

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Having been named by several of your correspondents as one of the scientific men who believe in spiritualism, you will perhaps allow me to state briefly what amount of evidence has forced the belief upon me. I began the investigation about eight years ago, and I esteem it a fortunate thing that at that time the more marvellous phenomena were far less common and less accessible than they are now, because I was led to experiment largely at my own house, and among friends whom I could trust, and was able to establish to my own satisfaction, by means of a great variety of tests, the occurrence of sounds and movements not traceable to any known or conceivable physical cause. Having thus become thoroughly familiar with these undoubtedly genuine phenomena, I was able to compare them with the more powerful manifestations of several public mediums, and to recognize an identity of cause in both by means of a number of minute but highly characteristic resemblances. I was also able, by patient observation, to obtain tests of the reality of some of the more curious phenomena which appeared at the time, and still appear to me, to be conclusive. To go into details as to those experiences would require a volume, but I may, perhaps, be permitted briefly to describe one, from notes kept at the time, because it serves as an example of the complete security against deception which often occurs to the patient observer without seeking for it.

A lady who had seen nothing of the phenomena asked me and my sister to accompany her to a well-known public medium. We went, and had a sitting alone in the bright light of a summer's day. After a number of the usual raps and movements our lady friend asked if the name of the deceased person she was desirous of communicating with could be spelt out. On receiving an answer in the affirmative, the lady pointed successively to the letters of a printed alphabet while I wrote down those at which three affirmative raps occurred. Neither I nor my sister knew the name the lady wished for, nor even the names of any of her deceased relatives; her own name had not been mentioned, and she had never been near the medium before. The following is exactly what happened, except that I alter the surnames, which was a very unusual one, having no authority to publish it. The letters I wrote down were of the following kind:—y n r e h n o s p m o h t. After the first three—y n r—had been taken down, my friend said, "This is nonsense, we had better begin again." Just then her pencil was at e, and raps came, when a thought struck me (having read of, but never witnessed a similar occurrence) and I said "Please go on, I think I see what is meant." When the spelling was finished I handed the paper to her, but she could see no meaning in it till I divided it as the first b, and asked her to read each portion backwards, when to her intense astonishment the name "Henry Thompson" came out, that of a deceased son of whom she had wished to hear, correct in every letter. Just about that time I had been hearing *ad nauseam* of the superhuman acuteness of mediums who detect the letters of the name the deluded visitors expect, notwithstanding all their care to pass too pencil over the letters with perfect regularity. This experience, however (for the substantial accuracy of which as above narrated I vouch), was and is, to my mind, a complete disproof of every explanation yet given of the means by which the names of deceased persons are rapped out. Of course, I do not expect any sceptic, whether scientific or unscientific, to accept such facts, of which I could give many, on my testimony, but neither must they expect me, nor the thousands of intelligent men to whom equally conclusive tests have occurred, to accept their short and easy methods of explaining them.

If I am not occupying too much of your valuable space I should like to make a few remarks on the misconceptions of many scientific men as to the nature of this inquiry, taking the letters of your correspondent Mr. Dircks as an example. In the first place, he seems to think that it is an argument against the facts being genuine that they cannot all be produced and exhibited at will; and another argument against them, that they cannot be explained by any known laws. But neither can catalepsy, the fall of meteoric stones, nor hydrophobia be produced at will; yet these are all facts, and none the less so that the first is sometimes initiated, the second was once denied, and the symptoms of the third are often greatly exaggerated, while none of them are yet brought under the domain of strict science; yet no one would make this an argument for refusing to investigate these subjects. Again, I should not have expected a scientific man to state, as a reason for not examining it, that spiritualism "is opposed to every known natural law, especially the law of gravity," and that it "sets chymistry, human physiology, and mechanics at open defiance," when the facts simply are that the phenomena, if true, depend upon a cause or causes which can overcome or counteract the action of these several forces, just as some of these forces often counteract or overcome others; and this should surely be a strong inducement to a man of science to investigate the subject.

While not laying any claim myself to the title of "a really scientific man," there are some who deserve that epithet who have not yet been mentioned by your correspondents as at the same time spiritualists. Such I consider the late Dr. Robert Chambers, as well as Dr. Elliotson, Professor William Gregory, of Edinburgh; and Professor Hare, of Philadelphia—all unfortunately deceased; while Dr. Gully, of Malvern, as a scientific physician, and Judge Edmonds, one of the best American lawyers, have had the most ample means of investigation; yet all these not only were convinced of the reality of the most marvellous facts, but also accepted the theory of modern spiritualism as the only one which would embrace and account for the facts. I am also acquainted with a living physiologist of high rank as an original investigator, who is an equally firm believer.

In conclusion I may say that, although I have heard a great many accusations of imposture, I have never detected it myself; and, although a large proportion of the more extraordinary phenomena are such, that, if impostures, they could only be performed by means of ingenious apparatus or machinery, none has ever been discovered. I consider it no exaggeration to say, that the main facts are now as well established and as easily verifiable as any of the more exceptional phenomena of nature which are not yet reduced to law. They have a most important bearing on the interpretation of history, which is full of narratives of similar facts, and on the nature of life and intellect, on which physical science throws a very feeble and uncertain light; and it is my firm and deliberate belief that every branch of philosophy must suffer till they are honestly and seriously investigated, and dealt with as constituting an essential portion of the phenomena of human nature.

I am, Sir, yours obediently,

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—No doubt Mr. Dircks is right in saying that the (avowed) point in his former letter to you has been missed, or ignored, by his opponents. But is not this circumstance mainly due to the facts that Mr. Dircks indulged in so many observations quite irrelevant to his avowed point, and was so gratuitously and profusely abusive, and so illogical?

The question he professed to answer was this,—Is spiritualism worthy the attention of scientific men? In the first paragraph of his former letter he denounces it as "legerdemain," a charge which he does not attempt to prove, but on the strength of which, *inter alios*, he decides his question in the negative. If this be not a case of *petitio principii*, I am ignorant of the meaning of the term.

The only real and *bona fide* reason that he gives for deciding his question in the negative is that spiritualism has done nothing for "useful arts." Assuming for the nonce that this is true, I ask, parenthetically, is the promotion of so-called useful arts the only or even the highest end of our existence here? I am afraid this reason, so far as it is true, must be admitted as a valid one why scientific men, as such, should not be expected to interest themselves in the subject. It does not specially belong to their department of human knowledge.

The rest of his argument is based on a tissue of false statements. Confining myself to his last letter,—it is not true that "no really scientific man believes in spiritualism." Many do, both in England and abroad, though in comparatively small numbers. The "really scientific man" is he who takes facts for his basis and deduces laws from them, not he who condemns *a priori* all facts not in accordance with his previous knowledge of laws and his preconceived theories.

It is not true that "spiritualism relates to the supernatural," nor that it is "opposed to every known law," nor even "to the law of gravity." The phenomena of spiritualism are just as subject to natural laws as any other phenomena, though we are as yet very imperfectly acquainted with those laws, spiritualism being still in its infancy; and though the phenomena may often seem to be at variance with known natural laws, this proves nothing. The circulation of the blood, the revolution of the earth round the sun, &c., *ad infinitum*, are all at variance with the natural laws known—not suspected, but known, as positively as anything that we now know is known—at the time of their discovery. As to the law of gravity, if I raise an apple from the ground, or with a magnet make a needle leap from the table, I oppose the laws of gravity just as much as the power which at sea raises tables, &c., in the air opposes those laws.

Nor is it necessarily true that "chymistry, human physiology, and mechanics are set at open defiance" by Mr. Home's carrying fire in his hand, or by his elongations and elevations. It may be that our knowledge of the laws of those sciences, or of the application of those laws, or of the exact circumstances of the cases in point is at fault. We know the facts. We ask scientific men to account for them. To deny them on the faith of known laws is much sadder,

but scarcely scientific. Mr. Dircks says we "believe because we cannot explain." Would it not be at least equally true to say that he disbelieves because he cannot explain?

Is it fair of Mr. Dircks to condemn our evidence on account of our want of "elementary scientific knowledge," while he refuses to enlighten our "ignorance" by investigating and disproving the genuineness of our phenomena?

Are we not fellow-men? Is it really beneath him to rescue us (some few millions of us) from this awful delusion? What were the benefits conferred on the human race by a Jenner or a Howard compared to those a Dircks might bestow, if he would but stoop from his scientific heights to study facts?

It is not true that "in the event of a proposed rigid investigation" mediums always require "a certain approved house, room, attendants, furniture, &c.," and it is very rare that the presence of a "disbeliever" quite destroys the power of a good medium. Almost any good medium can get some inexplicable manifestations, though taken blindfold to a house quite unknown to him or her, and though surrounded by unbelievers. But, admitting that Mr. Dircks's statement is true to a modified extent, how is this "proof of something wrong?" Mediums are human beings; generally highly sensitive. What is there unreasonable in supposing that their psychometric power, or call it what you will, is affected by associations, even with articles of furniture, and still more by a feeling of sympathy or the reverse in those around them?

It is ridiculously false to say that no advance in our knowledge of spiritualism has been made in 30 or 40 years; and if it were true, with whom would lie the fault, unless with those wise men who persistently refuse to investigate it? To whom does Mr. Dircks appeal when he says, "Why not cheapen the modes of illustration?" The modes of illustration are not within our control. To assume otherwise is to beg the question as to imposture, as, indeed, Mr. Dircks does throughout. "Mummery," "mystic," "gallible," "jugglery" are the terms he uses freely, without any attempt at proving his right to use them. And what does he mean by his charge of "secrecy?" I have been investigating and following spiritualism for some 12 years. I never even heard of a professional medium whose *seances* were not perfectly open to all who chose to come, and most non-professional mediums are extremely easy of access. And the only secrecy I ever met with is that many who are spiritualists keep the fact to themselves, either through fear of ridicule, or through fear that the knowledge of their being spiritualists might interfere with their usefulness in other spheres.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

AN EIGHT YEARS' SPIRITUALIST.