

## DISCUSSIONS.

### PROFESSOR MÜNSTERBERG ON MYSTICISM.

The criticism of 'The New Psychology,' it seems, has a sequel. We have an equal and presumably impartial attack upon Mysticism, of which one form is psychical research. In taking up the cudgels, however, I am not going to defend this curious department of inquiry. Even among those who are interested in it there is room enough for scepticism of the most scrutinizing sort. I accord any man whatever opinion he pleases to have about it. But I should ask that the scientific method that Professor Münsterberg demands in this and all psychological work be represented in his criticism, or a frank admission made that dogmatism is the fundamental instrument of knowledge. To me his recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly* is one of the most amusing documents that I have ever had the pleasure of reading. I am not going to attack the discussion as a whole, but only to deal with that part of it which criticises psychical research. Let us see how much science there is in his method.

Professor Münsterberg in one passage confesses that until the last summer vacation he felt rather guilty for forming and stating opinions on this subject before reading its literature. He then proceeds to enjoy his vacation 'in working through more than a hundred volumes of the so-called evidence.'!!! Just think of that! A scientist spending the summer rest of a few weeks reading more than one hundred volumes of matters involving a question of evidence, and actually forming what he thinks a scientific conclusion on them!! I do not believe there are twenty-five volumes in existence on this subject that any sane man ought to read at all, let alone doing it at such a time. I have watched this subject for ten years, and have in all that time read no more than ten volumes, some of them exceedingly carefully, and I did not dream of forming an opinion or irreversable conclusion upon them. On this subject of psychical research, unless you have made sufficiently decisive experiments personally (not merely curing one hallucination by suggestion), it may take a hundred years to arrive at any scientific conclusion at all. But would Professor Münsterberg advise his students to study psychology generally at the rate of 'more

than a hundred volumes' a vacation when the temperature is between eighty and a hundred? Moreover, what right has a professed scientist to depend upon books, no matter how many of them, for a conclusion that involves matters of very delicate experiment, and not analytical and introspective methods? Professor Münsterberg says that he is not a detective. He should then not pronounce upon problems that require that sort of ability. Here is a place for a confession of ignorance and to eschew the pretensions of knowledge.

Apropos of this last remark it is well to recall another singular confession of our author. His reason for not making a personal investigation into this question is that it is not 'dignified to visit such performances' as séances!! If physiology and biology had acted on this maxim we should have known very little about life on the one hand, and about brain processes on the other, on which Professor Münsterberg relies so much for his assurance against mysticism. Dignity is not anything that should stand in the way of experiment or exact method. I confess I admire Darwin for playing a bassoon to his garden plants to test some supposition, though his neighbors, had they seen him at it, would have thought him suitable for a lunatic asylum. Science at one time was too dignified to examine the stories about falling meteors, but it came to terms at last. It did the same with hypnotism. It first packed a jury to condemn it, and thought it had laid the monster, but after forty years contempt decided to embrace it as a fact nevertheless!! Its dignity would not save its scepticism.

It seems, again, that Professor Münsterberg cannot protect himself against fraud. He thinks the scientist is trained to 'an instinctive confidence in his coöperators.' Granted. All scientific truth involving the coöperation of others, then, must be taken on authority. Everything depends upon the assurance of men that there is no fraud who have either not looked for it or are not able to detect it!! When science comes to that pass I shall have done with it. A man who cannot protect himself against fraud must not expect his opinion to be worth very much. He may read 'more than a hundred volumes' in his vacation and form theories in that way, but he must not expect us to take his experimental work seriously.

Let us have some science. "If I talk with others whom I wish to convince there is no physical process in question, mind reaches mind, thought reaches thought, but in this aspect thoughts are not psychophysical phenomena in space and time, but attitudes and propositions in the sphere of the will." Well, this is either telepathy with a vengeance or it is blank nonsense. Just think of the statement that

there is no physical process in the communication of thoughts!! Where is the evidence for all this? Can science escape the demand for fact to prove an assertion? What facts has Professor Münsterberg to show that this view is either true or intelligible? Then, what does he mean by a 'proposition in the sphere of the will'? While we are playing 'ducks and drakes' with the language of science, why not go further and say that fear is a feeling in the sphere of logic? As to what Professor Münsterberg may intend by this description of the communication of ideas, I can well imagine. But I can do it only by having some knowledge of the process myself, and not from any statement that he makes. When I wish to transmit my thought to others by talking I make a disturbance in the air, and the receiver interprets the sound. Now, if 'communication' be convertible with 'interpretation' we may agree that there 'is no physical process in question,' but in all intelligible parlance, outside the suppositions of telepathy, 'communication' means that the physical process is a part of the totality. Otherwise there is no interpretation even, and the only resource for common thoughts would be universal telepathy, which Professor Münsterberg will not admit as possible. And neither for nor against one or the other of the claims does he produce any facts!! It is simply bald blank assertion, and this is supposed to be science after laughing at the dogmatism of the Middle Ages!

We have another illustration of the same sort of thing. "The ethical belief in immortality means that as subjects of will we are immortal; that is, that we are not reached by death. For the philosophical mind, which sees the difference between reality and psychological transformation, immortality is certain; for him the denial of immortality would be even quite meaningless. Death is a biological phenomenon in the world of objects in time; how, then, can death reach a reality which is not an object, but an attitude, and, therefore, neither in time nor space? Our real inner subjective life has its felt validity, not in time, but beyond time: it is eternal." This is science, I suppose!! Not a fact to prove it. It is said that 'philosophy' shows this. Whose philosophy? On what facts is it founded? Then, again, *what* is immortal? We are not told what it is. From a previous reference to the 'ethical belief' Professor Münsterberg says that it ends in mysticism, and I imagine that what he says of it here is intended to be condemned as compared with the philosophic verdict. If so it cannot be the subject of will, and if it is not this we have immortality affirmed without telling us what is immortal. But assuming it is 'we as subjects of will' that are immortal, what is this 'we,'

especially when an earlier passage asserts that the 'inner reality,' which is here said to be eternal, 'never consists of psychological phenomena.' But this sort of criticism aside as savoring of quibbles, I must press the scientific demand for fact to show that the tremendous assertion here made has another basis than the mere speculative opinion of the author. As for myself I must contend that there is not one iota of rational evidence for immortality, of any intelligible or desirable kind, outside the sphere and method of psychical research. I do not maintain that even this is rational, but it is all that can lay the slightest claim to being rational from the standpoint of science, and the philosophic standpoint I absolutely reject as merely a process of looking into one's navel to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. Heaven knows that the spiritualist's 'scientific' evidence for his belief has been meager and poor enough, but the philosopher's has been worse. It has rested mainly on 'dignity' and 'dignified' methods, tempered with equivocation and hypocrisy to escape persecution. I follow the method and accept the verdict of science on this matter. If it gives me trustworthy facts making immortality a rational belief, I can affirm it; if it cannot produce these facts I either suspend judgment or accept the probability, from the connection of consciousness with a perishable organism, that this function dissolves with it. And when I speak of immortality I mean personal survival; that is, the continuance of consciousness beyond the life of the body. Any other immortality I do not care a picayune for, and would not be caught juggling with any affirmative proposition containing the term. What amazes me is that any man making the slightest pretense to scientific method would, after the terrible lesson of scholasticism, attempt for a moment to make such a tremendous assertion as that of immortality without at least a small array of empirical facts to support it. There is another very singular passage. After telling us in fine language that science must not prejudge a question, must not 'reject a fact because it does not fit into the scientific system of to-day,' etc., Professor Münsterberg goes on to say: "This is the old text," etc., "Yet it is wrong and dangerous from beginning to end, and has endlessly more harm in it than a superficial view reveals, as it is in last consequences not only the death of real science, but worse, the death of real idealism." Well, we have to choose between psychical research and idealism. But what is idealism? Is that so clear in these times that men have no freedom to question it? When I read a book or essay on idealism I am reminded of the sermon which the old woman could not understand, but which, nevertheless, edified and consoled her by

the presence in it of 'the blessed word Mesopotamia.' Idealism is unintelligible, but then it is the basis of ethics and art! I say frankly that if I had to choose between psychical research and idealism I should unhesitatingly take the side of psychical research for clearness and knowing 'where you are at.' For I do not know any field of thought which is more full of intellectual hobgoblins than that of Kanto-Hegelian idealism. I am not opposing idealism, because if I am allowed to define it for myself I should say that it is a mere truism. It is to me like the proposition that water is wet or blue is a color. But I do not expect to solve any problems with it. Least of all, do I consider it a sanctuary in which I am not allowed to say anything about either materialism or spiritualism. The only way that idealism can get into antagonism with any theory is to limit itself to solipsism. In any other form it is only a field for that kind of intellectual gymnastics which, as Kant remarks, characterizes the heroes of Valhalla. They are forever hewing down shadows which only spring up again to renew their ceaseless and bloodless conflict.

But the most remarkable thing about this passage is its distinct renunciation of scientific method for a dogmatism that knows all about the universe without any further inquiry. I do not see why a man talks any more about 'science' and 'scientific' method as an enemy of superstition when he shows that he has no other conception of it than that which denies the right to revise existing opinion. Evidently, science and dogmatism are the same here, while idealism is 'that blessed word' which is to exorcise all spirits except its own, and they are as shadowy as the ghosts that inhabit Homer's Cimmerian shades.

Taking the article as a whole, I do not see why Professor Münsterberg did not distinguish between the relevancy of the various alleged phenomena that he was criticising. Table turning, telepathy, clairvoyance, hypnotism and what not were lumped together with no more conception of their differences than is usually displayed by the spiritualist himself. The fact is that not one of them, unless we except telepathy, even if they were genuine, has any bearing on the question of spiritualism, and telepathy, if true, might be used as a very effective bar to spiritualism. But as in the phenomena of insanity and hallucinations, which, by the way, Professor Münsterberg is not too dignified to study, we can classify alleged facts and discuss their relevancy to the hypotheses which they are said to support. Professor Münsterberg should have read that hundred volumes with sufficient care to discover the distinction that a scientist ought to master at first. There is no use to assume that the spiritualist has the right conception

either of his problems or of his facts. I consider that he has neither, as a rule, and it would save some reputation if these alleged phenomena could be treated as patiently as are those of insanity. I am here defending only the method of psychical research. I do not care what becomes of its facts or alleged phenomena. I merely ask that its critics deal with it from the inside, and not in a confessedly *a priori* manner. My attention to it for ten years has convinced me that there is enough in the subject to engage serious consideration, no matter what the conclusions may be. In fact, the plausibility of some tremendous claims is so great, and so thoroughly in accord with what the common mind in this sceptical age would like to see established, that it will require all the severity and sceptical scrutiny of scientific method at our command to get any proper attention to normal psychology. I happen to know some genuine supernormal phenomena, not explainable by either fraud, illusion, or suggestion, and whose significance, or at least plausible significance, will have to be reckoned with by men who, like the mediæval theologians refusing to look through Galileo's telescope, cannot sacrifice their dignity for the sake of controlling a movement instead of following in its wake. Some of those who are making haste to laugh at it without studying it and its alleged facts at first hand will find themselves where they will have either to lose their influence for all psychology or, in order to save it, will have to 'eat crow,' and 'white crow' at that. It is not the remarkable nature of the alleged phenomena of psychical research that gives them so much interest and influence; for the scientific scepticism of the last century has very well fortified the average intelligence against some of the vagaries of spiritualism. But it is the wonderful triumphs of invention and discovery in the fields of both science and art that have destroyed the ordinary criteria of the limits of human knowledge and capacity, so that the average mind is rapidly coming to expect that almost anything is possible. Electricity, the telephone, Roentgen rays, the phonograph, surgery, hypnotism, etc., have opened up such a fairy land of wonders and possibilities to the common mind that it is not surprising to see many otherwise balanced intellects yielding to the claims of spiritualism. Science must reckon with this condition of mind and, instead of employing dogmatism against it, treat its alleged phenomena in the same serious and sympathetic manner that insanity receives. Science has taught us not to burn witches, as they did once, but to put them in asylums. Perhaps the same generous treatment of psychical research may still further extend the operations of humanity. To do this also it will not re-

quire us to spend our summer vacations in reading any very large amount of occult lore.

JAMES H. HYSLOP.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

## MR. MARSHALL AND THE THEORY OF RELIGION.

Perhaps the most interesting problem with which evolutionary science has to deal is as to the social function of religion. Religion as a very general and large phenomenon could have survived and grown only as a useful element in the struggle of existence of the individual and his society. This evolutionary assumption that what is, subsists and increases only by virtue of function; that natural evolution is an evolution of utilities, and that useless factors are always speedily eliminated in the struggle of existence, is really a close approach to the old doctrine of evidences by which the theologian makes the warrant of religion to be the function which it plays in man's life. For instance, the apologist for prayer has always assured us that such a practice could not have arisen and developed except that it met a real need of human life and was in some way truly answered, and the evolutionist as biologist and sociologist likewise finds that prayer by its very existence shows its validation as an important factor in human life, if not in the way the religionist assumes, at least in some way. It is an interesting fact that, though science, by widening the domain of naturalism indefinitely, has shown that the religions are ineffectual in their methods, yet science, by its own assumption, sees in religion a function which has arisen in the struggle of existence.

Of recent interpretations of religion from the point of view of evolutionary science Mr. H. R. Marshall's 'Instinct and Reason' is the most notable and thoroughgoing. Mr. Marshall finds that evolution is toward organism, which is action of the part for the whole, and instinct is the psychic side of this organic tendency, while reason is the correspondent of individualistic action. The main stress of evolution is to subordinate the individual organ to the organic whole, the eye to minister to the body rather than to itself, the individual body to minister to the perpetuation of the species and of social wholes. But individualism is also a primitive and strong interfering tendency, and so, to give weight to the organic, Nature gives birth to religion as an instinct restraining us from undue individualism. Thus, when inclined to selfish actions religion appears as restraint, and so impulsive to social activity. The earliest sociality has to do with the perpetuation of the