

*On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism.* Three Essays. By ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE. Second Edition. London: Trübner and Co.

THE phenomena commonly known as spiritualistic occupy a most exceptional position. If a man of Science, of well-proved merit, dissatisfied with the vulgar explanations of "jugglery and imposture," ventures to examine the question as he would any other unsolved problem, he is forthwith assailed with the most scandalous misrepresentations. If a reviewer in dealing with a Spiritualist work expounds its tenets fairly and candidly, he too has sinned against those self-constituted authorities who presume to dictate what we are to investigate and what we are to overlook. As perfectly disinterested spectators we cannot but suspect that this evident wish to suppress is the outcome of a fear lest some, at least, of the teachings of Spiritualism should be true. Every man of Science in the present century is—or at least professes himself—ready to submit his most cherished theories to revision. Is then Monism—the doctrine that there exists in this universe naught save matter and motion—so dear to some of us that any testimony which might possibly tell against it must be dismissed unheard? We fear this is in some quarters the prevailing sentiment.

The work before us is one which may demand the serious and respectful attention of the scientific world. Its author is no weak-minded, ignorant fanatic. As the independent co-originator with Darwin of the doctrine of Natural Selection, as the author of "The Malay Archipelago" and the "Geographical Distribution of Animals," he has earned a world-wide reputation. He is everywhere recognised as a careful and accurate observer of facts, and no less as a happy generaliser. His suggestiveness, his power of explaining difficulties, are well known in the scientific world. His early training, as he himself points out in his Preface, was of such a nature that he became a "thorough and confirmed materialist." Further, it cannot be assumed that Mr. Wallace, by coming forward as a believer in Spiritualism had anything to gain. On the contrary, by the part that he has taken he has in some quarters decidedly damaged his reputation. He himself gives us the reason for the striking, though gradual, change in his opinions:—"The facts beat me." His curiosity was excited; his desire for knowledge and love of truth led him on. He strove vainly to account for the phenomena on the known principles of modern Science, and at last by slow degrees he felt compelled to accept the spiritual explanation. Surely after such avowals, coming from such a man, Spiritualism demands a more heedful examination than has been accorded to it by unscrupulous egotists and obscure "exposers," craving for notoriety if even under an *alias*.

A very important question will here suggest itself to biologists—Are the doctrines of Spiritualism compatible with the theory of Evolution? Mr. Wallace upholds the affirmative in a passage which we must take the liberty of quoting in full. He says:—“Having, as above indicated, been led by a strict induction from facts, to a belief,—1stly, in the existence of a number of pre-human intelligences of various grades; and 2ndly, 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 10th chapter of my “Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection” I have pointed out what I consider to be some of these 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, though implying (as indeed many of the chief supporters of the doctrine admit) that it is not the all-powerful, all-sufficient, and only cause of the development of organic forms.” We must venture to suggest to Mr. Wallace the further expansion of this interesting idea.

This reference to the compatibility of Spiritualism with the theory of Evolution reminds us of another point. At Spiritualist *séances* the forms manifested to the spectators are (or are supposed to be) the spirits of human beings exclusively. Now in conversation with Spiritualists we have more than once thrown out a friendly challenge that they should seek to obtain manifestations of pre-human anthropoids, missing links, and other extinct animals. Not being, for the most part, naturalists, they have paid no attention to our suggestion, or have perhaps regarded it as a mere joke. But we maintain that such manifestations would, equally well with the appearance of deceased men and women, prove the existence in living beings of an element not destroyed by death. Further, the ordinary spirit manifestations are open to the objection that the medium or a confederate artfully personates the supposed shade. But it would be impossible for such persons to personate successfully a Pterodactylus, a Hyenodon, or a Pythonomorpha. To naturalists such manifestations would be priceless; they would supply absolute demonstration of the theory of Evolution, and prove the continuity of mankind with the lower animals. Will Spiritualists make the attempt? Having put forth this suggestion it was with much pleasure that we read some remarks by Mr. Gerald Massey (“Light,” Oct. 15) to this effect:—“It would be of equal inte-

rest to the evolutionists to know that the Spirit of a monkey persisted (habits and all) as if it had been the Spirit of a man, and it would give me just as much pleasure to learn that our poor relations do continue as if I received a message from some far more highly developed being."

Mr. Wallace's book consists of three distinct treatises:—"An Answer to the Arguments of Hume, Lecky, and others, against Miracles," "The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural," and "A Defence of Modern Spiritualism."

The first of these essays, which was read eleven years ago before the Dialectical Society, and was printed for private circulation, is, in our opinion, a most complete refutation of Hume's argument. The great Scottish philosopher gives in the outset two definitions of miracles. He says that "a miracle is a violation of the laws of Nature," and again, "A miracle is a transgression of a law of Nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent." Mr. Wallace shows that these definitions are both bad, and that they in fact beg the question by the improper use of the terms "violation" and "transgression." He writes "the first definition assumes that we know all the laws of Nature; that the particular effect could not be produced by some unknown law of Nature overcoming the law we do know: it assumes, also, that if an invisible intelligent being held an apple suspended in the air, that act would violate the law of gravity. The second definition is not precise; it should be 'some invisible intelligent agent,' otherwise the action of galvanism or electricity when these agents were first discovered, and before they were ascertained to form part of the order of Nature, would answer accurately to this definition of a miracle." Mr. Wallace proposes instead the following:—"A miracle is 'any act or event necessarily implying the existence and agency of superhuman intelligence.'" He shows further that Hume deliberately and absolutely contradicts himself as to the amount and quality of the testimony in favour of miracles; and he points out the palpable fallacy of the argument, absolutely puerile, that "miracles connected with different religions destroy each other." Mr. Wallace next considers the modern argument, that if any number of men assert that they saw the stone lion on the top of Northumberland House come down to drink at the fountains in Trafalgar Square we should not believe them. Such arguments turn upon the assumed, but unprovable, proposition that "a large number of independent, honest, sane, and sensible witnesses can separately and repeatedly testify to a plain matter of fact which never happened at all."

The arguments of Mr. Lecky and Mr. Tylor are dealt with no less ably.

The second treatise is on the "Scientific Aspect of Spiritualism." One of its most important chapters consists of notes

of the author's own observations—his personal evidence. Some of the phenomena described are exceedingly remarkable, and the explanations proposed by physiologists utterly fail. We commend this portion especially to the attention of our readers. It is interesting to trace the opinions of a confirmed sceptic reluctantly, as it were, admitting first the facts, and then their explanation. On the other hand, it is difficult to conceive of such a man, in such a frame of mind, being imposed upon, either by his own feelings -which were working in the opposite direction—or by jugglery. We regret that we are unable to devote more space to this interesting volume.

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