

### Letters to the Editor.

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#### Science and Psychical Research.

IN NATURE of July 31, Dr. Tillyard, the well-known entomologist, reproaches Huxley for not being interested in the phenomena of what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and others call spiritualism. He extends this reproach to all who consider the claim that from "the organism of the medium 'psychic stuff,' by the moulding of which they [the invisible operators] can produce at will the phenomena of independent voice, levitation, materialisations of portions of their personalities, and so on," so highly improbable that they refuse to spend their time and energy in the efforts required for obtaining or refuting proof. Yet it is by such limitations, and by them only, that science has hitherto obtained its results.

No doubt Dr. Tillyard, guided by the experience which he gained during a long and successful career in entomology, would refuse to investigate reputed cases of insects with bony skeletons suckling their young. Why then should he be so hard on the physicist who, on the ground of his experience, refuses to investigate levitation, or on the biologist who, mindful of Harvey's *omne vivum ex ovo*, considers his time better spent in his usual pursuits than in an investigation of reputed "materialisations of portions of personalities"?

Dr. Tillyard evidently approves of the scientific movement which displaced the medieval church from its position as the guardian of all knowledge—natural as well as supernatural. Why then should he object to that great majority of his fellow-scientists who think that the change would be for the worse if they accepted the guardianship of the medium? This, however, is what Dr. Tillyard really advocates; he is not satisfied with the liberty accorded ungrudgingly to any one willing to investigate even the most improbable phenomena; he wants physicists and biologists to leave "the broad highway" of science and to enter "The neglected side-path, foul with mire and overgrown with noxious weeds" along which the medium is anxious to guide them. If science did so help, its name would be superstition.

J. P. LORSY.

LIKE Mr. Campbell Swinton, Dr. Lotsy confuses psychical research with spiritualism; he then charges me with reproaching Huxley for refusing to be interested in the latter! If he will again read carefully through the third paragraph of my article and follow it logically with the beginning of the fourth, he will see how far he has wandered from my meaning. He then selects the rarest and most puzzling of all psychical phenomena, namely, the ideoplastic moulding of teleplasm into forms resembling "portions of personalities," and says that I extend my reproach to all who refuse to consider this as a valid phenomenon worthy of scientific study! This would be rather like reproaching a peasant who lived in the middle of Asia for refusing to believe in the existence of submarines when he had never even seen the sea!

Dr. Lotsy is quite sure about what I would do if I were confronted with reputed cases of "insects with bony skeletons suckling their young." I am not!

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If one of our leading entomologists were to write to me and state that he had observed a case of one of the higher pupiparous Diptera suckling its young, I should most certainly want to investigate it, though I might feel sceptical about his use of the term "suckling." The more improbable the reputed facts, the more I should consider the weight to be attached to the reputation of the man who made the statement. If the fact were vouched for by three entomologists of the standing in their own science that Lodge, Crookes, and Richet hold in theirs, I should consider that a good case for investigation had been made out. The weak point of Dr. Lotsy's argument is that he tries to draw a comparison between something in entomology which has never been even 'reputed' to occur and something in another branch of science which many leading men of science state clearly has occurred in their presence under test conditions; so that the only question which remains is to decide whether it is really true or whether they are liars or under delusions.

As for Harvey's *omne vivum ex ovo*, I doubt very much if modern biologists are compelled to regard this as a strictly accurate statement of the origin of life. Certainly Dr. Lotsy himself does not, for he has been trying for years to get them to accept instead his own emendation of *omne vivum ex hybrido*! Personally I prefer Harvey's dictum, but I do not think that the first unit of life that appeared on our world was either an egg or a hybrid. Moreover, the phenomena of teleplasm do not controvert Harvey's statement. For the 'psychic stuff' itself is admittedly drawn from the physical organism of the medium, and the medium is "ex ovo." Even if the ideoplastic moulding is really done, not under the control of the subconscious mind of the medium but by the will of an invisible operator who has once lived in the flesh, that operator by his own claims and admissions was once "ex ovo." The facts of psychical research do not contradict any of the broad principles of biology.

Finally, Dr. Lotsy makes the usual blunder of those who, knowing nothing of the elementary principles of psychical research, persist in regarding the medium as the 'guide' in the experiments, whereas the medium is actually in trance and does not know what is going on. I can only repeat that the conditions of the experiments are just exactly what the researchers choose to make them; the facts can be studied and tabulated like other scientific facts. My plea is simply one for assistance instead of obstruction in the attempt to obtain them. To parody Dr. Lotsy's last sentence, "If Science do not so help, then her name is stagnation."

R. J. TILLYARD.

Zürich, Switzerland,

August 26.

MR. CAMPBELL SWINTON'S account in NATURE of August 28 of the incidents connected with the Combermere photograph is both inaccurate and misleading. Since he uses my name so freely perhaps you will permit me to state shortly the true version. The whole story, with the photograph, will be given in the next number of *Psychic Science*—the organ of the Psychic College.

This photograph, which shows plainly the outline of an elderly man seated in an armchair, was sent to me with the endorsement of the Combermere family, who may be expected to know as much about the matter as their relative by marriage. On the back was written that it was taken by a certain lady at the time of the old peer's funeral, and that the shadowy figure was supposed to be the wraith of the