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# SPIRITUALISM A DELUSION:

*Its Fallacies Exposed.*

A CRITICISM FROM THE STANDPOINT OF SCIENCE  
AND IMPARTIAL OBSERVATION.

BY  
CHARLES WATTS.

LONDON:  
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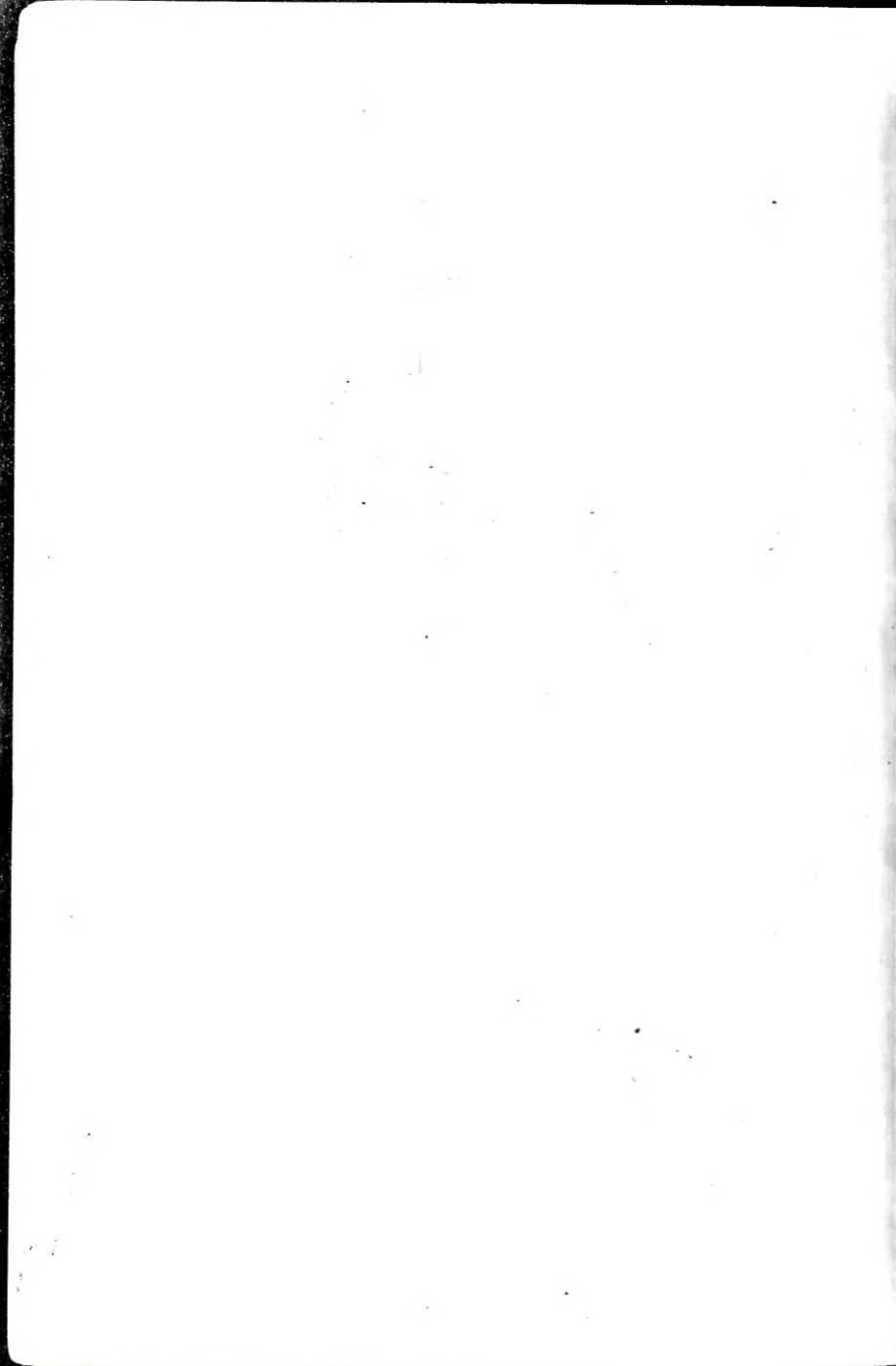
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1900



## SPIRITUALISM A DELUSION.

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A STUDY of the many mutations of human thought reveals the fact that persons who have neglected proper critical analysis find themselves ready victims to all kinds of superstition. And even some of those who, to a certain extent, do exercise their critical faculties are not exempt from yielding to superstitious allurements. Having devoted many years to the examination of the pretensions of Spiritualism, I have arrived at the conclusion that it is not based upon demonstrated facts, and that the belief that spirits survive death and reappear to the living is the result of emotional feelings uncontrolled by reason and unaccompanied by a fair critical analysis. I fully endorse the following statements of Professor Haeckel, which are to be found on page 313 of his latest work, *The Riddle of the Universe*. He there states :—

“ One of the most remarkable forms of superstition, which still takes a very active part in modern life, is Spiritism. It is a surprising and a lamentable fact that millions of educated people are still dominated by this dreary superstition ; even distinguished scientists are entangled in it.....It is a frequent boast of Spiritists that even eminent men of science defend their superstition. In Germany, A. Zöllner and Fechner are quoted as instances ; in England, Wallace and Crookes. The regrettable circumstance that physicists and biologists of such distinction have been led astray by Spiritism is accounted for, partly by their excess of imagination and defect of the critical faculty, and partly by the powerful influence of dogmas which a religious education imprinted on the brain in early youth. Moreover, it was precisely through the famous *séances* at Leipzig, in which

the physicists, Zöllner, Fechner, and Wilhelm Weber, were imposed on by the clever American conjurer, Slade, that the fraud of the latter was afterwards fully exposed ; he was discovered to be a common impostor."

Such testimony as this from a recognised scientist should cause inquirers to pause before giving their adherence to the Spiritualist theory, which I believe to be destitute of all trustworthy evidence.

Spiritualism, as its exponents allege, means the belief that, in addition to our material bodies, we possess what is called a spirit that lives after we are dead, and has the power, which it frequently exercises, of manifesting itself to those who still inhabit the earth. Now the first thing to consider is : What is a spirit ? I have frequently asked this question, but have never received a satisfactory answer. And yet it is indispensable that we should know what the term really means, for upon our possessing that knowledge will depend our ability to judge of the truth or falsehood of Spiritualism. The New Testament says : "A spirit hath not flesh and bones" (Luke xxiv. 39) ; but how such an existence can possess mobility and intelligence science and philosophy have failed to demonstrate. Spirit has also been described as "an intangible, invisible, intelligent power, capable of acting on, and influencing, physical organisms." Such a definition is a manifest absurdity ; for how that which is intangible and invisible can be seen, felt, and conversed with is beyond ordinary comprehension.

Another answer as to what is a spirit is that given by Sergeant Cox, who says : "Spirit is not, and cannot be, immaterial." The soul "is a refined Body" ; "its substance is vastly more refined than the thinnest gas" (Podmore's *Studies in Psychological Research*, pp. 35-6). If this were a correct definition of spirit, it would be, like all matter, subject to change and disorganisation, which, it is said, spirit is not. I should like to be informed how fine matter must become before it ceases to be subject to laws of integration and disintegration, distribution and re-distribution. If spirit is refined, sublimated matter, there is no possibility of immortality of any one form, *unless* at a certain stage of refinement matter

ceases to act in accordance with those laws which we now observe in all material operations ; which is an absurdity. The latest attempt to define Spiritualism has been made by Mr. G. H. Bibbings, editor of *Psyche*. According to him, Spiritualism is "the art or science of communing with ex-carnate intelligence." Now, this is not only no definition, but the use of the words "art or science" in the sentence is entirely out of place. J. S. Mill, in his *System of Logic* (vol. i., p. 2), says : "To define is to select from among all the properties of a thing those which shall be understood to be designated and declared by its name." The word "thing," here mentioned, represents what, in Mr. Bibbings's supposed definition, is called Spiritualism ; but there is no evidence that "art or science" is among its properties. Therefore, Mr. Bibbings's definition is logically defective. Mill further says that the properties "must be well known to us." The fact, however, is, that art and science are not known to us as properties of Spiritualism. Art is a term used to indicate the modification or improvement of things by human skill for a particular purpose. But how can art be applied to that which is immaterial ? And what purpose can it serve in connection with a spirit which has not nerves, muscles, flesh, nor bones ? What skill has Spiritualism manifested in dealing with mundane affairs ? Has it made known to the world a single fact that has not been discovered by other means ? Moreover, how can art be employed where the object upon which it could be exercised is absent ?

As to science, it is certainly unscientific to positively assert that there are other than natural causes operating in the universe. The function of science is to discover and classify facts, and to enable their importance to be recognised as being superior to mere speculation. Karl Pearson writes : "The scientific man has, above all things, to aim at self-elimination in his judgments, to provide an argument which is as true for each individual mind as for his own.....He will demand a high standard of reasoning, a clear insight into facts and their results" (*Grammar of Science*, pp. 7 and 11). Spiritualists have not hitherto done this, for their

arguments refer to the subjective, and are therefore true, if at all, to their own minds only, and not to others. All physical science is based upon verified facts, which is the basis of all scientific experiments ; it has nothing to do with conjectures of what is said to exist apart from the natural. Science does not teach that we are dual in this life and monistic in some other. If man has a continued existence after death, in which he manifests the capacity to think and to make his thoughts known, he must, judging from our knowledge of the requirements of mentality, be subject to the same laws of thought then as he is now. Hence to assume, as Spiritualists do, that man, when he has lost his material perceptive faculties, can retain the power of recognition, of thought, and of speech, is not science, but conjecture.

We are told that Spiritualism means "communing with ex-carnate intelligence." But what is that? Does it differ from carnate intelligence? If yes, in what particular? If no, is it reasonable to believe that intelligence, as at present understood, can be manifested when the conditions indispensable to such manifestations no longer exist? Moreover, is it scientific to allege that intelligent communications can be made when the organs necessary for such communications are destroyed? By the word "intelligence" I mean the totality of mental activity ; the ability to form and impart ideas. Of course, intelligence does not exist *per se*. It is not an entity, but a property or quality of a material organisation. It implies bodily senses and the power of perception. But this involves organism and environment, with action and interaction between the two. Besides, as we know intelligence, it is always associated with conscious beings, whose consciousness depends upon functional activity which is called life, which I regard as the result of the combination of different parts of matter. I define matter as being that which can be recognised by the senses. In the words of Professor Clifton, of Oxford, "it is that which occupies space and is cognised by the senses." Thomson and Tait allege that "the Naturalist may be content to know matter as that which can be



perceived by the senses, or as that which can be acted upon by, or can exert, force" (*Natural Philosophy*, vol. i., p. 161). Now, as life is necessary to intelligence, and organisation is requisite to life, it is legitimate to conclude that when life and organisation are gone intelligence will cease.

I do not deny that intelligence is shown at some of the so-called spiritual *séances*; but such intelligence is always associated with living beings. Whatever manifests intelligence must be something. If it is material, it is not separate from matter; and if it is not material, what is it? The verdict of science is, that force and matter are inseparable; that all the phenomena of nature are visible only in, and through, matter; that life is but a form or mode of motion; that thought, consciousness, the ego or self, are but resultants of force in matter; and that when the change called death ensues there is an end to that individual consciousness. Professor Tyndall, in his "Belfast Address," writes:—

"The mind runs along the line of thought which connects the phenomena, and from beginning to end finds no break in the chain. But when we endeavor to pass, by a similar process, from the physics of the brain to the phenomena of consciousness, we meet a problem which transcends any conceivable expansion of the powers we now possess. We may think over the subject again and again; it eludes all intellectual presentation."

Such is the teaching of science, and it appears to me to be based upon facts and to be justified by experience.

To maintain that the claims urged in favor of Spiritualism are fallacious, it is not necessary to impeach the honesty of all its professors. Many of them, no doubt, are sincere; but sincerity is no guarantee of the truth of the belief which is professed. Thousands of the victims of the lowest forms of superstition have been honest in their profession; that fact, however, does not establish the veracity of their belief. I frankly aver my opinion that the majority of Spiritualists are more liberal and progressive in their general ideas than orthodox Christians; still, that does not, in my judgment, rescue Spiritualism from the just charge of its being made up

of the most palpable fallacies that pervert the human mind at the present time. I do not refer to the various phenomena which are said to take place at professional *séances*, although much that I have seen at such gatherings appeared to me to be the result of fraud and trickery. Certain it is that I have never witnessed anything which was claimed to be done through spiritualistic agency that in any way convinced me of the existence of any power that was not material. What I take an exception to is the attempted explanation of what are termed "spiritualistic phenomena." I do not believe that spirits of persons—or, as I should term it, the *ego*—survive their death and manifest intelligence when functional activity has ceased, and the material organisation is destroyed. As Professor Huxley says: "The fact remains that, so far as observation and experiment go, they teach us that the psychical phenomena are dependent on the physical." If this be so, the theory of Spiritualism is false, and its fallacies should be evident to minds not captivated by this modern superstition.

I propose now to give my reasons for regarding the claims of Spiritualism as fallacies based upon emotional supremacy. My first allegation is that no one has yet given an intelligible definition of what a spirit is. Supposing it to exist, it is not a known property of matter; and, therefore, being a foreign element, it might prove dangerous by destroying all scientific certainty through interfering with what Professor Tyndall terms "the stability of natural law." Spiritualism must be governed either by natural law—in which case it would be material—or its acts in defiance of that law, which process would be contrary to knowledge and experience. Moreover, spirit, or what is better termed the *ego*, is not an entity separate from the body, but only the co-ordination of nerve-cells, an outcome of cerebral forces. According to modern scientists, the *ego* is not an independent existence which plays on the organs of the brain similar to a musician playing on the keys of a piano. Such an idea has no grounds in science; it belongs purely to the realms of imagination. The fact is that, so far as we know, consciousness does

not, and cannot, exist apart from nervous matter. Or as Spencer puts it: "We know nothing whatever of mind, save as exhibited by living beings." He also says: "Between the physical forces and the sensations there exists a correlation like that between the physical forces themselves.....and the one correlation, like the other, is not qualitative only, but quantitative." This view is ably maintained by Haeckel, Huxley, Leslie Stephen, and the French scientist, Ribot; and it has also been thus well expressed by George Henry Lewes:—

"Without a nervous system there could be nothing like what we know as feeling; without a brain or supreme nervous centre there could be little or nothing of that complex grouping of sensitive states which we know as emotion, thought, and will. But brain and nervous system are only parts of a living organism, and their functions are only specialisations of the general properties of that organism; separate the brain from the vital processes going on throughout the organism, and it is no instrument of consciousness. The Materialist asserts that the brain feels and thinks, as the stomach digests and the lungs breathe. I answer, Yes, but the stomach does not digest, the lungs do not breathe, except when these organs form parts of a living organism. An idea will arrest digestion, a little surplus of carbonic acid will arrest respiration, for the same reason that an arrested secretion will fill the mind with gloom, an excess of carbonic acid will stupefy it, a worm in the intestine will distract it, a plugged artery will obliterate it."\*

Such is the scientific view of the subject, and surely it is superior to that of the Spiritualists, whose alleged proof of the truth of their claims rests upon the subjective, which depends upon the abnormal condition of the nervous system. In such a state reason and judgment are deprived of a fair opportunity of exercising their legitimate functions.

Another fallacy of Spiritualism is its teaching that a person can manifest intelligence after life when the activity of the brain has ceased. Now, as scientific investigation has proved that the intellectual faculties, allied with a material organisation, are necessary for

\* *Fortnightly Review*, May, 1876.

the manifestations of intelligence, there is no obvious reason for supposing that in the absence of such organisation, and when the faculties are no longer in operation, any intelligence can be displayed. No truth is more certain than that too much alcohol, or an injury to the brain, impairs, and sometimes destroys, all consciousness and intelligence in man. Is the "spirit" susceptible of the evil influence of the one, and of the disastrous results of the other? If so, of what value is its controlling power? Further, if the body is used as an instrument by the so-called spirit for its operations, which are retarded and often entirely suspended when the brain is diseased, is it reasonable to suppose that these operations will continue when the instrument no longer exists? To postulate intelligence in some other state without living organisms is to assume possession of a miraculous power which Spiritualism does not do. The following scientific testimony, adduced by Dr. T. Cromwell in his work upon *The Soul and a Future Life*, fully corroborates my position, that intelligence and thought depend upon brain power :—

"Immaterialists have dwelt much on cases of considerable, though always partial, injury to the brain, with which no perceptible mental disorder was associated. But to this there are adequate replies. 'Many instances are on record in which extensive disease has occurred in *one* hemisphere (of the cerebrum) so as almost entirely to destroy it, without any obvious injury to the mental powers, or any interruption of the influence of the mind upon the body. But there is no case on record of any severe lesion of *both* hemispheres, in which morbid phenomena were not evident during life' (Carpenter's *Human Physiology*, p. 775). 'In every instance where there exists any corresponding lesion or disease on *each* side of the brain, there we are sure to find some express injury or impairment of the mental functions' (Sir H. Holland's *Chapters on Mental Physiology*, p. 184). 'There are no cases on record in which the mental faculties have remained undisturbed when the disorganisation has extended to *both* sides of the brain' (Solly on *The Human Brain*, p. 349). Dr. Maudsley, in his *Physiology of Mind*, p. 126, observes that he has come to the assured conviction that mind does not exist in nature apart from brain ;

all his experience of it is in connection with brain. Lawrence, in his *Lectures on Comparative Anatomy*, p. 112, says: 'I firmly believe that the various forms of insanity, that all the affections comprehended under the general term of mental derangement, are only evidences of cerebral affections, disordered manifestations of those organs whose healthy action produces the phenomena called mental—in short, symptoms of diseased brain.'

The fallacy of Spiritualism is further shown in the contradictory conjectures of its adherents as to what takes place in the much-talked-of spirit world. If spirits really communicate with the inhabitants of this planet, it is fair to suppose that some actual knowledge should obtain as to the customs observed in this spirit world. But such is not the case, for Spiritualists are not agreed among themselves as to the habits of the departed ones. Some of them assure us that in the spirit sphere the lower animals exist; that clothes are manufactured; that food is eaten, and that the sexual relations are continued; but other Spiritualists deny all these allegations, and assert that spirits of human beings only are to be found in the future state, and that none of the above mundane operations go on.

The absurdity of the spiritual theory appears evident when we consider the vain promises made by persons during their lives to the effect that, if Spiritualism be true, their friends should be assured beyond a doubt that it is so. According to my experience, no such promises have been kept; on the contrary, an unbroken silence has been preserved, although for many years I complied with all the required conditions which were said to be necessary to obtain the information. To say that spirits do appear to those who believe in them does not remove the difficulty, because such appearances cannot afford any evidence of the truth of Spiritualism to those who do not witness them. Neither does it remove the dilemma to urge that antagonistic minds prevent the manifestations. During years of honest inquiry I was in no way antagonistic. But supposing I was "a disturbing element," if "the spirits know all mortal consequents" they were aware that my desire was to learn the truth, and they would, therefore, have known

that their appearance would have convinced me of my error, and established at least some of the claims of Spiritualism. It is no answer to say that some spirits lack the power to appear, for the very persons who pledged their word to make themselves known to me are said to have frequently visited certain believers in Spiritualism. Besides, where it is alleged that such men as Shakespeare, Thomas Paine, and Colonel Ingersoll have returned to "say a few words," they are made to utter nonsense that in life they would have been ashamed of. The truth is, a living dead man is a contradiction, and we have yet to learn that one instance can be verified of the perpetual continuation of one living individual. A body in action must be present somewhere, but when it has disappeared in the grave and gone to dust it is no longer an organised body. In other words, a body, if it acts, must act where it is or where it is not. It cannot act where it is, in the grave, for there its functions have ceased; it cannot act elsewhere, because it is not there to act. This appears as self-evident as that the whole is greater than the part.

The most seductive fallacy associated with Spiritualism is what is termed the "evidential argument," or the "facts of testimony." It is urged that various persons who have seen certain supposed spiritual phenomena have given their testimony in favor of the reality of the manifestations they witnessed. The force of this allegation rests entirely upon what is meant by "spiritual phenomena." If they are the operation of a natural law, why call them spiritual? If they are something that is not natural, what are they? This point must be settled before the Spiritualistic claim can be fairly discussed. The important question is not only, Have certain phenomena occurred? but, What produced them?

The evidence given in favor of any theory should be supported either by consciousness, induction of reason, or personal testimony. Consciousness requires self-evident truths; but the alleged truths of Spiritualism are purely subjective, and are recognised only by the few, and then when their discerning faculties are in an

abnormal state. Hence we find that the impressions made upon the minds of Spiritualists are contradictory, which would not be the case if the supposed facts of Spiritualism were self-evident. Neither can the induction of reason be of any evidential value to Spiritualists, inasmuch as reason has failed to discover the nature of the assumed spirit, or to differentiate between it and the material existence. Testimony, therefore, is the only evidence left to support the claims of Spiritualism. Now, the evidential value of testimony depends not only upon the honesty, but also upon the ability, of those who testify. Men like Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, having seen any particular phenomenon, would be better able to form a sound judgment as to its nature and cause than, for instance, General Booth and the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes. These latter may be equally honest, but they do not possess the same ability to form an accurate opinion as to the cause or causes of the phenomenon they saw.

Nothing is more fallacious than to accept the truth of any theory, even upon the testimony of men who are well informed upon general subjects. Persons of more than average ability have testified that witchcraft is true, that the earth is flat, and that a personal Devil exists. Yet such views are discarded to-day, and are looked upon as errors and delusions of an ignorant and credulous past. There is, moreover, the fact to be remembered that all men are liable to be deceived, and in connection with Spiritualism the deception has been extensive. Thousands were deceived by the clever tricks of the Fox family, the Davenport brothers, and such mediums as Slade and "Dr." Monk. Spiritualists were in ecstasy in 1847 at the marvellous manifestations of the two Fox girls, but ultimately, through the confession of one who had been in their confidence, the whole affair was proved to be a deception. Both of the Davenport brothers, after making a little fortune, renounced Spiritualism, and one of them admitted that their performance was "the result of trickery and dexterity." The exposure of Slade and "Dr." Monk was so complete that the former had to leave the country, and the latter, after his imprisonment, retired



from public life.\* Even the two scientists, Wallace and Crookes, were victims of deception. Frank Podmore, M. A., in his *Studies in Psychical Research* (p. 93), shows how Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace was deluded by so-called spirit photography. He believed in its genuineness until Mrs. Sedgwick proved that the affair was a fraud. On page 111 of the same work Podmore points out that the mediums, Miss Cook and Mrs. Fay, with whom Mr. Crookes experimented, were detected in their trickery. It may be said that these instances of deception do not prove Spiritualism to be a fallacy, for the reason that dishonest people are found associated with all professions. Supposing this be so, that does not affect the object of my citing the above cases of delusion. That object is to indicate that even eminent men may be misled, and therefore their testimony is not sufficient to establish the truth of that to which they testify.

Spiritualists claim that the fact of one or two scientists accepting their theory is a proof of its truth. It does not, however, follow that, if a scientist be an authority in his special profession, therefore his opinion upon other questions is equally reliable. The real point at issue is this: Are scientific facts favorable or otherwise to the claims of Spiritualism? My contention is that they are not. Science is based upon demonstrated truths, discovered through the fullest examination of every subject within its province. As Spencer says:—

“Men of science subject the result of their inquiries to the most searching examination.....and conclusive testimony is to be found in the daily verification of scientific predictions.”

This is the very opposite to the method adopted by Spiritualists. Their theory is based upon emotional speculation, and their inquiry is limited by protective conditions. Dr. Helen Densmore, a prominent Spiritualist, admits that scientific conditions retard and destroy spiritual phenomena (*Light*, June 25, 1898). The fact is, to ascribe any effect to aught else but the

\* See the useful work, *The Supernatural*, written by Dr. Lionel A. Weatherly and J. M. Maskelyne.



natural is so absurd that Sir W. Crookes, in his Presidential Address at the British Association of 1898, candidly confessed that he put a naturalistic explanation upon Spiritualistic phenomena.

If the Spiritualists have a desire for the testimony of scientists, the following may interest them. The late Mr. Proctor, in his journal, *Knowledge* (October 1, 1888), published the following:—

“Professor Lester F. Ward says that, ‘So far as science can speak on the subject, consciousness persists as long as the organised brain, and no longer.’ Professor E. S. Morse writes: ‘I have never yet seen anything in the discoveries of science which would, in the slightest degree, support or strengthen a belief in immortality.’ Professor Tyndall, in a lecture on ‘Science and Man,’ in the Town Hall, Birmingham, in 1877, said: ‘But to return to the hypothesis of a human soul, offered as an explanation or simplification of a series of obscure phenomena. Adequate reflection shows that, instead of introducing light into our minds, it increases our darkness. You do not, in this case, explain the unknown in terms of the known, which is the method of science, but you explain the unknown in terms of the more unknown.’”

Professor Graham, in his *Creed of Science*, gives the following summary of modern scientific opinion as to a future life:—

“And now what is the scientific doctrine of the great theme of immortality? Is there any hope for man? In one word, No. For any such hope, if men must continue to indulge in it after hearing the scientific arguments, they must go elsewhere—to the theologian, the metaphysician, the mystic, the poet. These men, habitually dwelling in their several spheres of illusion and unreality, may find suggestions of the phantasy, which they persuade themselves are arguments in favor of a future life; the man of science, for his part, and the positive thinker, building on science, consider no proposition more certain than that the soul is mortal as well as the body which supported it, and of which it was merely the final flower and product.....Our modern physiologist has ascertained that thought is but a function of the brain and nerves. Why should it not perish with these?.....Why should it not collapse with the general break-up of the machinery? Why should it not cease when no longer supported by the various physical energies whose transformations

within the bodily machine alone made its existence possible?.....But Science, for her part, finds no grounds for the beliefs of theology or metaphysics in a future life—beliefs, moreover, which she regards as little comforting at the best.....Science, we think, has made out the dependence of our mind and present consciousness on bodily conditions, so far as to justify the conclusion that the dissolution of the body carries with it the dissolution of our present consciousness and memory, which are reared on the bodily basis” (pp. 148-9, 154, and 179).

The sentimental fallacy that Spiritualism is a kind of precautionary belief as to a future existence needs but a few words. Our opinions do not affect the reality in the slightest degree. If, when we are dead, we are to sleep for ever, we shall so sleep whatever our views thereon may be. Personally, I have no fear. To me death means the cessation of life and the anodyne of repose. In the beautiful language of Colonel Ingersoll: “Next to eternal joy, next to being for ever with those we love and those who have loved us—next to that, is to be wrapt in the dreamless drapery of eternal peace. Next to eternal life is eternal sleep. Upon the shadowy shore of death the sea of trouble casts no wave. Eyes that have been curtained by the everlasting dark will never know again the burning touch of tears. Lips touched by eternal silence will never speak again the broken words of grief. Hearts of dust do not break. The dead do not weep. Within the tomb no veiled and weeping sorrow sits, and in the rayless gloom is crouched no shuddering fear.”

## SOME CRITICISMS ANSWERED.

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SINCE the foregoing appeared in the columns of the *Freethinker*, a few weeks since, over a dozen letters have reached me complaining more or less of my "severe" treatment of the subject. Some of these correspondents avow their inability to understand my position, others state that I have not proved my allegations, and one writer in particular is exceedingly emphatic in reminding me that I overlook the great comfort that Spiritualism affords its believers in the assurance it gives them that the wrongs, shortcomings, and injustice of this life are more than compensated for in an existence "beyond the grave." All my critics say I have not proved that spirits do not exist, and that there is no future life. But as to the last charge, it is not my business to attempt to prove a negative. It is the duty of those who make statements to prove their affirmations.

When dealing with what appears to me to be a superstition, it is necessary, in my opinion, to be as severe as possible in exposing error, providing the severity is confined to the error, and not employed towards the persons who entertain it. While granting the right of all persons to hold what views they may deem right, nothing should preclude the condemnation of such views if they are proved to be erroneous. Personally, I regard Spiritualism as an unmistakable error, and, therefore, to me it is a duty to expose it in a fair and courteous manner. I do not, however, write disrespectfully of Spiritualists as a body, for some may be honest and sincere in their belief. I am reminded that we do not know what matter is in its essence. Granted; but we do know what the term connotes, and we are familiar with the properties, powers, and movements of what is understood by that term. The same cannot be said of what is called spirit. It is stated that I ignore the "facts" of metaphysics.

But what are those "facts"? Metaphysics Professor De Morgan defines as being "the science to which ignorance goes to learn its knowledge, and knowledge to learn its ignorance. On which all men agree that it is the key, but no two upon how it is to be put into the lock" (Thomson's *Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 15). Karl Pearson, in his *Grammar of Science*, writes: "Now, one of the idiosyncrasies of metaphysicians lies in this: that each metaphysician has his own system, which, to a large extent, excludes that of his predecessors and colleagues. Hence, we must conclude that metaphysics are either built on air or on quicksands—either they start from no foundation in fact at all, or the superstructure has been raised before a basis has been found in the accurate classification of facts..... The metaphysician is a poet, often a very great one; but, unfortunately, he is not known to be a poet, because he clothes his poetry in the language of apparent reason, and hence it follows that he is liable to be a dangerous member of the community" (pp. 20, 21).

Briefly stated, my reasons for rejecting the belief in Spiritualism are as follows: (1) No one has hitherto defined what a spirit is; (2) it has not been proved that what is termed matter is incapable of producing all possible phenomena; (3) that wherever we find intelligence manifested it is always associated with a material organisation; (4) that consciousness depends upon functional activity which is called life, and that experience proves, when such activity ceases, all consciousness ends; (5) that, brain being necessary to thought, science has demonstrated that in the human organisation a diseased brain is followed by impaired thought, and that, without brain, thinking cannot take place; (6) that the personal testimony which has been given in favor of supposed spiritualistic manifestations is inconclusive, inasmuch as many of those who are said to have beheld the phenomena have been deceived as to the cause or causes of what they saw. This was the case even with such eminent scientists as Alfred Russel Wallace and Professor Crookes.

The following excerpt from Mr. B. F. Underwood's

suggestive little work, *Spiritualism from a Materialistic Standpoint*, shows the fallacy of relying upon alleged communications from "the spirit world":—

"One spirit will tell you one thing, and another something diametrically opposite; and this in regard to matters of fact, and not merely concerning speculative points. For instance, it is still debated among Spiritualists and mediums whether there are brutes in the spirit world, because some spirits say yes, while others as positively say no. And yet we are on the very 'boundaries of another world,' and in daily conversation with its inhabitants.....Thousands of pretended spirits, claiming to be in many cases relatives and friends, say that all the animals of earth continue to exist, as individuals, after death, with dispositions and proclivities such as they possessed on earth—that they see them every day just as they see the spirits of their own race. Other thousands, just as intelligent, and apparently with equal sincerity, say that there are no brutes in the spirit world. Some of our pretended invisible friends and teachers tell us that, animals losing their identity at death, their spirits are resolved into 'elementary primates,' and afford food for the spirits of human beings. Other spirits solemnly declare 'through the mediums' that no food is used or needed in that invisible world. I once heard a distinguished trance speaker say that the relation of the sexes is continued after death; that human beings are there begotten, and ushered into existence, and pass through the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and manhood and womanhood, as they do here. Other communications—one from Socrates, and another from Lord Bacon, among the many—assure me that the notion of births in the world of spirits is false, and must have come from some lying, mischievous spirits. Appealing to men and women of common sense, I ask: Is it not evident that these utterances and messages about the land of spirits are simply the vagaries of the mediums' own brains?" (pp. 12, 13).

A prominent error with Spiritualists is in confounding belief with knowledge. There is a marked difference between the two. It is quite true we may, and do, have faith in that of which we have no real or actual knowledge, for we are compelled to exercise such faith in every-day life upon numerous topics. The point to be remembered is that, if we are judicial or rational, we

shall be careful that our belief is not opposed to knowledge. A man states that he has seen what he terms spiritualistic manifestations, and he brings a dozen persons to verify his statement. What are we to think in such a case? A moment's reflection may show that the testimony as to what occurred is unimpeachable, while the conclusion as to its cause is perfectly erroneous. The event which he describes may have happened, but how is it to be proved that it was caused by spirits? The forces in operation in its production may be to him unknown, still his evidence could simply vouch for the phenomenon; and the cause must be a matter for inquiry. No sensible person will deny that it is possible we may be unable to explain the cause of many phenomena we see, but that does not justify Spiritualists in assuming that their explanation is the true one. My objection to Spiritualism is that its assumptions have no foundation in fact. Its entire basis rests upon imagination and uncontrolled emotion. If, in their attempt to explain certain mysteries, Spiritualists adopt a method opposed to science and our present knowledge of natural law, we are perfectly justified in asking upon what grounds they do so.

I have been asked to answer the following questions : "Is mind higher than matter, and does it not control matter?" "If the organisation of brain be the cause of mind, is the organisation of the brain less complete in an elephant than it is in man?" I answer that mind is not higher than, but a part of, matter, and that its manifestations are unknown where matter is not. Mind does not always control matter, as in cases of epilepsy, paralysis, and intoxication. *Per se*, the organisation of the brain in an elephant is as complete as in man, but the structure is different. Haeckel, in his *History of Creation*, writes : "Between the most highly-developed animal souls and the lowest-developed human souls there exists only a small quantitative, but no qualitative, difference; and this difference is much less than the difference between the lowest and the highest human souls, or than the difference between the lowest and the highest animal souls" (vol. ii., p. 362). The following, from Edward Clodd's *Pioneers of*

*Evolution*, has also a bearing upon the question : "The science of Comparative Psychology declares that the evidence of his [man's] immortality is neither stronger nor weaker than the evidence of the immortality of the lower animals" (p. 35).

Recognising the fact that from the time when life first appeared on this globe until now progress appears to have been the order of nature, Spiritualists urge it is reasonable to suppose that the same law will continue its operations in some future world. This is another groundless assumption. How, in the name of common sense, can it be proved that because progress goes on in the material world, about the existence of which there can be no doubt, similar progress will be continued in a world of which we know nothing? It is thoroughly absurd to assert that a future existence in a spirit world is proved by the fact that development has been always taking place in the organic kingdom. First came animals low in the scale, then of higher and higher type, and so on up to man. Why, then, it is asked, may not man pass at death into a still higher condition? Now the merest tyro in logic can recognise that there is no analogy whatever in the two cases. The higher animals are not the lower in another stage, but an improvement upon them, a new individuality. The only argument that could logically be drawn from the development theory on this point is that, after man, beings of a still higher order might make their appearance, but then they would no more be individual men of a previous age than we are the Iguanodons of the "age of reptiles." Besides, all the changes that we know of in the organic kingdom have taken place upon the earth, whereas the condition which believers in a future life contend for is to be in some far-off land of shadows occupied by what are termed "disembodied spirits."

Equally fallacious is it to allege that "eternal justice" demands that the wrongs and inequalities of this life should be compensated for in some future state of existence. Mr. Leslie Stephen, in his *Science of Ethics*, says : "Justice, in a sense, means reasonableness." But is it reasonable to suppose that injustice here will be followed by justice hereafter? Upon what



grounds does such a notion rest? Moreover, does not the fact that injustice obtains here destroy the theory of "eternal justice"? Further, *why* should we have to suffer wrong here which is to be compensated for in some other life? Is it not more reasonable to believe that the evils endured on earth are largely the result of man's own ignorance, indifference, and false conceptions of the duties of life? Some Spiritualists contend that, in accordance with the law of "fitness of things," each person reaps what he has sown, and therefore, if there is no opportunity for such reaping here, an opportunity will be given for the operation hereafter. This is pure conjecture. Besides, it is not strictly accurate to allege that always "each reaps exactly as he has sown." This theory does not accord with the law of heredity and that of cause and effect. For instance, an individual may be sober, chaste, and honorable in the morning of his life, and yet subsequently be broken down physically and morally, and that not from his own fault, but in consequence of the wrong-doing of his parents prior to his birth. And yet those very parents themselves might never have experienced any serious effects through their own bad actions.

The Spiritualists' paper, *Light*, in its issue of November 17, while admitting that "Mr. Watts has fairly well stated the popular opinion," says that his remarks upon Henry Slade "are in no particular accurate." My answer to this is, that I gave as my authorities Professor Haeckel, Frank Podmore, M.A., and J. M. Maskelyne. See pages 3 and 14 of this pamphlet.



## APPENDIX.

### ORIGIN OF THE BELIEF IN A FUTURE LIFE.

PROFESSOR HAECKEL says in his *Riddle of the Universe*: "The regrettable circumstance that physicists and biologists of such distinction [as Wallace and Crookes] have been led astray by Spiritism is accounted for, partly by their excess of imagination and defect of critical faculty, and partly by the powerful influence of dogmas which a religious education imprinted on the brain in early youth" (p. 313).

Professor Graham, in his *Creed of Science*, remarks: "A strange and extravagant fancy that arose one day in the breast of one more aspiring than the rest became soon afterwards a wish; the wish became a fixed idea that drew around itself vain and spurious arguments in its favor; and at length the fancy, the wish, the idea, was erected into an established doctrine of belief. Such, in sum, is the natural history of the famous dogma of a future life" (p. 160).

Mrs. Annie Besant, in her *Roots of Christianity*, states: "It is noteworthy that all the great religions have their birthplace in the East. And since religion is ever born of wonder and of terror, it is not strange that in the Orient religions should be cradled. For there Nature is more grandiose and more awe-inspiring than she is with us; it is the region of earthquakes and volcanoes, of whirlwinds and of floods. There a region smiling in the morning is desolate at nightfall, and all man's works lie at the mercy of mighty forces which he is utterly incompetent to control. What wonder, then, that primitive oriental man, seeing and feeling around him the working of mighty powers, to him incomprehensible, scattering weal and woe, bowed before them in awe and worship, trusting that his submission might mollify, that his sacrifices might appease? The East is the region of poetry and imagination, and therefore of religion; for not until poetry and imagination are bridled by science and instructed by knowledge can they rise out of religion into truth" (p. 5).

### BODILY CHANGES AND IMMORTALITY.

A plausible argument urged in favor of the theory of a future life is that, although the material of the body changes several times during life, memory continues. I reply, that a scar which remains on the body for years, retaining the same form and appearance, seems to show that the particles of the body which leave are replaced by others which serve the same purpose.

Robert Cooper put the case thus: "If it follows, because the particles of matter which compose the brain change during a certain period, that therefore all power of thought or volition is obliterated, it must also be inferred, by the same rule, that, because the particles of matter which compose the muscles change in a given time, that therefore all power of locomotion is lost; or because the particles which compose the stomach change, that consequently all power of digestion would be gone. But is

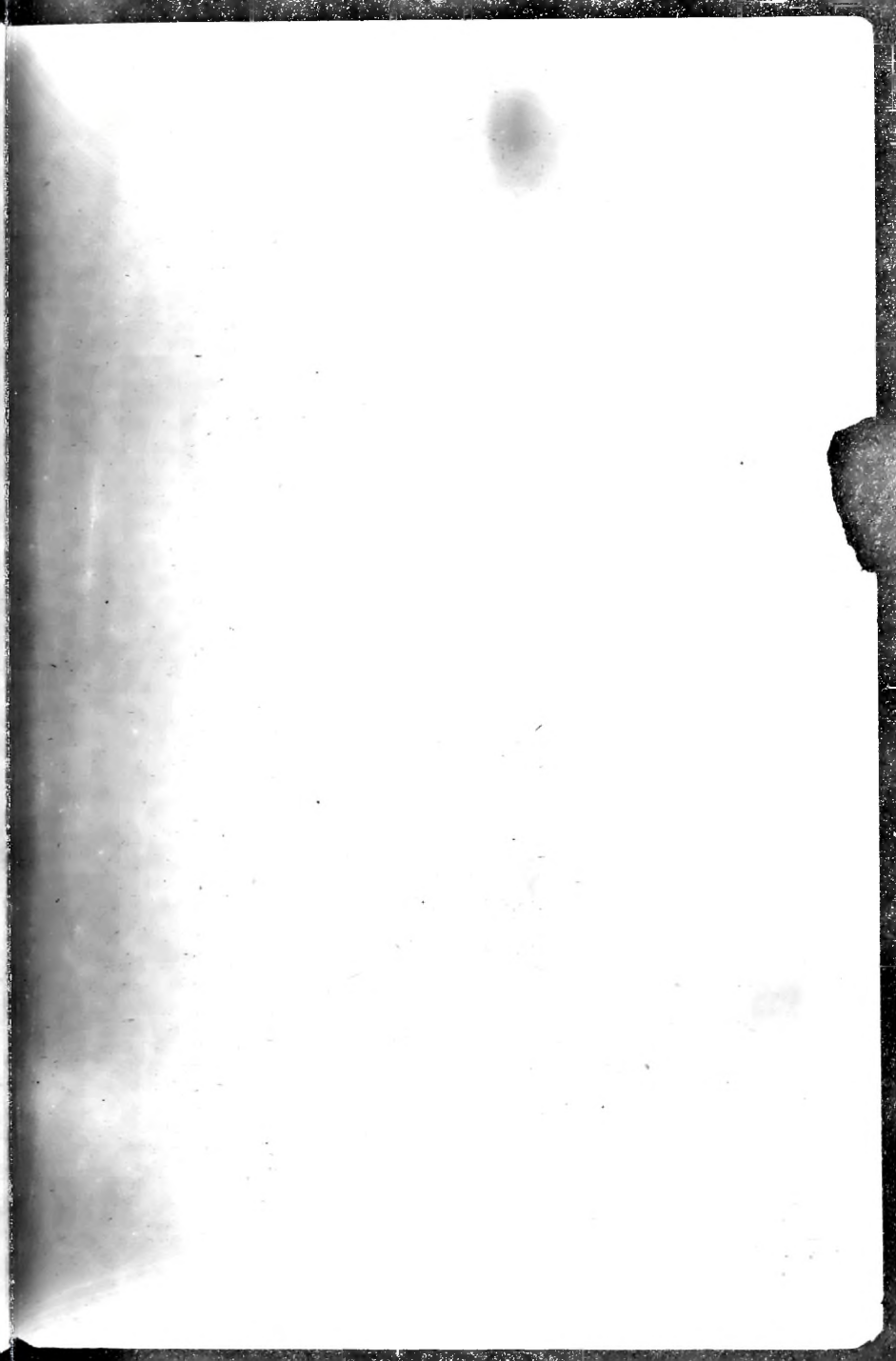
such the fact? Do we cease walking or digesting at the end of seven years? I know that I can walk or digest as well at this moment as I could seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years ago—probably better. It is clearly a fallacy, therefore, to conclude that, because an entire change occurs in the substance composing any given faculty, that the *function* of that faculty is destroyed. It is an acknowledged fact in physiological and medical science that the particles of matter gradually admitted into the system *insensibly acquire the same properties as those thrown off*. If this was not the case, man would suffer in the space of a few years an entire deprivation, not merely of his mental powers, but of all the senses of the body. He would lose his sight, hearing, speech, feeling, consciousness—in a word, he would literally die out the first seven years. If it follows that the thinking faculty must be immaterial and independent because we do not lose the use of it, it is equally deducible that the eye, ear, tongue, nerves, palate, hands, fingers, legs, etc., are 'immaterial,' because we do not lose the use of *them*!"

#### LIFE IS THE RESULT OF ORGANISATION.

Professor Huxley supports this view. He wrote: "It will be observed that the existence of the matter of life depends on the pre-existence of certain compounds—namely, carbonic acid, water, and ammonia. Withdraw any one of these three from the world, and all vital phenomena come to an end. They are related to the protoplasm of the plant, as the protoplasm of the plant is to that of the animal. Carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen are all lifeless bodies. Of these, carbon and oxygen unite in certain proportions, and under certain conditions, to give rise to carbonic acid; hydrogen and oxygen produce water; nitrogen and hydrogen give rise to ammonia. These new compounds, like the elementary bodies of which they are composed, are lifeless. But when they are brought together under certain conditions they give rise to the still more complex body, protoplasm, and this protoplasm exhibits the phenomena of life" (*Physical Basis of Life, Lay Sermons*, p. 135).

#### THE CATERPILLAR.

The case of the caterpillar is frequently given as an illustration of changes from a lower to a higher state of existence. But the caterpillar becomes transformed into the butterfly before our eyes. The butterfly is an improvement upon the caterpillar in point of organisation, but in every other respect they are both similar. Both are material, and each is liable to destruction and decay. The spirit, however, that is supposed to be evolved from the human form at death is said to be immaterial and immortal, and, therefore, totally unlike that material organisation from which it has escaped. The change is not observed. The body dies, and the elements of which it was composed pass into other forms—that is all that we see and all that we know. Beyond this everything is mere conjecture and vague speculation.



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