

SPIRIT PHENOMENA.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Seeing my name quoted in your columns (October 30) as one of those who “have certified to the genuineness of spirit phenomena,” I venture to request the briefest of hearings. The experience of 20 years has convinced me that (1) perception is possible without the ordinary channels of sensation ; and (2) that I have been in presence of a force or a power—call it what you will—evidently intelligent and palpably material, if, at least, man be made of matter. But, however “dark and debasing” be the doctrines of materialism, I know nothing of spiritualism, and thus I must be contented to be a spiritualist without spirits.

Some such power or force the traveller is compelled to postulate, even in the absence of proof. He finds traces of it among all peoples, savage as well as civilized ; and it is evidently not a “traditional supernaturalism.” This all but absolute universality claims for it the right to rank in the suprahuman category of the late Lord Amberley, who did not hold, as we do, the suprahuman and the supramundane to be the human and the mundane imperfectly understood. Even mere barbarians, as “The Earl” tells us in his last pleasant book, have learnt to juggle with it, and, speaking generally, I fear that many a professional medium has, at times when the legitimate agent failed him, learnt to supplement it by sleight of hand, pure and simple. In 1835 the late Mr. Lane startled the public with his account of the Cairo magician and the mirror of ink in the boy’s hand ; and “Eothen” vainly attempted to explain the phenomenon as a “tentative miracle.” Had the public read the “Janoon-i-Islam,” by Dr. G. A. Herkots, instead of thinking that it was a cookery-book, they would have found (chap. xxxiii., 1832) the very same process everywhere utilized in India. Churchill’s “Mount Lebanon” (1853), again, describes a notable feat performed by a Druse medium, which distinctly comes under the head of “materialized spiritualism,” to use the “Irish bull” now in vogue. My list of authors ranging over the “five quarters” of the globe is far too long for quotation.

I am, Sir, &c.,
Trieste, Nov. 9.

RICHARD F. BURTON.