MODERN VIEWS OF LIGHT.

ABSTRACT OF THE SUBJECT MATTER AND EXPERIMENTS.

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Just as a pebble thrown into a pond excites surface ripples, which can heave up and down floating straws under which they pass, so a struck bell or tuning-fork emits energy into the air in the form of what are called sound waves, and this radiant energy is able to set up vibrations in other suitable elastic bodies.

If the body receiving them has its natural or free vibrations violently damped, so that when left to itself it speedily returns to rest, then it can respond fully to notes of almost any pitch. This is the case with your ears and the tones of my voice. Tones must be exceedingly shrill before they cease to excite the ear at all.

If, on the other hand, the receiving body has a persistent period of vibration, continuing in motion long after it is left to itself, like another tuning-fork or bell for instance, then far more facility of response exists, but great accuracy of tuning is necessary if it is to be fully called out; for if the receiver is not thus accurately syntonised with the source, it fails more or less completely to resound.

Conversely, if the *source* is a persistent vibrator, correct tuning is essential, or it will destroy at one moment motion which it originated the previous moment.

Whereas, if it is dead-beat or strongly-damped, almost anything will respond equally well or equally ill to it.

What I have said of sounding bodies is true of all vibrators in a medium competent to transmit waves. Now a sending telephone or a microphone, when spoken to, emits waves into the ether, and this radiant energy is likewise able to set up vibration in suitable bodies. But we have no delicate means of directly detecting these electrical or etherial waves; and if they are to produce a perceptible effect at a distance, they must be confined as by a speaking-tube, prevented from spreading, and concentrated on the distant receiver.

This is the function of the telegraph wire; it is to the ether what a speaking-tube is to air. A metal wire in air (*in function*, not in details of analogy) is like a long hollow cavity surrounded by nearly rigid but slightly elastic walls.

Furthermore, any conductor electrically charged or discharged with sufficient suddenness must emit electrical waves into the ether, because the charge given to it will not settle down instantly, but will surge to and fro several times first; and these surgings or electric oscillations must, according to Maxwell, start waves in the ether, because at the end of each half-swing they cause electrostatic, and at the middle of each half-swing they cause electromagnetic effects, and the rapid alternation from one of these modes of energy to the other constitutes etherial waves.* If a wire is handy they will run along it, and may be felt a long way off. If no wire exists they will spread out like sound from a bell, or light from a spark,

* Strictly speaking, in the waves themselves there is no lag or difference of phase between the electric and the magnetic vibrations; the difference exists in emitter or absorber, but not in the transmitting medium. True radiation of energy does not begin till about a quarter wave-length from the source, and within that distance the initial quarter period difference of phase is obliterated.

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