick wall or of a stout wooden partition. Now "Katie" was either a visitant from another phase of being, or a confederate introduced into the cabinet for purposes of deceit; but this was a physical impossibility (the italics are ours), "therefore Katie, not being an inhabitant of this world, was a denizen of another made visible to us, for the time, by some process which has been called materialisation." And yet, Mr. Owen, less than a year after this, with an honesty which might be advantageously imitated by many of our English spiritualists, writes to say that "circumstantial evidence which I have just obtained induces me to withdraw the assurances which I have heretofore given of my confidence in the genuine character of certain manifestations presented last summer, in my presence, through Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Holmes." Dr. Child, Mr. Owen's co-guarantor for "Katie's" reality, now also repudiates her in her ghostly capacity.

Before finally dismissing these two works, we feel constrained to invite especial attention to the utter ineptitude of the methods employed for detecting imposture. Conceive that the late Inspector Field, or Mr. Pollaky had been employed to detect the "Katie" trick; does any sane person imagine that he would have gone fooling about with cameras, galvanometers, or phosphorus lamps, by way of giving a bastard aspect of scientific investigation to his proceedings? No! he would probably have gone accompanied by one strong assistant with a pair of small-sized ordinary spring handcuffs in his

pocket; and would himself have been armed merely with a common dark lantern. Then when "Katie" appeared in front of the curtain, the assistant would have rapidly seized and handcuffed her in a way familiar to all policemen, and would have held on to her while his principal went into the "Cabinet," and turned his light on the place where the "Medium" (or her clothes) lay. Some such recommendation as this must undoubtedly have been made in Miss Cook's hearing; for Mr. Crookes tells us (p. 109), "Of late she had become very nervous, in consequence of certain ill-advised suggestions that force should be employed as an adjunct to more scientific modes of research."

And well she might, as, for example, a ball from an ordinary Colt's revolver, which could hardly make much impression upon the æther, might interfere seriously with the comfort of a medium, in a trance or out of it; and how very intimate is the connection between the medium and the ghost, may be illustrated by a little anecdote, for the literal truth of which we vouch, which has long gone the round of the Scientific world; but which, so far as we know, has never yet appeared in print. One of the most (if not the most) rising among the younger astronomers of the day, who, after a distinguished career at Cambridge, is now a member of the Equity Bar, attended, by invitation, certain Sunday Evening Séances at the house of one of those whom Mr. Wallace parades as disinterested authorities. Here, after the "Medium" had become "entranced" in an extemporised cabinet, formed by a common clothes-horse, covered with black cloth, did ghostly forms appear, much to the bewilderment of the beholder. As his faith increased, so did one of these forms (like Mr. Crookes's rather substantial apparition), from being at first merely visible, became tangible; and eventually gave the gentleman to whom we are referring its hand to grasp. He availed himself of the awful privilege; but, before doing so, quietly inserted his fingers into a pillbox full of vermilion in his waistcoat pocket—afterwards fervently grasping the spectral member. Incredible as it may appear, when lights were afterwards brought, and the "Medium" was resuscitated, *there was a great smear of red paint in the middle of his hand!*

Spiritualists are so in the habit of referring to "the Report of the Committee of the Dialectical Society on Spiritualism" (or rather to those parts of it which suit them), that we can hardly conclude more appropriately than by quoting the words of their own Chairman (op.cit. p. 80), who, speaking of Spiritualistic manifestations, says, "At present I can only arrive at the conclusion that they have their origin in unconscious action or self-delusion, unless they are the result of imposture. Certainly they are mischievous and delusive to the last degree."

That such books as those which form the subject of this notice should have been published at the present day with two such names upon their title-pages, is a simple scandal to the boasted intellectual progress and enlightenment of the nineteenth century.