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Abstract and train of thoughts

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To the Editor of *Lucifer*.

I avail myself of your invitation to correspondents, in order to ask a question.

How is it that we hear nothing now of the signs and wonders with which Neo-Theosophy was ushered in? Is the “age of miracles” past in the Society?

Yours respectfully,

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“Occult phenomena,” is what our correspondent apparently refers to. They failed to produce the desired effect, but they were, in no sense of the word, “miracles.” It was supposed that intelligent people, especially men of science, would, at least, have recognized the existence of a new and deeply interesting field of enquiry and research [47] when they witnessed physical effects produced at will, for which they were not able to account. It was supposed that theologians would have welcomed the proof of which they stand so sadly in need in these agnostic days, that the soul and the spirit are not mere creations of their fancy, due to ignorance of the physical constitution of man, but entities quite as real as the body, and much more important. These expectations were not realized. The phenomena were misunderstood and misrepresented, both as regards their nature and their purpose.

In the light which experience has now thrown upon the matter, the explanation of this unfortunate circumstance is not far to seek. Neither science nor religion acknowledges the existence of the Occult, as the term is understood and employed in Theosophy; in the sense, that is to say, of a super-material, but not super-natural, region, governed by law; nor do they recognize the existence of latent powers and possibilities in man. Any interference with the everyday routine of the material world is attributed, by religion, to the arbitrary will of a good or an evil autocrat inhabiting a supernatural region inaccessible to man and subject to no law, either in his actions or constitution, and for a knowledge of whose ideas and wishes mortals are entirely dependent upon inspired communications delivered through an accredited messen-

ger. The power of working so-called miracles has always been deemed the proper and sufficient credentials of a messenger from heaven, and the mental habit of regarding any occult power in that light is still so strong that any exercise of that power is supposed to be “miraculous,” or to claim to be so. It is needless to say that this way of regarding extraordinary occurrences is in direct opposition to the scientific spirit of the age, nor is it the position practically occupied by the more intelligent portion of mankind at present. When people see wonders, nowadays, the sentiment excited in their minds is no longer veneration and awe, but curiosity.

It was in the hope of arousing and utilizing this spirit of curiosity that occult phenomena were shown. It was believed that this manipulation of forces of nature which [48] lie below the surface — that surface of things which modern science scratches and pecks at so industriously and so proudly — would have led to enquiry into the nature and the laws of those forces, unknown to science, but perfectly known to occultism. That the phenomena did excite curiosity in the minds of those who witnessed them, is certainly true, but it was, unfortunately, for the most part, of an idle kind. The greater number of the witnesses developed an insatiable appetite for phenomena for their own sake, without any thought of studying the philosophy or the science of whose truth and power the phenomena were merely trivial and, so to say, accidental illustrations. In but a few cases the curiosity which was awakened gave birth to the serious desire to study the philosophy and the science themselves and for their own sake.

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Experience has taught the leaders of the movement that the vast majority of professing Christians are absolutely precluded by their mental condition and attitude — the result of centuries of superstitious teaching — from calmly examining the phenomena in their aspect of natural occurrences governed by law. The Roman Catholic Church, true to its traditions, excuses itself from the examination of any occult phenomena on the plea that they are necessarily the work of the Devil, whenever they occur outside of its own pale, since it has a lawful monopoly of the legitimate miracle business. The Protestant Church denies the personal intervention of the Evil One on the material plane; but, never having gone into the miracle business itself, it is apparently a little doubtful whether it would know a *bona fide* miracle if it saw one, but, being just as unable as its elder sister to conceive the extension of the reign of law beyond the limits of matter and force as known to us in our present state of consciousness, it excuses itself from the study of occult phenomena on the plea that they lie within the province of science rather than of religion.

While Religion cannot grasp the idea of natural law as applied to the supersensuous Universe, Science does not allow the existence of any supersensuous universe at all to which the reign of law could be extended; nor can it conceive the possibility of any other state of consciousness than our present terrestrial one.

Now science has its miracles as well as the Church of Rome. But, as it is altogether dependent upon its instrument-maker for the production of these miracles, and, as [49] it claims to be in possession of the last known word in regard to the laws of nature, it was hardly to be expected that it would take very kindly to “miracles,” in whose production apparatus has no part and which claim to be instances of the operation of forces and laws of which it has no knowledge. Modern science, moreover, labours under disabilities with respect to the investigation of the Occult quite as embarrassing as those of Religion; for, while Religion cannot grasp the idea of natural law as applied to the supersensuous Universe, Science does not allow the existence of any supersensuous universe at all to which the reign of law could be extended; nor can it conceive the possibility of any other state of consciousness than our present terrestrial one. It was, therefore, hardly to be expected that science would undertake the task it was called upon to perform with much earnestness and enthusiasm; and, indeed, it seems to have felt that it was not expected to treat the phenomena of occultism less cavalierly than it had treated divine miracles. So it calmly proceeded at once to pooh-pooh the phenomena; and when obliged to express some kind of opinion, it did not hesitate, without examination, and on hearsay reports, to attribute them to fraudulent contrivances — wires, trap-doors, and so forth.

Occult phenomena were claimed by the Spiritualists as the work of their dear departed ones, and the leaders of Theosophy declared to be mediums in disguise.

It was bad enough for the leaders of the movement when they endeavoured to call the attention of the world to the great and unknown field for scientific and religious enquiry which lies on the borderland between matter and spirit, to find themselves set down as agents of his Satanic Majesty, or as superior adepts in the charlatan line; but the unkindest cut of all, perhaps, came from a class of people whose own experiences, rightly understood, ought certainly to have taught them better: the occult phenomena were claimed by the Spiritualists as the work of their dear departed ones, but the leaders in Theosophy were declared to be somewhat less even than mediums in disguise.

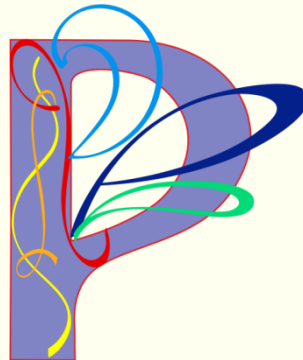
Never were the phenomena presented in any other character than that of instances of a power *over perfectly natural though unrecognized forces*, and incidentally over [50] matter, possessed by certain individuals who have attained to a larger and higher knowledge of the Universe than has been reached by scientists and theologians, or can ever be reached by them, by the roads they are now respectively pursuing.

What mean and unreasoning animals ignorant men become when their cherished prejudices are touched!

Did not the history of scientific research teach us how, very like an ignorant man, a learned man can behave when the truth of his theories is called in question?

Yet this power is latent in all men, and could, in time, be wielded by anyone who would cultivate the knowledge and conform to the conditions necessary for its development. Nevertheless, except in a few isolated and honourable instances, never was it received in any other character than as would-be miracles, or as works of the Devil, or as vulgar tricks, or as amusing gapeseed,¹ or as the performances of those dangerous “spooks” that masquerade in séance rooms, and feed on the vital energies of mediums and sitters. And, from all sides, Theosophy and Theosophists were attacked with a rancour and bitterness, with an absolute disregard alike of fact and logic, and with malice, hatred and uncharitableness that would be utterly inconceivable, did not religious history teach us what mean and unreasoning animals ignorant men become when their cherished prejudices are touched; and did not the history of scientific research teach us, in its turn, how very like an ignorant man a learned man can behave when the truth of his theories is called in question.

An occultist can produce phenomena, but he cannot supply the world with brains, nor with the intelligence and good faith necessary to understand and appreciate them. Therefore, it is hardly to be wondered at, that *word* came to abandon phenomena and let the ideas of Theosophy stand on their own intrinsic merits.



“Miracles are natural phenomena,” in our Down to Earth Series. — ED. PHIL.

¹ [Something that is so strange, interesting, or unexpected that it causes one to stare with mouth open.]