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‘Mr Alfred R. Wallace on Modern Spiritualism.’

In the present number of the *Fortnightly Review* Mr Wallace, the well known naturalist and author, contributes the first of two articles on Modern Spiritualism. Mr Wallace is a firm believer in the truth of the “phenomena” with which the world is now familiar, and he mentions instances of still more startling “phenomena” which to his mind clearly prove that they are only explicable on the supposition that they are due to spiritual agencies. We make the following extracts:—

HOT COALS COOLED BY THE MEDIUMS.

“But, perhaps, the best attested and most extraordinary phenomenon connected with Mr Home’s mediumship is what is called the fire test. In a state of trance he takes a glowing coal from the hottest part of a bright fire, and carries it round the room, so that every one may see and feel that it is a real one. This is testified by Mr H. D. Jencken, Lord Lindsay, Lord Adare, Miss Douglas, Mr S. C. Hall, and many others. But, more strange still, when in this state he can detect the same power in other persons, or convey it to them. A lump of red-hot coal was once placed on Mr S. C. Hall’s head in the presence of Lord Lindsay and four other persons. Mrs Hall, in a communication to the Earl of Dunraven (given in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1870, p. 178), says:—

“‘Mr Hall was seated nearly opposite to where I sat; and I saw Mr Home, after standing about half a minute at the back of Mr Hall’s chair, deliberately place the lump of burning coal on his head! I have often wondered that I was not frightened, but I was not; I had perfect faith that he would not be injured. Some one said, “Is it not hot?” Mr Hall answered, “Warm, but not hot.” Mr Home had moved a little way, but returned, still in a trance; he smiled, and seemed quite pleased, and then proceeded to draw up Mr Hall’s white hair over the red coal. The white hair had the appearance of silver thread over the red coal. Mr Home drew the hair into a sort of pyramid, the coal, still red, showing beneath the hair.’

“When taken off the head, which it had not in the slightest degree injured or singed the hair, others attempted to touch it and were burnt. Lord Lindsay and Miss Douglas have also had hot coals placed in their hands, and they describe them as feeling rather cold than hot; though at the same time they burn any one else, and even scorch the face of the holder if approached too closely. The same witnesses also testify that Mr Home has placed red-hot coals inside his waistcoat without scorching his clothes, and has put his face into the middle of the fire, his hair falling into the flames, yet not being the least singed. The same power of resisting fire can be temporarily given to inanimate objects. Mr H. Nisbet, of Glasgow, states (*Human Nature*, February, 1870), that in his own house, in January, 1870, Mr Home placed a red-hot coal in the hands of a lady and gentleman, which they only felt warm; and then placed the same piece on a folded newspaper, burning a hole through eight layers of paper. He then took a fresh and blazing coal and laid it on the same newspaper, carrying it about the room for three minutes, when the paper was found, this time, not to have been the least burnt.”

JUDGE EDMUND’S CRUCIAL TEST.

“We have yet to add a notice of what will be perhaps, to many persons, the most startling and convincing of all the Judge’s experiences. His own daughter became a medium for speaking foreign languages of which she was totally ignorant. He says: ‘She knows no language but her own and a little smattering of boarding-school French; yet she has spoken in nine or ten different tongues, often for an hour at a time, with the ease and fluency of a native. It is not unfrequent that foreigners converse with their spirit-friends through her, in their own language.’ One of these cases must be given.

““One evening, when some twelve or fifteen persons were in my parlour, Mr E. D. Green, an artist of this city, was shown in, accompanied by a gentleman whom he introduced as Mr Evangelides, of Greece. Ere long a spirit spoke to him through Laura, in English, and said so many things to him that he identified him as a friend who had died at his house a few years before, but of whom none of us had ever heard. Occasionally, through Laura, the spirit would speak a word or a sentence in Greek, until Mr E. inquired if he could be understood if he spoke Greek? The residue of the conversation for more than an hour was, on his part, entirely in Greek, and on hers sometimes in Greek and sometimes in English. At times Laura would not understand what was the idea conveyed either by her or him. At other times she would understand him, though he spoke in Greek, and herself, while uttering Greek words.’

“Several other cases are mentioned, and it is stated that this lady has spoken Spanish, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Latin, Hungarian, and Indian; and other languages which were unknown to any person present.

“This is by no means an isolated case, but it is given as being on most unexceptionable authority. A man must know whether his own daughter has learnt, so as to speak fluently, eight languages besides her own, or not. Those who carry on the conversation must know whether the language is spoken or not; and in several cases—as the Latin, Spanish, and Indian—the judge himself understood the language. And the phenomenon is connected with spiritualism by the speaking being in the name of, and purporting to come from, some deceased person, and the subject-matter being characteristic of that person. Such a case as this, which has been published sixteen years, ought to have been noticed and explained by those who profess to enlighten the public on the subject of spiritualism.”

MR CROOKES’ EXPERIMENTS.

“In Mr Crookes’ latest paper, published in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* for January last, we are informed that he has pursued the inquiry for four years, and, besides attending *séances* elsewhere, has had the opportunity of making numerous experiments in his own house with the two remarkable mediums already referred to, Mr D. D. Home and Miss Kate Fox. These experiments were almost exclusively made in the light, under conditions of his own arranging, and with his own friends as witnesses. Such phenomena as percussive sounds; alteration of the weight of bodies; the rising of heavy bodies in the air without contact by any one; the levitation of human beings; luminous appearances of various kinds; the appearance of hands which lift small objects, yet are not the hands of any one present; direct writing by a luminous detached hand or by the pencil alone; phantom forms and faces; and various mental phenomena—have all been tested so variously and so repeatedly that Mr Crookes is thoroughly satisfied of their objective reality. These phenomena are given in outline in the paper above referred to, and they will be detailed in full in a volume now preparing. I will not,

therefore, weary my readers by repeating them here, but will remark that these experiments have a weight as evidence vastly greater than would be due to them as resting on the testimony of any man of science, however distinguished, because they are, in almost every case, confirmations of what previous witnesses in immense numbers have testified to, in various places, and under various conditions, during the last 20 years. In every other experimental inquiry, without exception, confirmation of the facts of an earlier observer is held to add so greatly to their value that no one treats them with the same incredulity with which he might have received them the first time they were announced. And when the confirmation has been repeated by three or four independent observers under favourable conditions, and there is nothing but theory or negative evidence against them, the facts are admitted—at least provisionally, and until disproved by a greater weight of evidence or by discovering the exact source of the fallacy of preceding observers.”

THE SPIRITUAL THEORY—A DEAD WIFE RESTORED TO HER HUSBAND.

“This seems the proper place to notice the astounding assertion of certain writers, that there is not ‘a particle of evidence’ to support the spiritual theory; that those who accept it betray ‘hopeless inability to discriminate between adequate and inadequate proof of facts;’ that the theory is ‘formed apart from facts;’ and, that those who accept it are so unable to reason as to ‘jump to the conclusion’ that it must be spirits that move tables, merely because they do not know how else they can be moved. The preceding account of how converts to Spiritualism have been made is a sufficient answer to all this ignorant assertion. The spiritual theory, as a rule, has only been adopted as a last resource, when all other theories have hopelessly broken down, and when fact after fact, phenomenon after phenomenon, has presented itself, giving direct proof that the so-called dead are still alive. The spiritual theory is the logical outcome of the whole of the facts. Those who deny it, in every instance with which I am acquainted, either from ignorance or disbelief leave half the facts out of view. Take the one case (out of many almost equally conclusive) of Mr Livermore, who during five years, on hundreds of occasions, saw, felt, and heard the movements of the figure of his dead wife in absolute, unmistakable, living form. A form which could move objects, and which repeatedly wrote to him in her own handwriting and her own language, on cards which remained after the figure had disappeared. A form which was equally visible and tangible to two friends; which appeared in his own house, in a room absolutely secured, with the presence of only a young girl, the medium. Had these three men ‘not a particle of evidence’ for the spiritual theory? Is it, in fact, possible to conceive or suggest any more complete proof? The facts must be got rid of before you can abolish the theory; and simple denial or disbelief does not get rid of facts testified during a space of five years by three witnesses, all men in responsible positions, and carrying on their affairs during the whole period in a manner to win the respect and confidence of their fellow-citizens.”

MISS FLORENCE COOK’S DOUBLE.

“For some years a young lady, Miss Florence Cook, has exhibited remarkable mediumship, which latterly culminated in the production of an entire female form purporting to be spiritual, and which appeared barefooted and in white flowing robes while she lay entranced, in dark clothing and securely bound, in a cabinet or adjacent room. Notwithstanding that tests of an apparently conclusive character were employed, many visitors, spiritualists as well as sceptics, got the impression that all was not as it should be, owing in part to the resemblance of the supposed spirit to Miss Cook, and also to the fact that the two could not be seen at the same time. Some supposed that Miss C. was an imposter who

managed to conceal a white robe about her (although she was often searched), and who, although she was securely tied with tapes and sealed, was able to get out of her bonds, dress and undress herself, and get into them again, all in the dark, and in so complete and skilful a manner as to defy detection. Others thought that the spirit released her, provided her with a white dress, and sent her forth to personate a ghost. The belief that there was something wrong led one gentleman, an ardent spiritualist, to seize the supposed spirit and endeavour to hold it, in the hope that some other person would open the cabinet door and see if Miss Cook was really there. This was, unfortunately, not done; but the great resemblance of the being he seized to Miss Cook, its perfect solidity, and the vigorous struggles it made to escape from him, convinced this gentleman that it was Miss Cook herself, although the rest of the company, a few minutes afterwards, found her bound and sealed just as she had been left an hour before. To determine the question conclusively, experiments have been made within the last few weeks by two scientific men. Mr C. F. Varley, F.R.S., the eminent electrician, made use of a galvanic battery and cable-testing apparatus, and passed a current through Miss Cook's body (by fastening sovereigns soldered to wires to her arms). The apparatus was so delicate that any movement whatever was instantly indicated, while it was impossible for the young lady to dress and act as a ghost without breaking the circuit. Yet under these conditions the spirit-form did appear, exhibited its arms, spoke, wrote, and touched several persons; and this happened, be it remembered, not in the medium's own house, but in that of a private gentleman in the West End of London. For nearly an hour the circuit was never broken, and at the conclusion Miss Cook was found in a deep trance. Since this remarkable experiment Mr William Crookes, F.R.S., has obtained, if possible, still more satisfactory evidence. He contrived a phosphorus lamp, and armed with this was allowed to go into the dark room accompanied by the spirit, and there saw and felt Miss Cook, dressed in black velvet, lying in a trance on the floor, while the spirit-form, in white robes, stood close beside her. During the evening this spirit-form had been, for nearly an hour, walking and talking with the company; and Mr Crookes, by permission, clasped the figure in his arms, and found it to be, apparently, a real living woman, just as the sceptical gentleman had done. Yet this figure is not that of Miss Cook, nor of any other human being, since it appeared and disappeared in Mr Crookes' own house as completely as in that of the medium herself."

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.