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‘Spooks and Their Raisers.’

“The Great Secret and its Unfoldment in Occultism.” By a Church of England Clergyman. (London: George Redway. 5s. net.)

“Miracles and Modern Spiritualism.” By Alfred Russel Wallace, D.C.L., &c. Revised edition, with chapters on Apparitions and Phantasms. (London: George Redway. 5s.)

The long-hidden Secret is out! Prophets, priests, and kings longed for the vision, but died without the sight of that which has been revealed to a “Church of England Clergyman.” He confesses himself to be “stiffnecked and sceptical” in temperament, which, perhaps, explains why, despite his acceptance of Holy Orders, he was not satisfied with the evidence that “life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel.” Like the generation reproved by Jesus, he wanted a “sign” as answer to his doubts. So he cast about for evidence of “sight and sense” which should “supersede that of Church or Bible.” A visit to Paris supplied that evidence. It occurred in 1856, at the time when everybody was talking about the *séances* which were being held at the Tuileries. The formation of table-turning “circles” went on merrily. The author’s wife was an automatic vehicle of pneumatic dispatches, and their little *salon* soon became a centre of psychical activity. The table, “a gimcrack French affair,” proved an admirable agent of conviction to its “stiffnecked and sceptical” owner, rapping out, in answer to his query why it spun round so vigorously, “To make men believe in God.” Whereupon the “Church of England Clergyman: was immediately converted, although the process of initiation into occultism was gradual. First through table-tilts and raps, then through “such physical manifestations as sound of the spirit-voice and touch of the spirit-hand,” in one case the clasp of a stillborn twin; finally, through “the apparition proper,” which seems to have “the consistency of cigar smoke.” This suggests a comparison which can only be hinted at. During his progress from the lower to the higher stages, the author met nearly every person of eminence and notoriety connected with the Spiritualist movement, from Professor Crookes to Mrs. Guppy, and interviewed some more or less distinguished spirits. For reasons not given, the desire of the late Canon Charles Kingsley to meet the author was thwarted. The *pièce de résistance* of the book promised to be the appearance of Satan himself, but as the condition which the devil imposed was an Egyptian darkness in the room, this obviously prevented the “Church of England Clergyman” from discovering the “Great Secret” of that celebrity’s personal features. All that he tells us is—

Our *diablerie* was simple enough. We just sat in the usual manner, and reminded our unseen friend of his recent promise, when in an instant the table rose violently under our hands, and was as violently dashed on its legs again, so violently that the frail article was smashed into several fragments. We gathered up the *débris* without waiting for other developments.

Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus seems the fittest comment upon the author’s fulfillment of his high-sounding title. In his recital, one ingredient of sense is suggested by this morsel of self-inquiry:—

I am free to confess that in this department so enormous is the strain made upon belief that scarcely any evidence suffices to produce conviction. Even when I have “seen” myself—supposing the quasi-apparitions not to be of the ragbag order—I rub my eyes and find myself asking what I had for dinner or supper, as the case might be.

Into whatever vagaries Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace may fall, there is assured respect for the man who, in generous self-effacement, ceded to Darwin the prominence in connection with their independent formulation of the theory of the origin of species. Nevertheless, that respect is in danger of being lessened if its honoured subject himself fails in respect for accuracy. The preface to this new edition of his well-known book tells us that the text has been “carefully revised,” and a “few additional facts” added. Now, at page 104 Dr. Wallace gives an account of the notorious Eusapia Palladino case, and, reciting the evidence in brief, repeats the conclusion arrived at by Professors Lodge, Richet, and other investigators. That conclusion was that the “various phenomena were not produced by the medium in any normal way, and that they were not explicable as the result of any known physical causes.” Yet, as far back as last August, this woman Palladino, who had been brought from abroad to Cambridge for more rigid examination of her so-called abnormal powers, was proved to be a common trickster. The details of her collapse were given in these pages, and followed by a vigorous correspondence, in which Dr. Wallace himself took part. Perhaps the sheets of the body of his book were passed for press before the Eusapia exposure, and we give him the benefit of the doubt. But his preface bears the date Oct. 30, 1895, and ample time had, therefore, elapsed for the insertion of reference to what Mr. Andrew Lang, one of the quasi-believers in the woman, calls, in fit if homely phrase, her “busting up.”

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