

## Modern Sorcery.

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HAD someone stood under the crystal dome of the first great Exhibition, and foretold that in a quarter of a century after that inauguration of the millennium of common sense, England would incur the denunciations of the Hebrew prophets on a land of wizards and necromancers, and of those who "seek after familiar spirits," how merrily should we have laughed the absurd prediction to scorn! Not much more attention should we have paid to it even had we known that just three years before (in 1848) Miss Kate Fox, of Hydesville, State of New York, at the mature age of nine, had received monitions from the spirit world in the form of a hail-storm of raps on the walls and floors of her abode. It seemed, indeed, scarcely more likely that the juvenile "medium" should open a new dispensation for Europe and America, than that her contemporary little visionaries (or naughty little impostors, as the case may be) of La Salette should send half France on pious pilgrimage to the spot where they saw, or did not see, the Virgin. The lesson that great events may spring from small causes, and that the foolish things of the world not seldom confound the wise, is, however, by no means a new one for mankind, and we have now very plainly to reckon with Spiritualism as one of the prominent facts of the age. We will not take upon ourselves to guess how many disciples it may boast in America before these sheets pass to the press; a few millions, more or less, seem to count for little in the statements of its triumphant advocates; but here, in England, there are evidences enough of its flourishing condition. In nearly every company may be met at least one lady or gentleman who looks grave and uncomfortable when the subject is treated with levity; confesses to a conviction that there is "something in it;" and challenges disproof of miracles which she or he has actually beheld, heard, and handled. Not seldom are to be seen persons in a later stage of faith, easily recognisable by wild and vision-seeking eyes, and hands and feet in perpetual nervous agitation, who take no interest in other conversation, but eagerly pour out narratives, arguments, and appeals concerning Spiritualism whenever they can make an opportunity introducing the subject. Even the pulpit is no longer free from spiritualistic interpretations of religious mysteries; and the periodical press, which long confined itself to such attacks and refutations as those by Lord Amberley, in the *Fortnightly Review*, by an anonymous writer in the *New Quarterly Magazine*, and by a well-known physiologist in the *Quarterly Review* (October, 1871), has now opened its columns to two very remarkable papers in its defence, by Dr. Alfred Wallace (*Fortnightly*

*Review*, May and June, 1874). This double essay, indeed, by the distinguished traveller and fellow-originator with Dr. Darwin of the "Doctrine of Natural Selection," may be justly said to mark an epoch in the progress of the movement, and we can scarcely do wrong in taking it as the first serious challenge to us from competent authority, to give to the marvels of Spiritualism a fair and full investigation.

To many readers, indeed, we believe it has not unsuccessfully so appealed; causing them to hesitate as to whether they were justified in holding back any longer from enquiry, even while the process remains to them eminently distasteful. In view of such a dilemma it may be not inopportune to discuss briefly, *not* the Evidences of Spiritualism, but the preliminary question—Whether we are intellectually or morally bound to examine and weigh those evidences? Spiritualists, to do them justice, very candidly warn us that the task is no trivial one to be performed in a hurry. They scoff indignantly at the notion that five unsuccessful *séances* (in one of which Di Vernon appeared as an historical character, and, in another, Socrates with a straight nose and a disinclination to speak Greek) were sufficient to warrant Lord Amberley in pronouncing Spiritualism an imposition; and they bid us admire men who, like Dr. Sexton, are prepared to spend fifteen years in inquiry before the "needful evidence" to convince them is vouchsafed.\* To sift and collate the mass of evidence already produced; to cross-examine the witnesses, and weigh the value of their individual testimony; finally, to institute the requisite actual experiments at *séances* innumerable, would be to exceed the labours of Hercules, and repeat the weariness of the Tichborne trial. It is not too much to insist that excellent reason should be shown for the devotion of so much time and toil to such an end; nor need we be alarmed at the adoption by Spiritualists of the tone of high moral indignation against indolent non-inquirers, natural to all persons who think they are advocating some important discovery. Few amongst us who have reached middle life regret that we did not obey the solicitations of early friends to devote the years of our prime to investigations of the "discoveries" of St. John Long, Spurzheim, and Reichenbach,—to testing the therapeutic agencies of tar-water, "tractors," and brandy and salt; or nicely studying the successive solutions triumphantly propounded of the problem of human flight and of perpetual motion. We have borne with tolerable equanimity to be called hasty and prejudiced in these matters; and we may now endure the taunt of Spiritualists that we display indifference to truths possibly indefinitely valuable to the human race. *Some* limits there must needs be to the duty of inquiring into everything proposed to us as a subject of investigation; and those limits we may perhaps in the present case find in the nature of the subject, the methods of the investigation to be pursued, and the results which follow in the contingency of such inquiries proving successful.

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\* *Quarterly Review*, May 1874, p. 651.



The propensity which ethnologists attribute, especially to Touranian races, to seek after intercourse with inferior grades of spiritual existence, or (to give it the old name) the passion for Sorcery, is one which seems to flourish like the olive, the Phoenix of trees. Cut down, or burnt down, in one land or age, it springs up and branches forth afresh in the next; and while the main tendency of human thought seems constantly towards a stricter monotheism, a counter eddy of the current for ever fills and re-fills the invisible world with legions of imps, ghosts, and lying spirits, meaner and more puerile than human nature in its basest condition. Fifty years ago such delusions seemed to have ebbed out, and the few writers who dealt with them, spoke of them as things of the past; and assured us that, save in some Tartar tent in the East, or Gipsy one in the West, magic and incantations would be heard no more. The future historian of the England of to-day may truly relate that such incantations were more common in London in 1874 than they were in Palestine when the witch of Endor deluded Saul; or in Byzantium, when Santabaren restored his long lost son to the arms of the Emperor Basil the Macedonian.\*

What is the origin of this widespread and seemingly ineradicable propensity? Of course the answer which first suggests itself is, that it is the result of a most natural and blameless curiosity to learn the mysteries of that life into which we ourselves expect to pass through the gates of the tomb, and wherein it is our hope that the beloved ones who have left us have already entered. That in some cases this is the real spring of the desire, we will not question. But it is certain that the passion for Sorcery has far other springs beside, and that those who addict themselves to it most completely have neither ardent longings for immortality on their own account, nor common reverence for the dead. The special characteristic of the propensity, and of the practices to which it gives rise, is the *absence* of all the more delicate sentiments or spiritual aspirations of true human love, or true religion; and the presence, in their stead, of a brutal familiarity and irreverence as regards the dead, and of a gross materialism touching the experiences of communion, divine or human.

In this respect superstitious Sacerdotalism and Sorcery have in all ages borne some strong features of resemblance, even while mutually denouncing one another. Each of them disregards really spiritual gifts as needful to qualify Priest or Medium for intercourse with the unseen world; and relies upon rites and incantations, rather than upon such liftings-up of the human soul in longing and prayer, as should draw (if anything might draw) the Divine aid from heaven and human love back from the grave. The Sacerdotalist forgets the truth that, not by the help of

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\* This latter marvel is vouched for by Leo Grammaticus *in vita Basilii Imp.*, § 20. It was obviously accomplished by phantasmagoria and a magic lanthorn. See, for a most valuable explanation of a multitude of such wonders, Eusebe Salverte's *Sciences Occultes*.

ecclesiastical machinery, but by spiritual worship, must the Father of Spirits be approached; and the Spiritualist forgets that not by his machinery of raps and alphabets, but indeed "spiritually," must "spiritual things" (such as immortality), be discerned. It was well said of late by a profound thinker, that "if our belief in a future life could be verified by the senses, Heaven would cease to be a part of our religion, and become a branch of our geography." "Spiritualism" is indeed a singular misnomer, or, rather, it is a case of *lucus a non lucendo*, for there is no "spirituality" in the system at all. It is materialism, pure and simple, applied to a spiritual truth.

No one who entertains natural reverence and awe for the dead can contemplate the practices of spiritualists in their *séances* without pain and indignation, and only the example of unfeeling mediums and excited friends can have prompted many tender natures to sanction or endure them. In the midnight silence and stillness of our chambers, or in some calm evening solitude of hills and woods, it might be possible to bear the overwhelming emotions of awe; the rush of unspeakable tenderness, which must come upon us with the genuine conviction that the one who was "soul of our soul" has actually returned from the grave, and is near us once more, conveying to us (as his presence even in silence would surely do) the ineffable sense of love triumphant over death; and ready to receive from us the passionate assurances of never-forgotten regret and affection. Such a meeting of the spirits of the dead and the living would be among all life's solemn and affecting incidents the most profound and touching; the one which would move us to the very foundations of our being, and leave us evermore other men than we had been. Nay, we may further conceive that, bending over the dying, and speaking to them of the world into which they are about to enter, and where it is at least not impossible they may meet our long lost friend or parent, we might with faltering lips charge them to bear for us to the dead the message of unchanged fidelity. Such as these are forms of communion with the departed which involve no shock to our reverence, no sin against the holiness of buried affection. But what shall we say for the travesty and mockery thereof which goes on at every spiritualistic *séance*, amid the circumstances with which we are all too well acquainted; and as an alternate evening diversion to music, cards, or tea? In a drawing-room with gas raised or extinguished a score of times to suit the requirements of the medium, amid a circle of pleasantly excited ladies and gentlemen dabbling with alphabets, and slates, and *planchettes*, and ready to catch up every straw of "evidence" to be published or gossiped about on the morrow; in such a scene as this, and with the aid of a *psychagogue*, who can scarcely pronounce three common-place sentences without betraying his ignorance or his vulgarity,\* we are told that wives ask to com-

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\* Charles Sumner has just been brought back from the grave, and proves to have very quickly acquired that disregard of adverbs which is common among the weaker



municate with their dead husbands; parents are made to "feel" a lost child in their arms; and sons listen to words professedly spoken to them by their mother's souls. We do not need to be told that the communications thus made are utterly unworthy of the majesty of death, and are patently calculated rather to convince and entertain the audience by verifiable allusions to names and places, than to convey what—if it were truly the departed soul which had returned—would inevitably be the heart-wrung utterances of supreme love. Strange is it indeed that persons not otherwise devoid of tender and reverent feeling, when caught by the passion for this sorcery, permit themselves and the company they may happen to join; to find the entertainment of an evening in practice so revolting. Shall we give to it the name which it deserves, and say that the act of evoking the dead in such a manner, and for such a purpose, is *sacrilege*?

We have spoken of the objects and method of spiritualistic inquiry. Its results even more emphatically exonerate any man of sound and reverent mind from engaging in the task of its investigation. Dr. Wallace asks us to "look rather at the results produced by the evidence, than to the evidence itself," and we are thankful to accept his challenge. Never, we venture to say, may the principle of judging a tree by its fruits be more fairly applied. The grand and obvious result of Spiritualism is to afford us one more (real or fictitious) revelation of the state of departed souls, added to those which we possessed before. Let us consider it a little carefully, and observe what it really reveals.

The pictures of a future world which men have drawn in different lands and ages, all possess at least one claim to our interest. They afford us not indeed the faintest outlines of that Undiscovered Country beyond the bourne of death, but they reveal with unimpeachable, because unintentional sincerity, the innermost desires and fears of living men. On that "cloud" which receives every departing soul out of our sight, the magic-lantern of fancy casts its bright or gloomy imagery, and we need but watch the phantasms as they pass to know the hidden slides of the brain which produced them. The luscious gardens and Houris anticipated by the Moslem; the eternal repose of Nirvana sighed for by the Buddhist; the alternate warfare and wassail of Walhalla, for which the Norseman longed as the climax of glory and felicity, convey to us at a glance a livelier conception of the sensuality, the indolence, and the fierceness, of the respective races than could be acquired by elaborate studies of their manners and morality. In a similar way other characteristics are revealed by the terrors of Future Punishment,—which the lively Greek imagined to himself as the endless hopeless labours of an Ixion or a Sisyphus; the dignified Egyptian, as degradation to a bestial form; and the grim-souled Teuton of the Dark Ages, as eternal torture in a fiery

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brethren in America—and also, perhaps, among American mediums. He is reported to have said, "Oh, my friends, that you would ponder well that sacred injunction from spirit life, 'Lay up treasures in Heaven. You need not be told how to do this, you must act *unselfish*.'"

cave. Whatever has constituted man's highest pleasure on earth, *that* he has hoped to find again in heaven, and whatever he has most dreaded, *that* he has imagined as forming the retribution of guilt hereafter. From this point of view the Christian idea of a serene empyrean, wherein saints and archangels for ever cast their crowns before the great White Throne, and worship the thrice Holy One who sitteth thereon—affords singular evidence of the spiritual altitude to which those souls had attained to whom such an Apocalypse opened the supremest vision of beatitude. The attitude of Adoration—of sublime ecstatic rapture in the presence of perfect Holiness and Goodness, is assuredly the loftiest of which we have any conception, and to desire to enjoy and prolong it for ever can only genuinely pertain to a soul in which the love of Divine goodness is already the ruling passion. Wider thought and calmer reflection may teach that not alone on such mountain peaks of emotion, but on the plains of sacred service, should the faithful son of God desire to spend his immortality. But the modern American poet who has taken on himself to sneer at the notion of angels “loafing about the Throne,” has given curious evidence of his incompetence to understand what sublime passion it was which inspired that wondrous vision of Patmos.

Accepting then the Heaven and Hell of each creed as a natural test of the characteristic sentiments of its disciples, we turn somewhat inquisitively to discover what sort of a future existence the new faith of Spiritualism proposes to give us. Of course it affords every facility for such an inquiry; for, while other religions teach primarily concerning God, and secondly, and with much more reserve, about the life after death; Spiritualism teaches first, and at great length, about the future life, and frankly confesses that it has no light to throw on the problems of theology. What then, we ask, has Spiritualism told us respecting the state of the dead, or rather (as a sceptic must inwardly pose the question)—What do its narratives betray concerning the ideals of existence which Spiritualists have created out of the depth of their own consciousness? Do they prove an advance upon those of earlier creeds; or, on the contrary, do they mark a singular and deplorable retrogression towards the materialistic, the carnal, and the vulgar? Of course such an enquiry would be met at the outset by a Spiritualist with the vehement assertion that it was not he who devised what the spirits say of themselves, but the spirits who have lifted the veil of their own existence, for whose ignoble details he is in no way responsible. As, however, every Pagan and Buddhist, Mahometan and Parsee would say as much on his own behalf, and maintain that Elysium and Nirvana, Paradise and Gorotman, had each been revealed by such “mediums” as Orpheus and Buddha, Mahomet and Zoroaster, we must be content to pass by this argument and treat the phase of immortality discovered (or invented) by Mr. Hume and his friends, as no less significant of the moral ideals of Spiritualists and the general level of their aspirations.

Let it be granted cordially that there is nothing in the spiritualistic



Hades akin to the "Hell of the Red Hot Iron," the "Hell of the Little Child," the "Hell of the Burning Bonnet," and the "Hell of the Boiling Kettle" set forth with such ghastly circumstantiality in these latter days in Dr. Furness' *Books for the Young*, and in older times by numberless Calvinistic and Catholic divines. Theodore Parker went, indeed, so far as to say that "there was, at all events, one good service which the Spiritualists had done, *they had knocked the bottom out of Hell.*" Considering that the peculiarity of that terrible Pit has been generally understood to be that it is "bottomless," the achievement would seem rather difficult; but in any case we may candidly agree that on this side no exception need be taken against the spiritualist doctrine, save that perchance it fails to afford indication of any sense of how profound must be the mental anguish through which it is possible for a soul, stained with vice and cruelty, to recover its purity and peace. Spiritualist remorse seems almost as colourless as spiritualist beatitude is vulgar and inane.

On the other hand, when we ask to be informed (beyond the testimony of sweet smiles and assurances of felicity), of the nature of the happiness of virtuous departed souls, we are confronted with narratives much more nearly realizing our notion of humiliating penance and helplessness than of glory and freedom; of Purgatory rather than of Paradise. The dead, it seems, according to Spiritualism, have not (even after vast intervals of time) advanced one step nearer to the knowledge of those diviner truths for which the soul of man hungers, than they possessed while on earth. The Hope of Immortality is bound up, in religious minds, with the faith that though no actual vision can ever be vouchsafed of the all-pervading Spirit, yet that some sense beyond any which earthly life affords, of the presence and love of the Father will come to the soul when it has gone "home to God," and that Doubt will surely be left behind among the cerements of the grave. But Spiritualists cheerfully tell us such hopes are quite as delusive as those of the material crowns and harps of the New Jerusalem. "Nothing," says Dr. Wallace, "is more common than for religious people at *séances* to ask questions about God and Christ. In reply they never get more than opinions, or more frequently the statement that they, the spirits, have no more actual knowledge than they had on earth" (p. 805.) There are indeed, Dr. Wallace assures us, Catholic and Protestant, Mahommedan and Hindoo spirits, proving that the "mind with its myriad beliefs is not suddenly changed at death," nor, seemingly, for ages afterwards. Thus from our estimate of the Spiritualist state of future felicity, we are called on to make, at starting, the enormous deduction of everything resembling religious progress. The Spiritualist is perfectly content with an ideal Heaven wherein he will remain in just as much doubt or error as he happens to have entertained upon earth.

Further, as regards his personal and social affections, Does he at least image to himself that he will be nearer and more able to protect and bless his dear ones after death? Or that he will pass freely hither

and thither, doing service like a guardian angel to mankind, strengthening the weak, comforting the mourner, and awakening the conscience of the wicked? There is (so far as we have followed the literature of Spiritualism) no warrant for such a picture of beneficent activity. Good spirits, as well as bad—the souls of Plato and Fénelon, as well as those of the silliest and wickedest “twaddler” (as Dr. Wallace honestly describes many spirits *habitués* of *séances*)—have seemingly spent all the centuries since their demise humbly waiting to be called up by some, woman, or child precisely, as if they were lackeys ready to answer the downstairs’ bell. In many cases we are led to infer that the dead have been striving for years and ages to make themselves known, and now for the last quarter of a century have very clumsily and imperfectly succeeded in doing so. Let us conceive for a moment a grand and loving soul—a Shakespeare, or Jeremy Taylor, or Shelley, who once spoke to mankind in free and noble speech, a man among men, fumbling about the legs of tables, scratching like a dog at a door, and eagerly flying to obtain the services of an interpreter like Miss Fox, Mr. Hume, or Mrs. Guppy,—and we have surely invented a punishment and humiliation exceeding those of any purgatory hitherto invented. If Virtue itself has nothing better to hope for hereafter than such a destiny, we may well wish that the grave should prove indeed, after all, the last home of “earth’s mighty nation.”

Where Oblivion’s pall shall darkly fall  
On the dreamless sleep of annihilation.

In conclusion, Is it too much now to ask that we may be exonerated, once for all, from the charge of unreasonable prejudice, if we refuse to undertake the laborious inquiry into the marvels of Spiritualism which its advocates challenge,—an inquiry pursued by methods bordering upon the sacrilegious, and terminating, either in the exposure of a miserable delusion, or else in the stultification and abortion of man’s immortal Hope?

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