

writer has attended some twenty *séances* in his time, many of them with persons like Mr. Home, Mr. Foster, and others, of great reputed power in that capacity which the spiritualists call, evidently more from pure ignorance than from even rational conjecture as to what it means, "mediumship," without, however, seeing, hearing, or after any fashion whatever perceiving a single phenomenon which was unaccountable on the most ordinary and humdrum view of life. But he is, nevertheless, quite willing to admit that the facts of which he has been assured, by men of whose acuteness, calmness, and honour he has had every reason to form a very high estimate, are quite remarkable enough to make it, in every sense, a reasonable thing to inquire further and more carefully into the character and meaning of a class of phenomena which seem to be rather multiplying, and boasting a higher calibre than formerly in the character of the converts, as well as a rapidly increasing number of them, than dying out. And we have no wish, therefore, to meet Mr. Wallace's challenge by a mere exclamation of "Incredible nonsense!" If the belief of Spiritualists be, as, of course, it seems at first, to most people who have had only the ordinary experience of mortals, incredible and nonsensical, investigators will be able to show, on careful cross-examination of some of the leading instances, how the delusion arises; and that result alone would be quite worth a great deal of painstaking investigation. And if not, why, it seems to us as absurd as it seems to Mr. Wallace to say, with Professor Huxley, that the alleged facts are not important only because they are wrapped up in a jargon of at once trivial and pretentious nonsense. If true at all, whatever they mean,—whether they mean only a new physical force, or a new field of volition, or a new evidence of immortality,—they must be of the greatest importance; no wise man will say that because silly persons, embodied or otherwise, rap out very foolish truisms or falsisms by means hitherto unknown to science, the understanding of those means is without importance. As well might you say that because sometimes unmeaning, and often silly, and occasionally wicked messages are sent by the electric telegraph, the understanding of the electric agency itself is without importance to us. Still Mr. Wallace is very unreasonable, when he tells us that the reality of his alleged facts is so indisputably proved, that they do not want "confirmation;" and, moreover, he is not consistent with himself, because he ends his paper by saying that "spiritualism makes no claim to be received on hearsay evidence,"—and if not, then clearly, for all who have no better evidence than hearsay however good, it does clearly want confirmation. For our own parts, we have *seen* quite enough of the credulity of intellectual men, in cases where it was clear there was credulity, and not merely willingness to be convinced on sufficient evidence, to refuse to accept even the best hearsay evidence without the very important "confirmation" of observing for ourselves that the enthusiastic shudder of belief has not cast its spell over the minds of our informants. We know that there is such a thing as incredulity which gives way not step by step, as it is conquered by evidence, but with a sudden revulsion of feeling passing at once into the opposite extreme of conviction. None of these facts of Mr. Wallace's are in any degree conclusive, without that keen sifting of attendant circumstances to which inexplicable and marvellous facts ought always to be subjected; and where the fact is a good way off, either in space or in time, and we have no chance of finding the clue which might elucidate it, the incredulous reserve with which the intellect naturally accepts it, is, we think, most wise and wholesome. If scientific chemists, making their own preparations beforehand to guard against deception, have really found on their photographic plates faces quite unknown to them, invisible to their eyes at the time of the exposure to the sun, and recognised by other persons as those of persons long dead, the fact is undoubtedly in the highest degree curious. But then the whole burden of the marvel lies in the "if," and how is a reader of Mr. Wallace's paper to know simply on his assertion, that the chemists whom he there names as having verified this wonderful statement are adequate chemists, who have taken all the proper precautions to avoid either error or fraud? An excellent photographer, who has carefully examined the facts, and found fraud at work again and again, assures us that Mr. Wallace's instances, so far as they depend on mere scientific guarantees, are absolutely worthless for the purpose for which they are quoted. Of course, if Mr. Wallace can rely absolutely both on the science and on the good faith of his photographic investigators, that is another matter. But we cannot be expected to take on trust Mr. Wallace's reasons for moral confidence.

However, all this is by the way. What we want to say something of is Mr. Wallace's remarkable assertion that if Spiritualism

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#### MR. WALLACE ON THE RELIGION OF SPIRITUALISM.

MR. ALFRED WALLACE, the distinguished naturalist, who divides in some sense with Mr. Darwin the honour of establishing the principle of 'natural selection' as a real and most powerful cause of the variation of species, has written two remarkable papers for the *Fortnightly Review*, arraying under various heads the mass of positive evidence for the facts of spiritualism, and reproaching the world with the unreason of its incredulity. We are not about to dispute the assertion that a great deal of that evidence is of a kind which, in relation to facts less marvellous, few reasonable men would think of doubting; nor that its quantity, even if we limit it strictly to the asseverations of persons whom we should be disposed on ordinary subjects to regard as sound witnesses, *i.e.*, persons of whom the world knows something independently, and that something of a kind tending to establish their trustworthiness intellectual and moral, is very startling. The present

be true, it constitutes "a great moral agency, which may yet regenerate the world;" that it is "the only sure foundation for a true philosophy and a pure religion." This is an assertion which, we must say, simply amazes us. That "Spiritualism," if true,—and if true in Mr. Wallace's, and not simply in Mr. Serjeant Cox's sense,—would furnish a powerful additional evidence of continued life after death to the mass of mankind, is obvious enough; but that is almost its final word, as far as we have read, and we have read a good deal of this dreary literature,—for most dreary it is, however we may judge the question of true or false as to the main facts alleged. We should say that, assuming for a moment the theory of the Spiritualists to be true, as well as their facts,—assuming that these phenomena occur, and that they are due to the agency of spirits which once lived upon this earth,—then the chief inference from the facts would be that ninety-nine hundredths of the communications made to us come from the moral rubbish of the unseen world. And so far, at least, we should not be prepared to feel any surprise, considering that, as Mr. Wallace very justly insists, so many human beings do leave this life in an intellectual and moral condition in which "rubbishy" seems the word that most exactly expresses them." If not, then we must infer that the loss of their physical organisation impoverishes in every way instead of developing the capacities of the spirits departed, and this would be much more alarming. Of all the bald and dreary moralities, the jejune religious exhortations, the sickly sentiments, the empty and pompous mysticisms, the flatulent symbolisms, the incoherent parables, and the conceited rhapsodies that we have read in the so-called religious literature of the last ten years, we should say that five-sixths came from the Spiritualists. In fact we have hardly ever met with any kind of religious teaching from that source which came up to the level of the simplest of the Old Testament narratives, of the least striking of the meditations of Marcus Aurelius, of the least sagacious of the religious lessons of Socrates, or the homeliest of the pieties of Luther. If we compare Mrs. Tappan's windy and ambitious "trance-speeches," with (say) even any single lecture in the late Mr. Binney's "Is it possible to make the best of both Worlds?"—a book, we need hardly say, that we do not at all profoundly admire,—the spirit who inspires Mrs. Tappan will come off very poorly indeed, in comparison with the spirit which moved the prudent but earnest lips of Mr. Binney. The simple truth is, that there is no religious jargon going, worse than the pretentious jargon of the Spiritualists, so far as we know it, and we have waded through a good deal. Mr. Wallace says that from certain trance-speakers, "such as Mrs. Hardinge, Mrs. Tappan, and Mr. Peebles, I have heard discourses such as for high and sustained eloquence, noble thoughts, and high moral purpose, surpassed the best efforts of any preacher or lecturer within my experience." All we can say is, that either Mr. Wallace has been singularly fortunate, or his estimate of these matters and ours is widely different. We have, we admit, only read reports of the speeches of "trance-mediums," not heard their living words; but with a large experience of the twaddle of the pulpit, we may honestly say that it bears to the twaddle of the trance-speakers the relation which "moonlight bears to sunlight, or water unto wine." Here, for instance, is something Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan delivered on "the religion of Spiritualism,"—delivered, we are told, not out of her own mind but "under spirit influence,"—on Tuesday evening, the 21st of September, 1873:—

"Is Spiritualism a religion? says one. It is not a theology. If religion has to do with the human soul; if religion has to do with the spiritual of man's nature; if, indeed, it lifts, elevates, and strengthens, then it has to do with religion; but it has no creed. It has no institution where theology is taught. It has no altars, no shrines, no priests—save the altar of the fireside, the shrine of the human heart, the priest that rattles through the lips of the young babe on its mother's knee, or the grey-haired man moved to utterance, or the young man and maiden made to prophesy. It has not institutions, but it enters all institutions. It walks up to the priest in his stole, and in the voice of a child makes him tell his astonished hearers that the lost are not dead, but living, and can participate in our good words and works. But, says he to his auditors, this is not Modern Spiritualism I am telling you. It goes to the laboratory of the scientist, and it makes him move to its wonderful voice; it says, There is another life and a higher; this is but a stepping-stone to another sphere, but the entrance to the temple of life. He pauses, and says it is wondrous strange. Is it a religion? It inspires the pure and holy, no matter what creed he belongs to, so that the worshipper may bow under any form of service, it matters not so long as the conscience is satisfied. Seers have seen through its living light; poets have seen and have described in living rhythm the beauties of the spirit-land. Is it a religion? It makes known its voice whenever death comes; and those long schooled in the darkness of the past, when they thought there was no hope and no life, now lift up their voices and see there is life and there is hope. Is it a religion? The All-Father, whose ways we are now somewhat finding out, bendeth in loving care over his children, and by these various means, and through

these various forms of inspiration, He speaks to the nations of the earth, and what does He say?"

Now, that is what we may be permitted, we think, to call tall talk with a minimum of meaning, to put it very mildly. When it is said that spiritualism has no priests, "save the priest that rattles through the lips of the young babe on its mother's knee," does Mrs. Tappan's inspirer intend to say anything at all beyond intimating that maternal feelings are very nice, and much better than those usually excited by priests? And if this is what the spirit dictating the "inspirational address" of Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan meant, can we regard the progress it has made in the art of coming to the point, since it entered the spiritual world, as at all satisfactory? Mr. Peebles is also eulogised by Mr. Wallace for his spiritual trance-teachings. We are not told whether an encomium of his on the late Robert Owen, which is published in "Human Nature" (a Spiritualist publication) for May, was delivered in the trance-state or not. To tell the truth, there is nothing to distinguish what is, from what is not delivered in the trance-state, both spirits and mediums being given apparently to broken and very ungrammatical English. But here is a specimen of Mr. Peebles's remarks on the late Robert Owen, probably, we think, dictated by a spirit, or the printer would himself have taken the liberty to query the grammar:—"Though Emperors and Kings had listened to Mr. Owen, and though distinguished statesmen had been his associates, he never forgot the crowning, ideal principle of his life, *communism*. Rising from the miry plains of selfishness to the mountain-tops of equality and good-will to men, and it is clearly seen that communism is the voice of God through nature [*sic*]. Light and air, rain and sunshine are common. The prince and the pauper child, at the hour of birth, are equal and common. Death is common to king and subject. And the laws of the universe are common." None of them, however, are so "common" as trash and bad grammar. Why "equality and good-will to men" should be mountain-tops, even in metaphor, it is not easy to see. Are all mountain-tops equal? Are all mountain-tops benevolent? But apart from silly rhetoric, does a baby resemble sunshine in being common to all? Mothers do not ordinarily think so. The pauper child may be thought common in one sense, and both pauper and prince are common in another, if both the pauper and the prince are supported out of the common fund of taxation; but neither of them happily is common to us all, as air and light are common; and to talk like that, either in the spiritual state or in the earthly state is sheer idiocy.

But, says Mr. Wallace, Spiritualism is without a theology. No spirit tells you that he is with Christ or God. So much the worse for the spirits. However, a good many of them do say a great deal about God, and very little to the purpose. Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan calls God the "All Father," and evidently makes a point of the "All," as implying something fresh and reviving in the Spiritualistic creed, though we are unable to appreciate the point of her modification of the usual language. But even granting Mr. Wallace, what we do not think is true, that the Spiritualists tell us nothing of God, silly or otherwise, how does it gain as a pure religion by that? Mr. Wallace thinks it is a wonderful thing to have it quite sure that the soul lives on, and becomes what its actions make it. That is a good thing to know, unquestionably. We rather think St. Paul knew it, when he said, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap." But what we look for in a religion is not simply a proof that we become what we make ourselves, but some potent influence that shall help us to become what we are not,—such as intimate communion with perfect love and perfect holiness. So far as Spiritualism from procuring us this, that, as we find it, it actually leads to a (morally) very wasteful and injurious intercourse with vain, pretentious, and stilted spirits, whether in the body or out of the body, does not, for moral purposes, matter at all. Why, one sentence of Christ's, one chapter of St. Paul's, one poetic image from Isaiah is worth, spiritually, all the grandiose rubbish we have ever read in "inspirational" addresses. And we must express our firm conviction that if these communications could really be shown to come from the unseen world, they must in general be regarded as coming from the greatest pack of fools, impostors, and ignoramuses who ever left the visible world. That a great many bad, and silly, and ignorant persons have left this world we are well assured. Still it is discouraging to think that the communication between the two worlds when opened is opened almost exclusively with these, and that there is so little evidence of sanity and grave purpose amongst the spirits of the dead who desire to communicate with us. Mr. Crookes throws out somewhere a suggestion, which is quite serious, that the intelligences

which communicate through mediums are possibly not human at all, but may come from some other race of beings,—Ariels and Calibans, presumably, we should say, below our level, not above it. And, indeed, one of the curiosities of the spiritualistic faith is that no one has ever proposed a mode of either identifying these unembodied agencies with the persons for whom they give themselves out, or proving the impersonation to be a fraud. But be they what they will, this seems to us certain, that the "religion of spiritualism" is nothing in the world but a faith in immortality, plus the excitement of receiving a lot of communications from the other side of the grave, most of which give us a deplorable impression of the intellectual and moral calibre of the creatures which communicate with us. Of any new and regenerating affection in Spiritualism there is not a trace. If it be a great spiritual gain to believe that after death you will be able to knock about your friends' tables, to drown them with flowers, to give them a lock of spiritual hair, to appear in a misty cylinder with your head just dimly discernible at one end, to play an harmonium, to ring bells, and to untie knots, then Spiritualism may be a great gospel for the million. But as we do not feel any great desire for these exalted functions in our immortal state, we must say that to us the interest of the investigation of Spiritualism is not spiritual, but mainly physical. Immortality we hold, on higher evidence than that of Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan or Mr. Peebles. Still no doubt, if all these things could be established, the multitude would have a new and physically-grounded belief in it. But whether it would do them moral harm or good would depend on what the average character of future "spiritual" communications should be. For our parts, we do not desire to be put into constant communication with a world so noisy, purposeless, and fraudulent as the world of communicating spirits at present appears to be. Mr. Wallace's facts should be inquired into, for scientific and other reasons. But even if substantiated, they would imply not a new religion, but in the main a new manifestation of what St. John meant by the world, the flesh, and perhaps even the devil.

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