

*The climax of  
the undesirable  
in psychology.*

Professor Flournoy's volume on "Spiritism and Psychology" (Harper), though large, is a condensation of a very much fuller work in the French, and its scope covers recent investigation in the field of that department of "psychical research" which deals with mediums and their varied manifestations. Taken as a whole, the book is distinctly confusing, misleading, and even pernicious. Neither the reputation of its author, nor the evident ability in handling his data, nor the inclusion of meritorious investigations of his own, can offset the logical imperfections of his attitude. It is a case where contributory negligence amounts almost to crime. There is a slurring of the logic at the beginning, which fatally diverges, as the argument proceeds, from truth, to half-truth, to broad error. Professor Flournoy's investigations might well have taken the

shape of the study of mediums in the form of Professor James's "Varieties of Religious Experience." He has, however, confused the value of what such phenomena may mean as personal revelations with the very dubious question of their material verification. Intending to be open-minded on the latter issue, he presently confuses vague theoretic possibilities with practical probabilities, and in the end commits himself as unreservedly to an illogical belief in the so-called "genuineness" of these phenomena as the crudest partisan might have done at the outset. It is this mingling of academic scholarship and psychological insight with a lack of logical foundations, that makes the book unfortunate. The logical fallacy may be brought home by a story which is told of various peoples amongst whom a gift of "second-sight" is a common belief. To test one so gifted, who professed to tell what was going on in a village a few miles away, it was proposed that a man ride over to the village and report as to the truth of this long-distance vision. The messenger returned with the report that So-and-so, who at that particular hour was described as engaged in a certain place in a certain occupation, was at the designated hour elsewhere, and not at all engaged as appeared in the vision. The negative report by no means discouraged his partisans, who replied, "Well, he didn't see very accurately: but isn't it wonderful enough that he should see so far?" Professor Flourney describes "deceiving spirits" who failed to see accurately, and "beneficent spirits" who happened to hit it right, or remained undetected. The exposition of Paladino is regarded as incidental, and as in no way interfering with the possibility—indeed, with the "genuineness"—of such of her performances as escaped detection. The association of psychology with spiritism has been unfortunate from the first, but may well be said to have reached the climax of the undesirable in the present volume.

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