

ON THE ATTITUDE OF MEN OF SCIENCE
TOWARDS THE INVESTIGATORS OF
SPIRITUALISM.

BY PROF. A. R. WALLACE, F.R.G.S., F.R.Z.S., AND PRES. ETH.
SOC., F.E.S., ETC.

It is now generally admitted that all original investigation of Nature is useful and honorable; that the man who devotes himself to the observation of natural phenomena, of however obscure and apparently uninteresting a nature, who conducts experiments calculated to throw light upon their causes, and who fully and accurately records such observations and experiments, gains for himself a place in the roll of scientific investigators. But, strange to say, in order to merit this honorable position, he must strictly limit his inquiries within certain bounds. For should he have chanced to meet with any of those singular cases in which an individual exhibits exalted and exceptional mental capacities, appearing like the development of new senses, or those still more extraordinary phenomena which seem to prove the existence of intelligent beings, invisible and intangible to most men, yet capable, under certain conditions, of making their presence known to us; and if he devote his best energies to the study of these strange and exceptional cases, and, after long-continued inquiry and careful experiment, arrive at the conclusion that they are veritable realities, and, as such, of the highest importance to his fellow-men, — instead of being welcomed as a discoverer, or rewarded as a scientific investigator, he finds himself set down as credulous and superstitious, if not openly accused of falsehood and imposture, and his careful and oft-repeated experiments ignored, as not worth a moment's consideration.

That the public at large should thus deal with new and unpopular inquiries is not to be wondered at; but that philosophers and men of science should act in the same unscientific and unphilosophical spirit is truly extraordinary. While

proclaiming loudly that the only way to acquire knowledge is by observation of facts, by experiment, and by the formation of provisional hypotheses to serve as the basis for further experiment and more extended observation, they have yet, for many years, refused to accept any facts or experiments which go to prove the existence of recondite powers in the human mind, or the action of minds not in a visible body. They have ridiculed the idea of any effects being produced by the latter cause, and have repudiated as imposture or delusion all those which appear due to the former. To show that this is really the case, I have only to quote the names of such men as Dr. Esdaile, Dr. Elliotson, Dr. Lee, Dr. Ashburner, Dr. Gregory, Dr. Reichenbach, Dr. Herbert Mayo, Dr. Haddock, Mr. H. G. Atkinson, Miss Martineau, Prof. De Morgan, William Howitt, Prof. Hare, Prof. Bush, Judge Edmonds, Robert Dale Owen, and a host of others, who, for more than twenty years, have published detailed observations and experiments, which corroborate each other in a variety of details, and agree with many facts recorded throughout history; but which observations and experiments are all ignored or denied. There has never yet been a work written in this country, which has fairly grappled with the facts addressed. It has never yet been shown, why, *à priori*, they may not be true; it has never yet been explained, how, if not true, we are to account for the vast mass of direct testimony to them. The declaration so often made or implied, that facts witnessed thousands of times by honest and intelligent men, and thousands of times carefully examined to detect fraud or delusion which has never been discovered, can not exist, because they imply a subversion of the laws of Nature, is a most weak and illogical objection, since all we know of the laws of Nature is derived from the observation of facts. No fact can possibly subvert the laws of Nature; and to declare that it does so is to declare that we have exhausted Nature, and know all her laws.

In the history of human progress, we look back in vain for a case parallel to the present one, in which the professed teachers of science have been right. The time-honored names of Galileo, Harvey, and Jenner, are associated with the record

of a blind opposition to new and important truths. Franklin and Young were laughed and sneered at for discoveries which seemed wild and absurd to their scientific contemporaries. Nearer to our own day, painless operations during mesmeric trance were again and again denounced as imposture; and the various phenomena of mesmerism, as due to collusion and fraud: yet both are now universally acknowledged to be genuine phenomena. Even such a question of pure science as the evidence of the antiquity of man has met with similar treatment till quite recently. Papers by good observers, recording facts since verified, were rejected by our scientific societies, as too absurd for publication; and careful researches now proved to be accurate were ignored, merely because they were opposed to the general belief of geologists.

It appears, then, that men of science are at least consistent in treating the phenomena of Spiritualism with contempt and derision. They have always done so with new and important discoveries; and, in every case in which the evidence has been even a tenth part of that now accumulated in favor of the phenomena of Spiritualism, they have *always been in the wrong*. It is, nevertheless, a curious psychological fact, that they do not learn by experience to detect a truth when it comes before them, or take any heed of the warnings of their greatest men against preconceived opinions as to what may, or may not, be true. Thus Humboldt declares, that "a presumptuous skepticism, which rejects facts without examination of their truth, is, in some respects, more injurious than an unquestioning incredulity." Sir Humphry Davy warns them, that "one good experiment is of more value than the ingenuity of a brain like Newton's. Facts are more useful when they contradict, than when they support, received theories." And Sir John Herschel says, that "the perfect observer in any department of Nature will have his eyes open for any occurrence, *which, according to received theories, ought not to happen*; for these are the facts which serve as clues to new discoveries." Yet in the present day, when so many things deemed absurd and impossible a few years ago have become every-day occurrences, and in direct opposition to the spirit of the advice of their most eminent teachers, a body of new

and most remarkable phenomena is ignored or derided without examination, merely because, *according to received theories, such phenomena ought not to happen.*

The day will assuredly come when this will be quoted as the most striking instance on record of blind prejudice and unreasoning credulity.

“So far as the phenomena go, I readily admit, with Prof. De Morgan, ‘that I have both seen and heard, in a manner which would make unbelief impossible, things called spiritual, which can not be taken by a rational being to be capable of explanation by imposture, coincidence, or mistake. So far, I feel the ground firm under me; but, when it comes to what is the cause of these phenomena, I find I can not adopt any explanation which has yet been suggested. . . . The physical explanations which I have seen are easy, but miserably insufficient. The spiritual hypothesis is sufficient, but ponderously difficult.’

“I quite agree with this. That certain physical phenomena, such as the translation of material substances, and the production of sounds resembling electric discharges, occur under circumstances in which they can not be explained by any physical law at present known, is a fact of which I am as certain as I am of the most elementary fact in chemistry.” — PROF. WILLIAM CROOKES.

ACCURATE RECORDS OF SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATIONS.

BY WILLIAM H. HARRISON, EDITOR “LONDON SPIRITUALIST.”

THOSE scientific investigators on this side of the Atlantic, who have acquired the knowledge that Spiritualism is true, at once wish to set to work to classify the details of the phenomena, so as to establish laws and principles. As Spiritualism is only just beginning to get an extended hold in England, the periodicals and literature of America are examined by such inquirers, not so much for the communications given by spirits, as for accurate statements of the earthly conditions under which the messages were obtained. At present, the