

SARGENT. (E)

MATERIALISM'S LAST ASSAULT.

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# DOES MATTER DO IT ALL?

A REPLY TO PROFESSOR TYNDALL'S LATEST  
ATTACK ON SPIRITUALISM.

BY EPES SARGENT.

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## DOES MATTER DO IT ALL?

EPES SARGENT'S REPLY TO TYNDALL ON  
SPIRITUALISM.



**Men of Science who have Thought it Worthy of Investigation—Spiritualism now able to Take Care of Itself—Materialism Contradicts Itself—Inconvenient Facts—Universal Science Bringing Us Nearer the Higher Life.**

PROF. JOHN TYNDALL—*Sir*: I find in the preface to your "Fragments of Science," in the Popular Science Monthly, for December, 1875, the following remark:

"The world will have religion of some kind, even though it should fly for it to the intellectual whoredom of Spiritualism."

Seeing that your preface is largely made up of expressions that betray great soreness on your part because of the "hard words" which your "noisy and unreasonable assailants" of the pulpit have launched at you; seeing that you express a wish that the minds which deal with "these high themes" were "the seat of dignity—if possible of chivalry—but certainly not the seat of littleness;" and that you regard as "unmanly" those persons who have denounced you for "rejecting the notion of a separate soul," &c.—does it not appear like a disposition to mete out to the unpopular Spiritualists a measure which you sensitively shrink from having meted out to yourself, when, from the calm atmosphere, the "Alpine heights" of scientific meditation, you try to affix a foul, dishonoring name to a subject which many eminent men of science among your contemporaries have thought worthy of their serious investigation?



If you ask to what men I refer, I could mention the names of Alfred Russell Wallace, President of the Anthropological Society of London, and known to science as sharing with Darwin the discovery of the principle of natural selection; Maximilian Perty, Professor of Natural History in the University of Berne; J. H. Fichte, the illustrious son of an illustrious father; the late Robert Hare, one of America's foremost chemists; Nicholas Wagner and Dr. A. Butlerof, both well-known physicists and professors of the University of St. Petersburg; Dr. Franz Höffman, of Würzburg University; Camille Flammarion, whose astronomical writings are well known to the readers of the Popular Science Monthly; Dr. J. R. Nichols, chemist, and editor of the Boston Journal of Chemistry; the late Nassau William Senior, celebrated as a political economist; Hermann Goldschmidt, the discoverer of fourteen planets; William Crookes, F. R. S., a well-known chemist, and editor of the London Quarterly Journal of Science; C. F. Varley, F. R. S., electrician; and the late Prof. De Morgan, eminent as a mathematician, and who once remarked of certain physicists like yourself, who "snap up" the investigators of Spiritualism with the cry of unphilosophical, degrading, even as the clergymen of a former generation thought to frighten free thinkers with the cry of infidel—"They want taming, and will get it, for they wear the priest's cast-off garb, dyed to escape detection."

#### PROFESSORS ON THE LIST.

I could enlarge this list considerably, as you must well know. In this very number of the Popular Science Monthly, containing your "unmannerly" attack, is a paper by Prof. W. D. Gunning on "Progression and Retrogression," showing that retrogression of types, as well as progression, belongs to the system of evolution, and is illustrated in the natural world. Prof. Gunning has long been a Spiritualist, and has written much and ably in defence of his belief. I might refer you to Prof. William Denton, an experienced geologist, and who has lately succeeded in taking casts of hands which he has reason

to believe are projected by spirit power into temporarily material conditions ; also, to Dr. J. R. Buchanan of Kentucky, eminent as an anthropologist and cerebral anatomist. Archbishop Whately, the skilled logician, became a confirmed Spiritualist shortly before he died. Lord Lindsay, long devoted to scientific pursuits, testifies to having witnessed the levitation of Mr. Home, the medium. The late Lords Lyndhurst and Brougham, though advanced in years when they became interested in Spiritualism, had certainly given no signs of mental degeneracy. In a preface which Lord Brougham wrote, just before his death, for "Napier's Book of Nature and Book of Man," he says in conclusion : " But even in the most cloudless skies of skepticism I see a rain cloud, if it be no bigger than a man's hand ; it is Modern Spiritualism." I might instance the case of the late Dr. Elliotson, the studious physiologist, and editor of the *Zoist*, who, after advocating up to the age of seventy views as to the "potency of matter" similar to your own, suddenly had the convictions of a lifetime reversed by his recognition of the reality of certain phenomena through Mr. Home, and pathetically expressed a regret that he had not "known these things earlier."

But there are evidences more recent of the profound impression which the facts of Spiritualism are making upon the cultivated classes in England. In the *British Quarterly Review* for October, 1875, is a paper on "Modern Necromancy," the drift of which is that there are evidences of preternatural facts in the phenomena claimed as spiritual ; that investigators like Mr. Wallace and Mr. Crookes are not to be condemned for examining into them ; but that those facts, being such as were forbidden by the Mosaic law, and the moral conditions for their production being assumed to be objectionable, the moment we have become convinced of their reality we ought to drop them as Satanic. In other words, there is proof of the action of spirits, but as these are perhaps bad spirits, the less we have to do with them the better for our souls' safety and the good of humanity.

I will not risk giving offence by supposing that you, whose

expressions of scorn for the "fanatical, foolish, and more purely sacerdotal portion of Christendom" are so emphatic, share in these nervous apprehensions of diabolical agency. You will doubtless agree with me that if it be right to test the facts, it must be right to draw inferences from them, even if these should lead to the spiritual hypothesis.

The London Spectator, in some apt comments on the article, expresses itself as no longer surprised to find any inquirer accepting—"what indeed so many intelligent persons day by day now become convinced of"—the assumption, namely, "that there is a solid nucleus of preternatural fact in the phenomena called spiritualistic."

#### THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE.

I might also call your attention to a remarkable paper on "Theism" in the last number of the Westminster Review, in which Spiritualism is referred to as "the religion of the future," and of which the writer says :

"It is in our midst to-day, with signs and wonders uprising like a swollen tide, and scorning the barriers of nature's laws. It comes veiling its destined splendors beneath an exterior that invites contempt. Hidden from the prudent, its truths are revealed to babes. Once more the weak will confound the mighty, the foolish the wise. \* \* \* Spiritualism will reëstablish, on what professes to be ground of positive evidence, the fading belief in a future life—not such a future as is dear to the reigning theology, but a future developed from the present, a continuation under improved conditions of the scheme of things around us."

I do not concur with this eloquent writer in regarding Spiritualism as a "religion," or as "scorning the barriers of nature's laws." It is neither a religion nor a sect. Reconciling, as it does, to our reason, the theory of superior spirits, and hence a Supreme Spirit, infinite in His attributes, Spiritualism presents the basis for a religion, even as the earth-life presents the basis for a morality; and all the "signs and wonders" are in harmony with universal law.

Were it not that you would say they belong to the "pre-scientific past," I could quote nearly all the leading Catholic authorities of the day in support of the facts (regarded by them

as demoniacal) which you would so confidently ignore. But I have named to you three of the organs of the highest intellect of Protestant England, whose language distinctly intimates a belief that there is in these phenomena a preternatural element. I have given you also the names of many distinguished men of science, your contemporaries, who have no doubt of the facts, and most of whom have explained them by the spiritual hypothesis. I could mention the names of some sixty journals in different parts of the world, all devoted to the discussion of these most interesting thaumaturgic occurrences. And do you think to scare off investigation into them by hurling at the subject, from your scientific tripod, your missile of dirty words? Is it by such hectoring that you hope to suppress an inconvenient topic? Are we to be awed, in this last quarter of the nineteenth century, by the "priest's cast-off garb, dyed to escape detection?" Nay, rather give us back the bigotry of religion, and spare us the bigotry of your "positive science!"

#### A DEATH-DEFYING PRINCIPLE.

If, as is claimed, there be a "preternatural element" involved in the manifestations, what fact more important could be established? The question of a death-defying principle in man, an invisible body, the continent of his individuality, of his entire self, unimpaired by the wreck of matter or by the transition to another stage of being! Were it a question of the discovery of a beetle, distinguishable from all other known varieties by an additional spot, what respectful heed would be given to it by specialists like yourself, and how patient would they be of all details!

The offence which you charge against the eminent persons I have named and other Spiritualists is, it appears, of the intellect, that faculty which investigates and reasons. The "whoredom" is "intellectual." If by this you mean anything beyond mere obscene scurrility—if, to borrow the language of your complaint against the theologians, you are not

merely "slipping out of the region of courtesy into that of scorn and abuse"—what you would say is that Spiritualism implies a prostitution of the intellect in the desertion of truth for imposture and delusion. Let us see.

The primary question is one of facts. You will hardly contend that the facts, if provable, are not as legitimate a subject of scientific investigation as the facts of chemistry or geology. Contemptuous as have been your expressions, you have not yet had the rashness to say, with Prof. Huxley: "Supposing the phenomena to be genuine, they do not interest me." For, to mention only one of the phenomena, that of the sudden appearance and disappearance of materialized hands, drapery, &c., you, a student of matter, cannot seriously say that you are indifferent to a fact which, if admitted, must reverse all current notions on the subject.

Prof. Butlerof, the Russian physicist, of the University of St. Petersburg, remarks of the manifestations indicating this fact:

"The recognition of their reality will very soon be the inevitable duty of every honorable observer, and finally, of all humanity. This recognition will destroy many of the present prevailing views; life and science will have to come to terms with it. Our old notions about the essential nature of matter dissolve in the light of the actuality of these facts, and new ideas present themselves of the endless variety of degrees and forms of existence."

And yet you, in the very breath in which you deplore the illiberality of the clergy toward your own free utterances, do your best to prevent investigation into these stupendous facts of nature by exerting your influence as a man of science to soil the subject with an opprobrious name! You say, too, that Spiritualism is "degrading;" as if even that aspersion ought to deter a brave, earnest seeker from getting at the truth in respect to it! You, sir, who, through one of your German quotations, complain of the "tactics" of your opponents in "treating you contemptuously and trying to disparage you gradually in the public esteem," resort to the same "tactics" when Spiritualism comes in your way.



## TROUBLESOME FACTS.

I can imagine how exasperating it must be to a physicist of your experience to have certain new facts thrust in his face, which, if accepted, must unsettle confident theories born of years of pursuit of what he has regarded as scientific certainties. A busy man of science like yourself, how can he afford to give his attention to phenomena so subtle and evasive, so baffling and extraordinary, that they require much time and patience in the investigation, and which, if proved, he can classify under no law known to his code; facts for which there is no place in any of the pigeon-holes of his laboratory, and which flatly contradict, or threaten to contradict, some of the laws he has looked on as inviolable?

The impatient contempt with which Faraday, Huxley, yourself, and the Harvard professors have dismissed the transcendent facts of Spiritualism affords a lesson which is likely to be often referred to in the future as a check to those over-confident votaries of science who, disregarding Bacon's monition, make their own *à priori* objections the measure of nature's possibilities. For you are one of those clever professors whom Goethe describes in a passage which you will pardon me for translating, since you let us frequently see how well you could have read it for yourself in the original :

"Most learned Don, I know you by these tokens:

What you can feel not, that can no one feel;

What comprehend not, no one comprehend;

What you can't reckon is of no account,

What you can't weigh can no existence have,

What you've not coined, that must be counterfeit."

Certain phenomena occur, to which the name spiritual is given, simply because they cannot be explained by any known physical laws, and because the intelligent force, from which they are supposed to proceed, declares itself to be a spirit. The establishment of these phenomena, as occurrences recognized by science, is merely a question of time. The question how far and in what sense they are spiritual is like-

ly to remain an open one long after the facts are accepted as proven. Meanwhile how can any man of science, not crazed by prejudice or dwarfed by bigotry, charge it upon any investigator of the facts, or holder of the hypothesis, that he is lending himself intellectually to a "degrading" subject? Can the verification of any fact of Nature be degrading to the honest searcher after truth?

You tell us of certain scientific considerations that will help us to see and feel "what drivellers even men of strenuous intellect may become, through exclusively dwelling and dealing with theological chimeras." Did it never occur to you what "drivellers" men of strenuous intellect may become through exclusively dwelling and dealing with the chimeras derived from one little group of facts to the exclusion of others, somewhat different in their nature and in the conditions of their verification? Give heed to the familiar wisdom of Arago, where he says: "He who asserts that, outside of the domain of pure mathematics, anything is impossible, lacks prudence."

#### SPIRITUALISM ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF ITSELF.

Spiritualism can now take care of itself. For the last quarter of a century those who hate and fear it have been comforted almost daily with the assurance that it was at last dead and buried; that some great exposure had taken place which explained its tricks and proved it to be all a fraud. Yet here it is, more irrepressible than ever, though its expositors seem to multiply, and its calumniators call it bad names, such as jugglery, epilepsy, mediomania, and intellectual whoredom. It goes on, not at all affected, it would seem, by all these assaults of anger, malevolence, charlatanry, and pseudo-science. It has survived not only the frauds and misdemeanors of real or spurious mediums—not only the dislike and denunciation of the critical classes, the religious and the cultivated—but what is harder to endure, the help that is harmful, the imprudences of its own friends, and the heresies, credulities and stupidities that would seek a shelter under its name.

Even if it were conclusively proved that two-thirds of those persons believed to be genuine mediums, though subject to human frailties, like Mrs. Holmes, the Eddys, and others, had occasionally, in the absence of supposed spirit-help, resorted to imposture, or that all their manifestations were frauds, it would not impair the force of the great, irresistible body of thoroughly tested facts on which Modern Spiritualism is based.

The thrust at Spiritualism occupies but a line or two of your preface. The rest is devoted to a vindication of your thesis that "matter contains within itself the promise and potency of all terrestrial life." In your Belfast address you stated this somewhat more broadly, omitting the word *terrestrial*; and you have since so softened down your materialism with conditions, qualifications, and admissions that no one who has followed you through all your explanations could be surprised any day to hear of your subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles.

While seeming to repudiate materialism by conceding that there is "an impassable chasm, intellectually, between the physical processes of the brain and the facts of consciousness," you take away all the force and grace of the concession by saying:

"Were not man's origin implicated, we should accept without a murmur the derivation of animal and vegetable life from what we call inorganic nature. The conclusion of pure intellect points this way and no other. But this purity is troubled by our interests in this life and by our hopes and fears regarding the world to come."

This looks very much like a contradiction. After having told us that "the passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is unthinkable," you would have us suppose that nevertheless "pure intellect," untroubled by hopes and fears of a world to come, does not at all regard as unthinkable the derivation of animal life, including consciousness, of course, from "inorganic nature," or its equivalent, matter.

## HOPES AND FEARS OF FUTURE LIFE.

And so, after all, the "impassable chasm" may be easily leaped by an *esprit fort!* If we will only give up our foolish little hopes and fears about a future life, it will not be so difficult for us to ascribe all our faculties, including consciousness, genius, and love, to matter.

But how can the chasm at once be passable and impassable? This disposition on your part to hedge—to make concessions which, when hard pressed by your clerical assailants, you can fall back on to prove that you are not the atheist they would make you out, while, at other times, you would create the impression that science and "pure intellect" favor your notion that matter is the all-sufficient factor—is manifest through all your argument, both in your present preface and in your Belfast address. No one will suppose you insinuate; but, to put the case mildly, does not this almost simultaneous coquetry with opposite opinions indicate a somewhat unguarded and superficial way of treating a great subject?

If any further proof of your fickleness in arguing were needed, it may be found in that passage where you say:

"Nor am I anxious to shut out the idea that the life here spoken of [the 'life immanent everywhere'] may be but a subordinate part and function of a higher life, as the living, moving blood is subordinate to the living man. I resist no such idea so long as it is not dogmatically imposed."

Here, with a princely generosity, though not in lucid language, you permit us to entertain the theistic idea. Here you accept a supposition which wholly neutralizes the theory of materialism. Do you not see that in granting to matter a spiritual property, an infusion from a "higher life," a deific impulse, you abandon your dream of the "promise and potency" of mere matter, and nullify your threat of "wresting from theology the entire domain of cosmological theory?"

You cannot escape by saying that the theologic conception belongs to the region of the emotions, while yours is the conclusion of pure science; for you virtually admit with Locke that

matter may be divinely gifted with the power of producing mind and other marvels. You do not "shut out" that idea, only it must not be "dogmatically imposed." No more must the idea of the "promise and potency" of mere matter be dogmatically imposed! To your hypothesis, Theology replies with another which neutralizes it, and exposes the impotence of the threat you address to her.

"Promise and potency!" Have you never had any mis-giving as to your right to use these words in the way you do? Are they not wholly metaphorical in their application to the processes of pure, unaided matter, or inorganic nature? Have they any strictly scientific validity or fitness? Shall we allow you to express unintelligent operations in terms of mind when your purpose is to prove that no mind is needed in the case?

#### REDUCING MATTER.

You would reduce matter to a spiritual activity, having thinking and matter, the "potency" of appearing and perceiving, for its two-fold functions; and then you call upon us to regard it still as matter, having within itself the "promise and the potency of all terrestrial life!" Reason cannot accept such postulates. Even Hartley, whose vibratory hypothesis was welcomed by materialists, admits that it is the same thing whether we suppose that matter has properties and powers unlike those which appear in it, and superior to them, or whether we suppose an immaterial substance. You say:

"I have spoken above as if the assumption of a soul would save Mr. Martineau from the inconsistency of crediting pure matter with the astonishing building power displayed in crystals and trees. This, however, would not be the necessary result, for it would remain to be proved that the soul assumed is not itself matter."

And you then quote Tertullian to show that he "was quite a physicist in the definiteness of his conceptions regarding the soul," since he believed in its corporeal nature; and you wonder "what would have happened to this great Christian father amid the roaring lions of Belfast."

But you omit to inform your readers that Tertullian was

after all, a Spiritualist, in the strictly modern sense, since the corporeal soul in which he believed was simply the equivalent of the spiritual body of the teachings according to Spiritualism; for he drew his notions of the soul not only from his interpretations of the Bible, but from the communications of a female medium, who, he says, described a soul as corporeally exhibited to her view, and as being "tender and lucid, and of aerial color, and every way of human form."

Tertullian was largely influenced by his knowledge of phenomena quite similar to those of Modern Spiritualism; but he left the question an open one how far all organisms are indebted for life, intelligence, and formative power to a divine influx, a "higher life." The fact of such an influx is what no human science can prove or disprove. In the nature of things the eternal cause must be above all proof. To prove God would be to look down upon God, to be superior to God.

After having admitted that "the life immanent everywhere" may be "a subordinate part and function of a higher life," you, with a strange neglect of your admission, call upon Mr. Martineau to tell you at what moment the soul could have come in, if, in the production of the snow-crystal, for example, "an imponderable formative soul unites itself with the substance after its escape from the liquid." And you playfully ask, "Did it enter at once or by degrees? Is it distributed through the entire mass of the crystal? Has it legs or arms? What becomes of it when the crystal is dissolved? Why should a particular temperature be needed before it can exercise its vocation?" &c.

#### THE HIGHER LIFE.

Did it never occur to you that the "higher life," which you concede as an idea not to be excluded, may account for the soul, not only in the formative power of the snow-crystal, but in all organisms, vegetable and animal? The force which every being and every thing is possessed of lies in its idea; and this idea—a vitalizing, spiritual principle—is from God,

or, if you please, "the higher life." What would be thought of the reasoner who, for proof of the heat in a body, should ask, "Has it legs or arms? What becomes of it? Did it enter at once, or by degrees?"

Universal science is bringing us nearer every day to this conception of a single elementary substance or force, from which, by differentiation, transformation, and the infinite adjustment of proportions, all the varieties, properties, and exquisite forms of matter and marvels of mind are produced; and in this intelligent force, informing principle, or "higher life," pervading all things and culminating in the human soul, we have a glimpse of the immediate agency of deity.

You ask, "If there be anything besides matter in the egg, or in the infant subsequently slumbering in the womb, what is it?" And you conclude, "Matter I define that mysterious thing by which all this is accomplished. How it came to have this power is a question on which I never ventured an opinion."

But, sir, it is to venture a very decided opinion to admit, as not in conflict with your hypothesis, the notion that the origin of the power may be in a "higher life," of which the lower life, revealed in matter, may be a "function." And when you employ the words "promise and potency" to characterize the evolution issuing in manifestations of beauty, prescience, adaptation, mind, and consciousness, you invest matter with that "higher life," the conception of which you seem at times, with a strange contradiction, to relegate to the region of the emotions. Your "mysterious something" becomes a two-faced unity, like "the convex and concave of the same curve," partaking of properties which the theologians call spiritual, and which you prefer to call "promise and potency."

#### A FRUITLESS CONTENTION.

But what an aimless logomachy it is, then, that you are engaged in! After all the qualifications and elaborations of your argument—and I admire the eloquence and imaginative

grace which you put forth in your style—you are brought to an admission which dematerializes your vaunted matter, introduces a mysterious agency which, for all that you can show to the contrary, may be spiritual, and points, in spite of your skeptical "What is it?" to "something besides matter in the egg."

You express, in conclusion, a hope that the minds of the future may be "purer and mightier than ours, partly because of their deeper knowledge of matter and their more faithful conformity to its laws."

And yet here are phenomena, attested to by thousands of competent witnesses, for which it is claimed that they prove the instant apparent production and dissipation of matter by what is believed to be a superior intelligent force or will—phenomena going on under your very nose, and which have been tested by Wallace, Crookes, Varley, Wagner, Butlerof, Aksakof, Harrison, Sexton, Buchanan, Gunning, Denton, and hundreds of other respectable physicists; and yet you, without giving to the subject the study that you would have to give to a fly's wing in order to test what science asserts of it, escape from the whole amazing body of facts, and the hypothesis that would account for them, with the brave, ingenious cry of—

But I will spare you the repetition of the ribald scoff. If it came to you from those higher moods, those "Alpine summits," those "moments of clearness and vigor," to which you claim to be sometimes lifted, what form of speech would you have found unclean enough for the lower level of your ordinary discourse?

Respectfully, EPES SARGENT.

*No. 68 Moreland street, Boston, Mass., Dec. 11th, 1875.*