

THE
LONDON, EDINBURGH AND DUBLIN
PHILOSOPHICAL MAGAZINE
AND
JOURNAL OF SCIENCE.

[THIRD SERIES.]

MAY 1846.

LIV. *Thoughts on Ray-vibrations.* By MICHAEL FARADAY,
Esq., D.C.L., F.R.S., Fullerian Prof., &c. &c.

To Richard Phillips, Esq.

DEAR SIR,

AT your request I will endeavour to convey to you a notion of that which I ventured to say at the close of the last Friday-evening Meeting, incidental to the account I gave of Wheatstone's electro-magnetic chronoscope; but from first to last understand that I merely threw out as matter for speculation, the vague impressions of my mind, for I gave nothing as the result of sufficient consideration, or as the settled conviction, or even probable conclusion at which I had arrived.

The point intended to be set forth for the consideration of the hearers was, whether it was not possible that the vibrations which in a certain theory are assumed to account for radiation and radiant phenomena may not occur in the lines of force which connect particles, and consequently masses of matter together; a notion which, as far as it is admitted, will dispense with the æther which, in another view, is supposed to be the medium in which these vibrations take place.

You are aware of the speculation* which I some time since uttered respecting that view of the nature of matter which considers its ultimate atoms as centres of force, and not as so many little bodies surrounded by forces, the bodies being considered in the abstract as independent of the forces and capable of existing without them. In the latter view, these little particles have a definite form and a certain limited size; in the former view such is not the case, for that which represents size may be considered as extending to any distance to which the lines of force of the particle extend: the particle indeed is

* *Phil. Mag.* 1844, vol. xxiv. p. 136.

supposed to exist only by these forces, and where they are it is. The consideration of matter under this view gradually led me to look at the lines of force as being perhaps the seat of the vibrations of radiant phænomena.

Another consideration bearing conjointly on the hypothetical view both of matter and radiation, arises from the comparison of the velocities with which the radiant action and certain powers of matter are transmitted. The velocity of light through space is about 190,000 miles in a second; the velocity of electricity is, by the experiments of Wheatstone, shown to be as great as this, if not greater: the light is supposed to be transmitted by vibrations through an æther which is, so to speak, destitute of gravitation, but infinite in elasticity; the electricity is transmitted through a small metallic wire, and is often viewed as transmitted by vibrations also. That the electric transference depends on the forces or powers of the matter of the wire can hardly be doubted, when we consider the different conductibility of the various metallic and other bodies; the means of affecting it by heat or cold; the way in which conducting bodies by combination enter into the constitution of non-conducting substances, and the contrary; and the actual existence of one elementary body, carbon, both in the conducting and non-conducting state. The power of electric conduction (being a transmission of force equal in velocity to that of light) appears to be tied up in and dependent upon the properties of the matter, and is, as it were, existent in them.

I suppose we may compare together the matter of the æther and ordinary matter (as, for instance, the copper of the wire through which the electricity is conducted), and consider them as alike in their essential constitution; *i. e.* either as both composed of little nuclei, considered in the abstract as matter, and of force or power associated with these nuclei, or else both consisting of mere centres of force, according to Boscovich's theory and the view put forth in my speculation; for there is no reason to assume that the nuclei are more requisite in the one case than in the other. It is true that the copper gravitates and the æther does not, and that therefore the copper is ponderable and the æther is not; but that cannot indicate the presence of nuclei in the copper more than in the æther, for of all the powers of matter gravitation is the one in which the force extends to the greatest possible distance from the supposed nucleus, being infinite in relation to the size of the latter, and reducing that nucleus to a mere centre of force. The smallest atom of matter on the earth acts directly on the smallest atom of matter in the sun, though they are 95,000,000

of miles apart; further, atoms which, to our knowledge, are at least nineteen times that distance, and indeed, in cometary masses, far more, are in a similar way tied together by the lines of force extending from and belonging to each. What is there in the condition of the particles of the supposed æther, if there be even only *one* such particle between us and the sun, that can in subtilty and extent compare to this?

Let us not be confused by the *ponderability* and *gravitation* of heavy matter, as if they proved the presence of the abstract nuclei; these are due not to the nuclei, but to the force superadded to them, if the nuclei exist at all; and, if the *æther* particles be without this force, which according to the assumption is the case, then they are more material, in the abstract sense, than the matter of this our globe; for matter, according to the assumption, being made up of nuclei and force, the æther particles have in this respect proportionately more of the nucleus and less of the force.

On the other hand, the infinite elasticity assumed as belonging to the particles of the æther, is as striking and positive a force of it as gravity is of ponderable particles, and produces in its way effects as great; in witness whereof we have all the varieties of radiant agency as exhibited in luminous, calorific, and actinic phænomena.

Perhaps I am in error in thinking the idea generally formed of the æther is that its nuclei are almost infinitely small, and that such force as it has, namely its elasticity, is almost infinitely intense. But if such be the received notion, what then is left in the æther but force or centres of force? As gravitation and solidity do not belong to it, perhaps many may admit this conclusion; but what is gravitation and solidity? certainly not the weight and contact of the abstract nuclei. The one is the consequence of an *attractive* force, which can act at distances as great as the mind of man can estimate or conceive; and the other is the consequence of a *repulsive* force, which forbids for ever the contact or touch of any two nuclei; so that these powers or properties should not in any degree lead those persons who conceive of the æther as a thing consisting of force only, to think any otherways of ponderable matter, except that it has more and other *forces* associated with it than the æther has.

In experimental philosophy we can, by the phænomena presented, recognise various kinds of lines of force; thus there are the lines of gravitating force, those of electro-static induction, those of magnetic action, and others partaking of a dynamic character might be perhaps included. The lines of electric and magnetic action are by many considered as exerted

through space like the lines of gravitating force. For my own part, I incline to believe that when there are intervening particles of matter (being themselves only centres of force), they take part in carrying on the force through the line, but that when there are none, the line proceeds through space*. Whatever the view adopted respecting them may be, we can, at all events, affect these lines of force in a manner which may be conceived as partaking of the nature of a shake or lateral vibration. For suppose two bodies, A B, distant from each other and under mutual action, and therefore connected by lines of force, and let us fix our attention upon one resultant of force having an invariable direction as regards space; if one of the bodies move in the least degree right or left, or if its power be shifted for a moment within the mass (neither of these cases being difficult to realize if A and B be either electric or magnetic bodies), then an effect equivalent to a lateral disturbance will take place in the resultant upon which we are fixing our attention; for, either it will increase in force whilst the neighbouring resultants are diminishing, or it will fall in force as they are increasing.

It may be asked, what lines of force are there in nature which are fitted to convey such an action and supply for the vibrating theory the place of the æther? I do not pretend to answer this question with any confidence; all I can say is, that I do not perceive in any part of space, whether (to use the common phrase) vacant or filled with matter, anything but forces and the lines in which they are exerted. The lines of weight or gravitating force are, certainly, extensive enough to answer in this respect any demand made upon them by radiant phænomena; and so, probably, are the lines of magnetic force: and then who can forget that Mossotti has shown that gravitation, aggregation, electric force, and electro-chemical action may all have one common connexion or origin; and so, in their actions at a distance, may have in common that infinite scope which some of these actions are known to possess?

The view which I am so bold as to put forth considers, therefore, radiation as a high species of vibration in the lines of force which are known to connect particles and also masses of matter together. It endeavours to dismiss the æther, but not the vibrations. The kind of vibration which, I believe, can alone account for the wonderful, varied, and beautiful phænomena of polarization, is not the same as that which occurs on the surface of disturbed water, or the waves of sound in gases or liquids, for the vibrations in these cases are direct,

* Experimental Researches in Electricity, pars. 1161, 1613, 1663, 1710, 1729, 1735, 2443.

or to and from the centre of action, whereas the former are lateral. It seems to me, that the resultant of two or more lines of force is in an apt condition for that action which may be considered as equivalent to a *lateral* vibration; whereas an uniform medium, like the æther, does not appear apt, or more apt than air or water.

The occurrence of a change at one end of a line of force easily suggests a consequent change at the other. The propagation of light, and therefore probably of all radiant action, occupies *time*; and, that a vibration of the line of force should account for the phænomena of radiation, it is necessary that such vibration should occupy time also. I am not aware whether there are any data by which it has been, or could be ascertained whether such a power as gravitation acts without occupying time, or whether lines of force being already in existence, such a lateral disturbance of them at one end as I have suggested above, would require time, or must of necessity be felt instantly at the other end.

As to that condition of the lines of force which represents the assumed high elasticity of the æther, it cannot in this respect be deficient: the question here seems rather to be, whether the lines are sluggish enough in their action to render them equivalent to the æther in respect of the time known experimentally to be occupied in the transmission of radiant force.

The æther is assumed as pervading all bodies as well as space: in the view now set forth, it is the forces of the atomic centres which pervade (and make) all bodies, and also penetrate all space. As regards space, the difference is, that the æther presents successive parts or centres of action, and the present supposition only lines of action; as regards matter, the difference is, that the æther lies between the particles and so carries on the vibrations, whilst as respects the supposition, it is by the lines of force between the centres of the particles that the vibration is continued. As to the difference in intensity of action within matter under the two views, I suppose it will be very difficult to draw any conclusion, for when we take the simplest state of common matter and that which most nearly causes it to approximate to the condition of the æther, namely the state of rare gas, how soon do we find in its elasticity and the mutual repulsion of its particles, a departure from the law, that the action is inversely as the square of the distance!

And now, my dear Phillips, I must conclude. I do not think I should have allowed these notions to have escaped from me, had I not been led unawares, and without previous

consideration, by the circumstances of the Evening on which I had to appear suddenly and occupy the place of another. Now that I have put them on paper, I feel that I ought to have kept them much longer for study, consideration, and, perhaps, final rejection; and it is only because they are sure to go abroad in one way or another, in consequence of their utterance on that evening, that I give them a shape, if shape it may be called, in this reply to your inquiry. One thing is certain, that any hypothetical view of radiation which is likely to be received or retained as satisfactory, must not much longer comprehend alone certain phænomena of light, but must include those of heat and of actinic influence also, and even the conjoined phænomena of sensible heat and chemical power produced by them. In this respect, a view, which is in some degree founded upon the ordinary forces of matter, may perhaps find a little consideration amongst the other views that will probably arise. I think it likely that I have made many mistakes in the preceding pages, for even to myself, my ideas on this point appear only as the shadow of a speculation, or as one of those impressions on the mind which are allowable for a time as guides to thought and research. He who labours in experimental inquiries knows how numerous these are, and how often their apparent fitness and beauty vanish before the progress and development of real natural truth.

I am, my dear Phillips,

Ever truly yours,

Royal Institution, April 15, 1846.

M. FARADAY.

L.V. *On the Wax of the Chamærops.*

By J. E. TESCHEMACHER, Esq.*

ABOUT three millions of palm leaves are annually imported into the United States of America, for the purpose of being manufactured into hats. They come tied in bundles, called in Spanish *Esteras*, each *estera* weighing from 50 to 60 pounds; these are the palmate part of the leaf with a small portion of the petiole; this last weighs one-eighth of the leaf. The palm from which the leaves are cut in Cuba and other parts of the West Indies for this purpose is a Chamærops, a low-growing species, not differing I believe from the *C. humilis* of the southern sections of the United States, except in being much more robust in habit. The *C. humilis* of the United States is too soft and yielding for this manufacture.

* Communicated by the Chemical Society; having been read December 1, 1845.