

MISCELLANEOUS.

IS SPIRITUALISM UNSCIENTIFIC?

IN CRITICISM OF LT.-COL. GARDNER'S ARTICLE.

To the Editor of The Open Court:

Some time ago I read an article, "An Evening With the Spiritualists," in *The Open Court*, and since then my attention has more than once been directed to this article, with the result that I am persuaded that in the cause of justice and right thinking the article merits a few comments. (See *The Open Court* for Dec., 1901.)

In this day when old systems and ways are being challenged, and are passing away, it behooves one who makes any pretension to scientific training to consider seriously what the Scientific Spirit is, and take thought that he do as little as possible to blind or mislead the inquirer, or bring ridicule upon science. He must remember that he is not justified in accepting or rejecting any theory or belief until he can produce the evidence and argument for or against said theory or belief; unless he make it unmistakably plain that he adopts said theory or belief unproven and merely upon hypothesis or assumption. He has neither right nor reason to make objections or give counter-explanations unless his objections and counter-explanations are more reasonable,—more consistent with Nature. And let him look well to his fundamentals.

My desire is neither to defend nor attack the writer or spiritualism,—neither is necessary to my aim and contention,—but to impress upon all that the only way not to confound and pervert, but to enlighten and direct, is to employ the true scientific method; that we had better hold our peace forever than to lift up our voice in a cry on the wrong track. Is it necessary that it forever be said that man attempts every wrong way before he will enter the right?

In the article the Judge had three visions, clairvoyant in nature, every one of which seems to have been fulfilled to the letter,—prophetic insight which was absolutely impossible to him in the ordinary, full self-consciousness of his waking state. The particularities of the visions should be noted. Now, history, from the most ancient to the most modern, gives us visions of various sorts and values. Swedenborg, Dr. Walker, and many others have foretold the date and manner or other circumstances of their own death and burial; and others have foreseen the death of friends under the most unexpected and unheard-of circumstances,—which followed to the letter. I know of such cases among my acquaintances, as does nearly every one.

It should not be necessary for me to say that I do not concede anything infallible nor supernatural in these occurrences,—nor in anything else of like nature.

Science has made the term supernatural obsolete. Cause and effect hold everywhere: orderly interaction is necessary.

But here is my question: Does the flow of more or less blood to certain centers of the brain and its cortex sufficiently explain such visions or other psychical action? Does more or less blood cause one to know and see things he can neither know nor see when in full command of his faculties (objective self), conduct the thought-current from centre to centre properly to make one see these things in their precise relation or as they will afterward actually occur? Is this sufficient cause or is it miracle?—hold my entire psychical activity in absolute subjection? hold my will-power under its magical control?—this more or less blood! Does the cart push the horse?

In such investigation, where we do not yet know the relations of the various phenomena and powers, we should always bear in mind the possibility of three very distinct relations,—primary cause, concomitant, effect. In psychical investigation the caution is particularly necessary. Now, is this flow of blood the sufficient and primary cause of hypnotism,—the hypnotic state? Does it explain those rare cases of somnambulant clairvoyance in which the subject describes and relates things not only before unknown to himself, but also unknown to all present? And if the subject fail and blunder, does the blood explanation serve here? Whatever one may mean by "thought transference," does the blood explicate all, or anything, here?

Finally, in these cases—which are authenticated beyond honest doubt—of "trance," in which competent physicians have pronounced the subject dead,—where the heart has ceased to beat, where there is no natural warmth, where the blood has ceased to circulate,—in these cases, I ask, where is this more or less blood, which must (says the writer) control and cause the thoughts of this person who is all the time conscious of the funeral preparations going on round him, who hears every word said, and who is all this time in the most exquisite mental agony, yet wholly unable to manifest any sign of life or consciousness,—who is completely unable to make the required connection between subjective and objective self,—who may exercise his "will-power" to his full limit, but cannot bring about the proper effect? I will say no more on this subject. I use it, because it is striking, on account of its infrequency; familiarity has not yet bred contempt; yet it is no harder to explain than the ordinary sleeping and waking,—requires no other principles or psychic laws.

Because one thing happens or is true that doesn't always necessarily prohibit the possibility of another thing happening or being true. It depends on conditions. Science should give everything its just and proper place. We should not get so tangled up and overwhelmed with phenomena and mechanism that we can't see or realise noumena and meaning. We must realise that "naming" isn't necessarily "explaining"—especially when the names are merely *hypothetical* labels to denote certain *unexplained* entities or actions, such as auto-suggestion, thought-transference, telepathy, and other "well known" mental phenomena and powers. Our explanations should not be still more miraculously inexplicable or mere empty names. It isn't likely that thoughts are things; nor knowledge substance.

"Will-power," says the writer, is "the ability of determinating a preponderating activity to one or more ganglia or groups of nerve-cells, and so causing nervous force to be directed or expended through *one* channel, or to *one* organ, rather than to another." Now, even granting the validity of, and the sequence of the parts in, this definition—which is unnecessary—still, whence this "ability" which determinates this "activity" which causes the direction and expense of this "ner-

vous force"? Study this definition and you will see what I mean by mechanism so filling the mind's eye that it is impossible to see, or inquire into, the meaning. Granting that the phenomena are comprehended—which is questionable—still the truth remains that both phenomena and noumena, or *both* mechanism and meaning, should be comprehended. What the definition would mean is that will-power is the ability to direct and control thoughts, I infer. But what, in his definition, has this "ability"? I can deduce only from his argument that more or less blood controls the thoughts—or, it could be differently worded, as it is in his definition, if necessary.

Now since this quantity of blood effects and controls all these thoughts, the will-power must be subject to it "in vision," so also in waking hours—if he is correct,—that is, the "ability" must belong to this more or less blood.

It is only too true that many so-called scientists not only have never known the scientific spirit, but are also much like the Irishman who couldn't "see the city, for the houses," and whose explanations are as delightfully elucidating as the small boy's information shouted at the farmer, "Mister, your wheel's turning round," and "There's spokes in your wheel."

That these psychical powers are real; that these psychological phenomena have been witnessed, and credited as bona fide, what man who has followed the developments of psychical research will question? That if they exist or occur they must necessarily be natural and entirely according to "law," what scientist will doubt? Consequently, who will hesitate to acknowledge that our duty is thorough and unprejudiced investigation, before we dogmatically assert or seem to argue concerning said powers and phenomena? And, again, be sure of your fundamentals; be sure of your accoutrement: let there be no erroneous nor senseless nor gratuitous presuppositions.

This more or less blood is undoubtedly a marvellous and venerable power if it is a sufficient explanation of visions, and likewise of all other psychical action. It must be the sufficient and easy explanation of the writer's article, and of this letter also.

Now this, while it may confound the ignorant and make amusement for the careless, cannot but grieve the scientific; and bring ridicule upon science: pray you avoid it. And let us pray that this more or less blood drive us not into too much, one way or the other.

L. M. J.

[The author of this letter is a man of wide experience in the field of spiritualistic phenomena and comes from a family of extraordinarily sensitive disposition. His father was a writing medium when four years of age, but such occult habits were not encouraged in those days, and the grandfather interfered. Mr. L. M. J. is quite familiar with the experiences of his father which he listened to in his childhood, and he thought of questioning them as little as his fairy-tales. But after graduating from college he became a zealous investigator of spiritual manifestations, for he believed that they merit first an investigation and then an explanation. He writes: "My attitude was simply that of the scientist inquiring into any phenomena, without prejudice or desire one way or other: I wanted only to understand the facts, the same as in any other case; and I have not the least feeling of partisanship for them more than any reality,—for so they seem to me. Yet there has been humbug and insufficient mediumship: and this too must be explained. I hold to no ism of any sort; and would that all be subjected to strict and impartial investigation by pure scientific methods."

Lieut.-Col. Gardner has promised to consider L. M. J.'s criticism and may

answer the same in a forthcoming number. The editor, belonging to the large class of doubters, has expressed his views on the subject in an article entitled "Spirit or Ghost," which appeared in the April *Monist*.—*Ed.*]

CHARITY.

BY THE HON. C. C. BONNEY.

Of all the angels sent us from the throne
 Of the Divine, the loveliest one is known
 By the sweet name of Charity. Her face
 Filled with the beauty of celestial grace,
 Turns from the splendors of the rich and strong,
 To seek the lowliest in sorrow's throng,
 And change their tears and wretchedness and pain
 To peace and joy. She asks no other gain
 Than the delight of making others blest
 With food and shelter, raiment, work and rest,
 Virtue and peace, pure lives and worthy deeds,
 And all the graces that the great world needs.

A SPIRITUALISTIC SEANCE.

To the Editor of The Open Court:

As an inquirer into the phenomena of Spiritualism, I was naturally interested in the article in *The Open Court* of December, 1901, written by Lieut.-Col. Gardner—"An Evening with the Spiritualists."

The account of a *séance* at Boston brought to my mind an incident which—occurring within my own experience, a few years ago—has led me to regard a great deal of present-day "Spiritualism" as about the lowest form of "Materialism" to which mankind can descend.

I was invited one evening to a *séance* in one of our New Zealand towns: about twenty persons were present (male and female, say half and half). The meeting was presided over by an individual known to the others as "Brother" Jones, who opened the proceedings by requesting "Brother" Fish to oblige the company with a prayer. Brother Fish's abilities in this direction were extraordinary indeed: he addressed Omnipotence with a fervor and unctuousness which would have done credit to a Salvation Army officer or Latter Day Saint; and at the same time gave utterance to a caricature of the "Lord's Prayer" which (could it only have been reported) would have been worthy of a prominent place in the French "Comic Bible," or the "Annals of Blasphemy." The prayer concluded, Brother Fish was invited to sing a hymn; upon which that personification of piety led the congregation in a strictly original version of "Abide with Me"; I say "strictly original," because though he knew the tune well enough, his knowledge of the words was limited to "Abide with me, fast falls the even tide," which he adapted to the tune, with consummate solemnity, from beginning to end: the effect of this "exercise" upon myself was more ridiculous than sublime. This part of the proceedings being over, Brother Jones stated that, the regular medium being absent, their friend Brother Bell would give an "inspired" address; and Brother Bell having