

BOOKS OF THE DAY.

DR. WALLACE'S VOLUME ON MODERN SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY.*

REVIEWED BY B. O. FLOWER.

It is very suggestive to the student who thinks below the surface to note the surprising activity evinced in the world of thought by master minds regarding problems relating to psychical research. We are approaching the meridian of a century which corresponds in many ways to the first century of modern times (1450-1550), and the intellectual, moral, and spiritual activity of the present time, though necessarily far different from that which emphasized the Renaissance, is none the less boldly marked. In the world of social, ethical, religious, and scientific thought we see the interrogation point raised on every hand, while side by side with this searching and challenging spirit we also note a vast amount of constructive work going on. Everywhere the loftiest spirits and the most advanced and profound natures are demanding nobler ideals than those which have prevailed in the past, while the ascendancy of the critical and scientific spirit is also observable in every field of investigation, although it must be confessed that critical scientific thinkers have been slow to engage in careful systematic investigation of psychical phenomena. This has doubtless been due to many causes. The whole field of research until lately was regarded as a dark continent, subtle and elusive in results, while conservative prejudice on the one hand and the fraudulent imposition of alleged psychical phenomena on the other have operated with other causes to prevent many of the most thoughtful and sincere searchers after truth from entering a field of investigation which promises incalculable gain to humanity when the laws which underlie psychical science are clearly demonstrated. Among sincere investigators it is doubtless true that many have permitted their zeal to override their discretion, while on the other hand a number of ultra-conservatives have erred in the opposite direction from the predominance of the materialistic bias and doubtless, in some instances, fearing lest they should bring down upon their heads the anathemas of a slothful conventionalism. But in spite of the injudicious on the one hand and the ultra-conservative on the other, there is a vast body of well-balanced, thoughtful, and competent investigators who are tirelessly pursuing every great problem which promises blessings for civilization and an increase of knowledge for man. Nowhere is that activity more noticeable at the present time than in the field of psychical research. Recently several volumes of great value and worthy of the

*"Miracles and Modern Spiritualism," by Alfred Russel Wallace, D. C. L., LL. D., F. R. S. Revised edition, with chapters on Apparitions and Phantasms George Redway, 9 Hart St., Bloomsbury, London, England. Price 6s. net

serious consideration of all scholarly men and women who dare to think have appeared. The first of these I wish to notice is "Miracles and Modern Spiritualism," by the eminent English scientist, Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace.

This work, which consists of a carefully revised and enlarged edition of Dr. Wallace's former work, to which are added the important papers originally written for the ARENA on "Objective Apparitions and Why They Appear," and an important appendix.

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace is recognized as the world's greatest living naturalist, and his work as co-discoverer with Darwin of the law of Evolution has long since placed him among the greatest physical scientists of this pre-eminently scientific century. Hence the following extracts from the preface to his work will be of peculiar interest to thinking people, and should receive the special attention of physical scientists with a materialistic bias who have been flippant and superficial in their criticism of this great serene soul who has penetrated beyond the range of their vision :

I am well aware that my scientific friends are somewhat puzzled to account for what they consider to be my delusion, and believe that it has injuriously affected whatever power I may have once possessed of dealing with the philosophy of Natural History. One of them—Mr. Anton Dohrn—has expressed this plainly. I am informed that, in an article entitled "Englische Kritiker und Anti-Kritiker des Darwinismus," published in 1861, he has put forth the opinion that Spiritualism and Natural Selection are incompatible, and that my divergence from the views of Mr. Darwin arises from my belief in Spiritualism. He also supposes that in accepting the spiritual doctrines I have been to some extent influenced by clerical and religious prejudice. As Mr. Dohrn's views may be those of other scientific friends, I may perhaps be excused for entering into some personal details in reply.

From the age of fourteen I lived with an elder brother, of advanced liberal and philosophical opinions, and I soon lost (and have never since regained) all capacity of being affected in my judgments either by clerical influence or religious prejudice. Up to the time when I first became acquainted with the facts of Spiritualism, I was a confirmed philosophical sceptic, rejoicing in the works of Voltaire, Strauss, and Carl Vogt, and an ardent admirer (as I am still) of Herbert Spencer. I was so thorough and confirmed a materialist that I could not at that time find a place in my mind for the conception of spiritual existence, or for any other agencies in the universe than matter and force. Facts, however, are stubborn things. My curiosity was at first excited by some slight but inexplicable phenomena occurring in a friend's family, and my desire for knowledge and love of truth forced me to continue the inquiry. The facts became more and more assured, more and more varied, more and more removed from anything that modern science taught or modern philosophy speculated on. They compelled me to accept them *as facts* long before I could accept the spiritual explanation of them; there was at that time "no place in my fabric of thought into which it could be fitted." By slow degrees a place was made; but it was made, not by any preconceived or theoretical opinions, but by the continuous action of fact after fact, which could not be got rid of in any other way. So much for Mr. Anton Dohrn's theory of the causes which led me to accept Spiritualism. Let us now consider the statement as to its incompatibility with Natural Selection.

Having, as above indicated, been led, by a strict induction from facts,

to a belief: firstly, in the existence of a number of preterhuman intelligences of various grades, and, secondly, that some of these intelligences, although usually invisible and intangible to us, can and do act on matter and do influence our minds, I am surely following a strictly logical and scientific course in seeing how far this doctrine will enable us to account for some of those residual phenomena which Natural Selection alone will not explain. In the tenth chapter of my "Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection," I have pointed out what I consider to be some of those residual phenomena; and I have suggested that they may be due to the action of some of the various intelligences above referred to. This view was, however, put forward with hesitation, and I myself suggested difficulties in the way of its acceptance; but I maintained, and still maintain, that it is one which is logically tenable, and is in no way inconsistent with a thorough acceptance of the grand doctrine of Evolution through Natural Selection, although implying (as indeed many of the chief supporters of that doctrine admit) that it is not the all-powerful, all-sufficient, and only cause of the development of organic forms.

In the preface to this last edition Dr. Wallace observes:

It was about the year 1843 that I first became interested in psychical phenomena, owing to the violent discussion then going on as to the reality of the painless surgical operations performed on patients in the mesmeric trance by Dr. Elliotson and other English surgeons. The greatest surgical and physiological authorities of the day declared that the patients were either impostors or persons naturally insensible to pain; the operating surgeons were accused of bribing their patients, and Dr. Elliotson was described as "polluting the temple of science." The Medico-Chirurgical Society opposed the reading of a paper describing an amputation during the magnetic trance, while Dr. Elliotson himself was ejected from his professorship in the University of London. It was at this time generally believed that all the now well-known phenomena of hypnotism were the result of imposture.

It so happened that in the year 1844 I heard an able lecture on mesmerism by Mr. Spencer Hall, and the lecturer assured his audience that most healthy persons could mesmerize some of their friends and reproduce many of the phenomena he had shown on the platform. This led me to try for myself, and I soon found that I could mesmerize with varying degrees of success, and before long I succeeded in producing in my own room, either alone with my patient or in the presence of friends, most of the usual phenomena. Partial or incomplete catalepsy, paralysis of the motor nerves in certain directions, or of any special sense, every kind of delusion produced by suggestion, insensibility to pain, and community of sensation with myself when at a considerable distance from the patient, were all demonstrated, in such a number of patients and under such varying conditions as to satisfy me of the genuineness of the phenomena. I thus learnt my first great lesson in the inquiry into these obscure fields of knowledge, never to accept the disbelief of great men, or their accusations of imposture or of imbecility, as of any weight when opposed to the repeated observation of facts by other men admittedly sane and honest. The whole history of science shows us that, whenever the educated and scientific men of any age have denied the facts of other investigators on *a priori* grounds of absurdity or impossibility, the deniers have always been wrong.

A few years later and all the more familiar facts of mesmerism were accepted by medical men, and explained more or less satisfactorily to themselves, as not being essentially different from known diseases of the nervous system, and of late years the more remarkable phenomena, including clairvoyance both as to facts known and those unknown to the mesmerizer, have been established as absolute realities.

Next we come to the researches of Baron von Reichenbach on the action of magnets and crystals upon sensitives. I well remember how these were scouted by the late Dr. W. B. Carpenter and Prof. Tyndall, and how I was pitied for my credulity in accepting them. But many of his results have now been tested by French and English observers and have been found to be correct. Then we all remember how the phenomena of the stigmata, which have occurred at many epochs in the Catholic Church, were always looked upon by sceptics as gross imposture, and the believers in its reality as too far gone in credulity to be seriously reasoned with. Yet when the case of Louise Lateau was thoroughly investigated by sceptical physicians, and could be no longer doubted, the facts were admitted; and when, later on, somewhat similar appearances were produced in hypnotic patients by suggestion the whole matter was held to be explained.

Second sight, crystal-seeing, automatic writing, and allied phenomena have been usually treated either as self-delusion or as imposture, but now that they have been carefully studied by Mr. Myers, Mr. Stead, and other inquirers, they have been found to be genuine facts; and it has been further proved that they often give information not known to any one present at the time, and even sometimes predict future events with accuracy.

Lastly, we come to consider the claim of the intelligences who are connected with most of these varied phenomena to be the spirits of deceased men and women; such claim being supported by tests of various kinds, especially by giving accurate information regarding themselves as to facts totally unknown to the medium or to any person present. Records of such tests are numerous in spiritual literature as well as in the publications of the Society for Psychical Research, but at present they are regarded as inconclusive, and various theories of a double or multiple personality, of a sub-conscious or second self, or of a lower stratum of consciousness, are called in to explain them or to attempt to explain them. The stupendous difficulty that, if these phenomena and these tests are to be all attributed to the "second self" of living persons, then that second self is almost always a deceiving and a lying self, however moral and truthful the visible and tangible first self may be, has, so far as I know, never been rationally explained; yet this cumbrous and unintelligible hypothesis finds great favor with those who have always been accustomed to regard the belief in a spirit world, and more particularly a belief that the spirits of our dead friends can and do sometimes communicate with us, as unscientific, unphilosophical, and superstitious. Why it should be unscientific, more than any other hypothesis which alone serves to explain intelligibly a great body of facts, has never been explained. The antagonism which it excites seems to be mainly due to the fact that it is, and has long been in some form or other, the belief of the religious world and of the ignorant and superstitious of all ages, while a total disbelief in spiritual existence has been the distinctive badge of modern scientific scepticism. The belief of the uneducated and unscientific multitude, however, rested on the broad basis of alleged facts which the scientific world scouted and scoffed at as impossible. But they are now discovering, as this brief sketch has shown, that the alleged facts, one after another, prove to be real facts, and strange to say, with little or no exaggeration, since almost every one of them, though implying abnormal powers in human being or the agency of a spirit-world around us, has been strictly paralleled in the present day, and has been subjected to the close scrutiny of the scientific and sceptical with little or no modification of their essential nature. Since, then, the scientific world has been proved to have been totally wrong in its denial of the facts, as being contrary to laws of nature and therefore incredible, it seems highly probable, *a priori*, it may have been equally wrong as to the spirit hypothesis, the dislike of

which mainly led to their disbelief in the facts. For myself, I have never been able to see why any one hypothesis should be less scientific than another, except so far as one explains the whole of the facts and the other explains only a part of them. It was this alone that rendered the theory of gravitation more scientific than that of cycles and epicycles, the undulatory theory of light more scientific than the emission theory, and the theory of Darwin more scientific than that of Lamarck. It is often said that we must exhaust known causes before we call in unknown causes to explain phenomena. This may be admitted, but I cannot see how it applies to the present question. The "second" or "sub-conscious self," with its wide stores of knowledge, how gained no one knows, its distinct character, its low morality, its constant lies, is as purely a theoretical cause as is the spirit of a deceased person or any other spirit. It can in no sense be termed "a known cause." To call this hypothesis "scientific" and that of spirit agency "unscientific," is to beg the question at issue. That theory is most scientific which best explains the whole series of phenomena; and I therefore claim that the spirit hypothesis is the most scientific, since even those who oppose it most strenuously often admit that it does explain all the facts, which cannot be said of any other hypothesis.

I have quoted at length from Dr. Wallace's exceedingly thoughtful preface, feeling that such observations from such a source will be of special interest to students of psychical science, and also to show how firmly this truly grand old man, this savant among savants, adheres to the spiritual philosophy.

In the body of the volume the author discusses among other subjects "Modern Miracles Viewed as Natural Phenomena," "The Evidence of the Reality of Apparitions," "Modern Spiritualism: Evidence of Men of Science," "Evidence of Literary and Professional Men to the Facts of Modern Spiritualism," "The Moral Teachings of Spiritualism," "A Defence of Modern Spiritualism," "Are There Objective Apparitions?" "What Are Phantasms, and Why Do They Appear?"

This work is justly entitled to a wide circulation; it is strong, dignified, critical, yet sympathetic; in a word, the truly scientific spirit pervades it.