SUPERNATURALISM AND SCIENCE.

Prof. Newcomb Discusses Ghosts, Mesmerism, and Mind Reading.

The second lecture of the third course of lectures under the auspices of the Anthropological and Biological societies, given at the National Museum, was delivered Saturday by Prof. Simon Newcomb, the astronomer, upon "Psychic Force," with special reference to the supernatural manifestations claimed for ghost phenomena, mesmerism, spiritualism, &c. The lecturer said he was willing to acknowledge the truth of the oft-heard quotation from "Hamlet," that "there are more things between Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Yet many of the things for a long time supposed to be mysterious and supernatural were subsequently, by the investigations of science, shown to be knowable and explicable. He advanced the theory that everything in nature that can be seen must be subject to the laws governing optic impressions. He gave explanations of ghost phenomena, mesmerism, spiritualism, mind reading, and other psychological puzzles, and ascribed their chief influences to the disposition at wanderment. Mind-reading, he said, if at all existing, could only be explained upon the theory that our minds are completely subject to mutual attraction. In the other cases the question reduced itself to a determination whether outward forces could act upon us without the mediation of our nervous system and, vice versa, whether we could act upon the outside world without the exertion of our nervous force, a thought that is utterly absurd. He then illustrated his argument by the want of sense or absence of action on our part in moving even a feather at some distance from the body, and said that in falling a moving body could not be swayed one inch from its course by the action of the falling individual. He compared the action of the mind, in its manifestations through the will or nervous force, to the actions of a prisoner confined within four walls with no other communication with the outside world, than by means of telegraphic communications through wires leading into his prison.

There is no power in the mind to go beyond the limits of its own nervous force. The speaker then drew a sharp contrast between the investigations of science and spiritualistic investigations or results. In science nothing has ever been done accomplished that could not, ever after, be produced again by similar means. Science records its failures as well as its successes, because the knowledge of what elements will prevent the desired effect are as necessary as the results accomplished. In spiritualism, mind-reading and mesmerism, on the other hand, neither the excitement of, twenty and twenty-five years ago, nor the doings of the London society established many years ago, nor the researches of men of science, had ever led to a practical result. The same conditions did not exist, as in scientific research, the same conditions, sometimes, under the same circumstances, "favorable," and sometimes, under the same circumstances, "unfavorable," and, upon the whole, the by far greater majority of tests, resulted in disappointment. The lecturer denied, for these reasons, the existence of "psychic force" in demonstrations of this kind, and expressed his doubts as to the reality of spiritualistic occurrences.