

# **The Confessions of a Medium (1860, 1861)**

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## Introduction

*Confessions of a Medium* (1860-1) is a early — but perhaps not the first — example of a particular genre of Spiritualist literature, the mediumistic confession, of which genre the most important examples are William Chapman's *Confessions of a Medium* (1882) (which details his brief and nefarious career as the partner of the materializing medium Alfred Firman) and Charles F. Pidgeon's *Revelations of a Spirit Medium* (1891).<sup>1</sup>

Predating both of these texts, this *Confessions* is not a revelation of chicanery practiced by the narrating spirit medium; it is the revelation that a particular pair of Spiritualists — referred to as Mr. Abijah Stilton and Miss Abby Fetters in the text itself — are Free Lovers, Spiritual Affinities. The Fox sisters, including Leah as Mrs. Fish, appear in the text under their proper names, as does — obliquely, as the author of *An Epic of the Starry Heavens* (1854) — Thomas Lake Harris, but the identities of Mr. Stilton and Miss Fetters are a mystery, to me at least, and may or may not have been intended by the author to stand in for real people. Stilton's only identifying characteristics are that he is married, not a medium, and the editor of a small monthly periodical entitled 'Revelations from the Interior,'" which may be a reference to the Auburn Apostolic Circle's periodical *Disclosures from the Interior and Superior Care for Mortals*.<sup>2</sup> Miss Fetters is identified by a minimalistic physical description, a range of manifestations, and a relatively large number of spirit controls: Sampson, Peter the Great, Gibbs the Pirate, Black Hawk, Joe Manton, and "Cribb, a noted pugilist of the last century."

The text was written by the poet and journalist Bayard Taylor (1825-1878), and is reproduced verbatim in the second series of Taylor's *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery, and Men* (1862).<sup>3</sup> Taylor presents himself, in *At Home and Abroad*, as sympathetic to the supernatural, remarking in a chapter entitled "My Supernatural Experiences" that:

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<sup>1</sup> For background on Chapman text, see my notes at: <http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/2012/12/confessions-of-medium-author-outed.html> For background on the Pidgeon text, see my notes at: <http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/2013/05/some-notes-on-revelations-of-spirit.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See my notes on this periodical, at: <http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/2014/Q2/notes-on-mountain-cove-6-disclosures.html>. A portion of the Auburn Apostolic Circle broke away to form, under the Rev. J. L. Scott and Thomas Lake Harris, the separatist Spiritualist Mountain Cove Community, which itself dissolved after a few brief years in the wake of a spate of accusations that included Free Love and financial mismanagement.

<sup>3</sup> Bayard Taylor. *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery and Men*. Second Series. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1862). *Confessions* occupies pages 433 to 472 in this edition.

Let sceptical [sic], hard, matter-of-fact men talk as they may, there is a lingering belief in the possibility of occasional communication between the natural and the supernatural — the visible and invisible world — inherent in human nature. There are not many persons whose lives do not contain at least some few occurrences, which are incapable of being satisfactorily explained by any known laws — remarkable presentiments, coincidences, and sometimes apparitions, even, which seem to be beyond the reach of accident or chance, and overcome us with a special wonder. The error, however, is generally on the side of credulity. Men are reluctant to accept any rational interpretation of such things, since the veil which they believe to have been agitated, if not lifted, is thereby rendered as still and impenetrable as before. The remarkable prevalence of “Spiritualism,” in spite of its disgusting puerilities, can only be accounted for in this way.<sup>4</sup>

This view of Spiritualism is consistent with the view expressed in “Confessions,” in particular with the narrator’s uncertainty about the validity of his experiences, and his dismay at the dismal content of communications received from spirits of the famous dead.

Thomas Shorter, the British Spiritualist leader, included this text as the final item in his 1867 bibliography of Modern Spiritualism, and believed that the confessions in the narrative were “plainly spurious.”<sup>5</sup> While it is clear that the narrator of the *Confessions* is not Bayard himself and that the narrative is fictionalized, the substance of the confessions are not spurious. The developing relationship between Stilton and Fetters reflects, accurately, one that occurred frequently, within the movement, between mediums and their promoters or managers, at the time the narrative was written. Whether Shorter’s reaction stems from his aversion to the story’s equation of Spiritualism with Free Love, or from a knowledge of the identities of Mr. Stilton and Miss Fetters, I do not know.

In any event, the text deserves recovery and circulation as an early exemplar of the confessional genre within Spiritualist literature, and may offer an enterprising researcher enough internal clues to hazard identification of Mr. Stilton and Miss Fetters (whose spirit guides may provide the best clue to her identity).

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<sup>4</sup> Bayard Taylor. *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery and Men*. [First Series]. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1859), pp. 140-1.

<sup>5</sup> See the bibliography at: [http://www.ehbritten.org/ts\\_hib.html](http://www.ehbritten.org/ts_hib.html)



## Bibliographical Note

The text first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* for December of 1860, and received notice from both the secular<sup>6</sup> and Spiritualist<sup>7</sup> press. Henry James Tressider, a small London publisher, presumably saw an opportunity to capitalize on the rising demand for Spiritualist material in England, in early 1861, and reset the article as a pamphlet — no doubt without the knowledge of the editors of the *Atlantic Monthly* — that appeared in the hands of critics, booksellers and readers in late March of 1861.

The two texts exhibit differences, in particular in the handling of the author's footnotes. There is some scant evidence that the text may have circulated prior to its publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*.<sup>8</sup>

Both versions of the text are provided here, along with some reviews and advertisements for the British pamphlet version of the text, in the appendices.

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<sup>6</sup> The Philadelphia *Inquirer* for November 24, 1860, remarked (p. 2) that "The Confessions of a Medium" is better suited for the latitude of Boston than of Philadelphia, as we don't take much interest here in psychological developments," a remarkable instance of whistling in the dark. Its compatriot, the Philadelphia *Press*, noted the text on the same day (p. 1), and felt "The Confessions of a Medium," full of exaggeration, is the very worst Magazine article of the month, and its appearance here [in the *Atlantic Monthly*] surprises us." The *Springfield Daily Republican*, on December 1, 1860 (p. 2), told its readers that "The Confessions of a Medium will be welcomed by many as a clear and candid statement of what is really known of the Spiritualist philosophy, wavering and unreliable as it has proved, and involving as it appears to do a perilous sacrifice of that power of personal will which is one of God's most sacred gifts."

<sup>7</sup> The *Herald of Progress* commented on the text some time prior to the February 2, 1861 issue, in which a reader from Louisiana's letter notes that "We like your reflections on 'Confessions of a Medium'" (p. 1). The *Banner of Light* silently replays, in its January 26, 1861 issue (p. 5) a notice from an otherwise unidentified periodical called the *Clarion*, which pans the text as "one of the silliest and most slanderous stories ever published against Spiritualism."

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the advertisements for an uncharacterized text entitled *Confessions of a Medium* in the (Baltimore) *Sun* for May 10 (p. 1) and May 11 (p. 1), 1860. These advertisements are pointing in the direction of an article in the *Baltimore Dispatch* for May 12, 1860, entitled "Confessions of a Medium," which I have been unable to locate.



**“Confessions of a Medium”  
Atlantic Monthly  
December 1860  
Pages 699-714**



## THE CONFESSIONS OF A MEDIUM.

It is not yet a year since I ceased to act as a Spiritual Medium. (I am forced to make use of this title as the most intelligible, but I do it with a strong mental protest.) At first, I desired only to withdraw myself quietly from the peculiar associations into which I had been thrown by the exercise of my faculty, and be content with the simple fact of my escape. A man who joins the Dashaways does not care to have the circumstance announced in the newspapers. "So, he was an habitual drunkard," the public would say. I was overcome by a similar reluctance,—nay, I might honestly call it shame,—since, although I had at intervals officiated as a Medium for a period of seven years, my name had been mentioned, incidentally, only once or twice in the papers devoted especially to Spiritualism. I had no such reputation as that of Hume or Andrew Jackson Davis, which would call for a public statement of my recantation. The result would be, therefore, to give prominence to a weakness, which, however manfully overcome, might be remembered to my future prejudice.

I find, however, that the resolution to be silent leaves me restless and unsatisfied. And in reflecting calmly—objectively, for the first time—upon the experience of those seven years, I recognize so many points wherein my case is undoubtedly analogous to that of hundreds of others who may be still entangled in the same labyrinth whence I have but recently escaped, so clear a solution of much that is enigmatical, even to those who reject Spiritualism, that the impulse to write weighs upon me with the pressure of a neglected duty. I *cannot* longer be silent, and, in the conviction that the truth of my statement will be evident enough to those most concerned in hearing it, without the authority of any name, (least of all, of one so little known as mine,) I now give my confession to the world. The names of the individuals whom I

shall have occasion to introduce are, of course, disguised; but, with this exception, the narrative is the plainest possible record of my own experience. Many of the incidents which I shall be obliged to describe are known only to the actors therein, who, I feel assured, will never foolishly betray themselves. I have therefore no fear that any harm can result from my disclosures.

In order to make my views intelligible to those readers who have paid no attention to psychological subjects, I must commence a little in advance of my story. My own individual nature is one of those apparently inconsistent combinations which are frequently found in the children of parents whose temperaments and mental personalities widely differ. This class of natures is much larger than would be supposed. Inheriting opposite, even conflicting, traits from father and mother, they assume, as either element predominates, diverse characters; and that which is the result of temperament (in fact, congenital inconsistency) is set down by the unthinking world as moral weakness or duplicity. Those who have sufficient skill to perceive and reconcile—or, at least, govern—the opposing elements are few, indeed. Had the power come to me sooner, I should have been spared the necessity of making these confessions.

From one parent I inherited an extraordinarily active and sensitive imagination,—from the other, a sturdy practical sense, a disposition to weigh and balance with calm fairness the puzzling questions which life offers to every man. These conflicting qualities—as is usual in all similar natures—were not developed in equal order of growth. The former governed my childhood, my youth, and enveloped me with spells, which all the force of the latter and more slowly ripened faculty was barely sufficient to break. Luxuriant weeds and brambles covered

the soil which should have been ploughed and made to produce honest grain. Unfortunately, I had no teacher who was competent to understand and direct me. The task was left for myself, and I can only wonder, after all that has occurred, how it has been possible for me to succeed. Certainly, this success has not been due to any vigorous exercise of virtue on my part, but solely to the existence of that cool, reflective reason which lay *perdue* beneath all the extravagances of my mind.

I possessed, even as a child, an unusual share of what phrenologists call Concentrativeness. The power of absorption, of self-forgetfulness, was at the same time a source of delight and a torment. Lost in some wild dream or absurd childish speculation, my insensibility to outward things was chastised as carelessness or a hardened indifference to counsel. With a memory almost marvellous to retain those things which appealed to my imagination, I blundered painfully over the commonest tasks. While I frequently repeated the Sunday hymn, at dinner, I was too often unable to give the least report of the sermon. Withdrawn into my corner of the pew, I gave myself up, after the enunciation of the text, to a complete abstraction, which took no note of time or place. Fixing my eyes upon a knot in one of the panels under the pulpit, I sat moveless during the hour and a half which our worthy old clergyman required for the expounding of the seven parts of his discourse. They could never accuse me of sleeping, however; for I rarely even winked. The closing hymn recalled me to myself, always with a shock, or sense of pain, and sometimes even with a temporary nausea.

This habit of abstraction — properly a complete *passivity* of the mind — after a while developed another habit, in which I now see the root of that peculiar condition which made me a Medium. I shall therefore endeavor to describe it. I was sitting, one Sunday, just as the minister was commencing his sermon, with my eyes carelessly following the fingers of my right

hand, as I drummed them slowly across my knee. Suddenly, the wonder came into my mind, — How is it my fingers move? What set them going? What is it that stops them? The mystery of that communication between will and muscle, which no physiologist has ever fathomed, burst upon my young intellect. I had been conscious of no intention of thus drumming my fingers; they were in motion when I first noticed them: they were certainly a part of myself, yet they acted without my knowledge or design! My left hand was quiet; why did its fingers not move also? Following these reflections came a dreadful fear, as I remembered Jane, the blacksmith's daughter, whose elbows and shoulders sometimes jerked in such a way as to make all the other scholars laugh, although we were sorry for the poor girl, who cried bitterly over her unfortunate, ungovernable limbs. I was comforted, however, on finding that I could control the motion of my fingers at pleasure; but my imagination was too active to stop there. What if I should forget how to direct my hands? What if they should refuse to obey me? What if my knees, which were just as still as the hymn-books in the rack before me, should cease to bend, and I should sit there forever? These very questions seemed to produce a temporary paralysis of the will. As my right hand lay quietly on my knee, and I asked myself, with a stupid wonder, "Now, can I move it?" it lay as still as before. I had only questioned, not willed. "No I cannot move it," I said, in real doubt. I was conscious of a blind sense of exertion, wherein there was yet no proper exertion, but which seemed to exhaust me. Fascinated by this new mystery, I contemplated my hand as something apart from myself, — something subordinate to, but not identical with, me. The rising of the congregation for the hymn broke the spell, like the snapping of a thread.

The reader will readily understand that I carried these experiences much farther. I gradually learned to suspend (perhaps in imagination only, but therefore none

the less really) the action of my will upon the muscles of my arms and legs; and I did it with the greater impunity, from knowing that the stir consequent upon the conclusion of the services would bring me to myself. In proportion as the will became passive, the activity of my imagination was increased, and I experienced a new and strange delight in watching the play of fantasies which appeared to come and go independently of myself. There was still a dim consciousness of outward things mingled with my condition; I was not beyond the recall of my senses. But one day, I remember, as I sat motionless as a statue, having ceased any longer to attempt to control my dead limbs, more than usually passive, a white, shining mist gradually stole around me; my eyes finally ceased to take cognizance of objects; a low, musical humming sounded in my ears, and those creatures of the imagination which had hitherto crossed my brain as *thoughts* now spoke to me as audible voices. If there is any happy delirium in the first stages of intoxication, (of which, thank Heaven, I have no experience,) it must be a sensation very much like that which I felt. The death of external and the birth of internal consciousness overwhelmed my childish soul with a dumb, ignorant ecstasy, like that which savages feel on first hearing the magic of music.

How long I remained thus I know not. I was aroused by feeling myself violently shaken. "John!" exclaimed my mother, who had grasped my arm with a determined hand,—"bless the boy! what ails him? Why, his face is as white as a sheet!" Slowly I recovered my consciousness, saw the church and the departing congregation, and mechanically followed my parents. I could give no explanation of what had happened, except to say that I had fallen asleep. As I ate my dinner with a good appetite, my mother's fears were quieted. I was left at home the following Sunday, and afterwards only ventured to indulge sparingly in the exercise of my newly discovered faculty. My mother, I was conscious,

took more note of my presence than formerly, and I feared a repetition of the same catastrophe. As I grew older and my mind became interested in a wider range of themes, I finally lost the habit, which I classed among the many follies of childhood.

I retained, nevertheless, and still retain, something of that subtle instinct which mocks and yet surpasses reason. My feelings with regard to the persons whom I met were quite independent of their behavior towards me, or the estimation in which they were held by the world. Things which puzzled my brain in waking hours were made clear to me in sleep, and I frequently felt myself blindly impelled to do or to avoid doing certain things. The members of my family, who found it impossible to understand my motives of action,—because, in fact, there were no *motives*,—complacently solved the difficulty by calling me "queer." I presume there are few persons who are not occasionally visited by the instinct, or impulse, or faculty, or whatever it may be called, to which I refer. I possessed it in a more than ordinary degree, and was generally able to distinguish between its suggestions and the mere humors of my imagination. It is scarcely necessary to say that I assume the existence of such a power, at the outset. I recognize it as a normal faculty of the human mind,—not therefore universal, any more than the genius which makes a poet, a painter, or a composer.

My education was neither general nor thorough; hence I groped darkly with the psychological questions which were presented to me. Tormented by those doubts which at some period of life assail the soul of every thinking man, I was ready to grasp at any solution which offered, without very carefully testing its character. I eagerly accepted the theory of Animal Magnetism, which, so far as it went, was satisfactory; but it only illustrated the powers and relations of the soul in its present state of existence; it threw no light upon that future which I was not willing to take upon faith alone.



Though sensible to mesmeric influences, I was not willing that my spiritual nature should be the instrument of another's will, — that a human being, like myself, should become possessed of all my secrets and sanctities, touching the keys of every passion with his unhallowed fingers. In the phenomena of clairvoyance I saw only other and more subtle manifestations of the power which I knew to exist in my own mind. Hence, I soon grew weary of prosecuting inquiries which, at best, would fall short of solving my own great and painful doubt, — Does the human soul continue to exist after death? That it could take cognizance of things beyond the reach of the five senses, I was already assured. This, however, might be a sixth sense, no less material and perishable in its character than the others. My brain, as yet, was too young and immature to follow the thread of that lofty spiritual logic in the light of which such doubts melt away like mists of the night. Thus, uneasy because undeveloped, erring because I had never known the necessary guidance, seeking, but almost despairing of enlightenment, I was a fit subject for any spiritual epidemic which seemed to offer me a cure for worse maladies.

At this juncture occurred the phenomena known as the "Rochester Knockings." (My home, let me say, is in a small town not far from New York.) I shared in the general interest aroused by the marvellous stories, which, being followed by the no less extraordinary display of some unknown agency at Norwalk, Connecticut, excited me to such a degree that I was half-converted to the new faith before I had witnessed any spiritual manifestation. Soon after the arrival of the Misses Fox in New York I visited them in their rooms at the Howard House. Impressed by their quiet, natural demeanor, the absence of anything savoring of jugglery, and the peculiar character of the raps and movements of the table, I asked my questions and applied my tests, in a passive, if not a believing frame of mind. In fact, I had

not long been seated, before the noises became loud and frequent.

"The spirits like to communicate with you," said Mrs. Fish: "you seem to be nearer to them than most people."

I summoned, in succession, the spirits of my mother, a younger brother, and a cousin to whom I had been much attached in boyhood, and obtained correct answers to all my questions. I did not then remark, what has since occurred to me, that these questions concerned things which I knew, and that the answers to them were distinctly impressed on my mind at the time. The result of one of my tests made a very deep impression upon me. Having mentally selected a friend whom I had met in the train that morning, I asked, — "Will the spirit whose name is now in my mind communicate with me?" To this came the answer, slowly rapped out, on calling over the alphabet, — "*He is living!*"

I returned home, very much puzzled. Precisely those features of the exhibition (let me call it such) which repulse others attracted me. The searching daylight, the plain, matter-of-fact character of the manifestations, the absence of all solemnity and mystery, impressed me favorably towards the spiritual theory. If disembodied souls, I said, really exist and can communicate with those in the flesh, why should they choose moonlight or darkness, graveyards or lonely bed-chambers, for their visitations? What is to hinder them from speaking at times and in places where the senses of men are fully awake and alert, rather than when they are liable to be the dupes of the imagination? In such reflections as these I was the unconscious dupe of my own imagination, while supposing myself thoroughly impartial and critical.

Soon after this, circles began to be formed in my native town, for the purpose of table-moving. A number of persons met, secretly at first, — for as yet there were no avowed converts, — and quite as much for sport as for serious investigation. The first evening there was no satisfactory manifestation. The table moved a little,



it is true, but each one laughingly accused his neighbors of employing some muscular force: all isolated attempts were vain. I was conscious, nevertheless, of a curious sensation of numbness in the arms, which recalled to mind my forgotten experiments in church. No rappings were heard, and some of the participants did not scruple to pronounce the whole thing a delusion.

A few evenings after this we met again. Those who were most incredulous happened to be absent, while, accidentally, their places were filled by persons whose temperaments disposed them to a passive seriousness. Among these was a girl of sixteen, Miss Abby Fetters, a pale, delicate creature, with blond hair and light-blue eyes. Chance placed her next to me, in forming the ring, and her right hand lay lightly upon my left. We stood around a heavy circular dining-table. A complete silence was preserved, and all minds gradually sank into a quiet, passive expectancy. In about ten minutes I began to feel, or to imagine that I felt, a stream of light,—if light were a palpable substance,—a something far finer and more subtle than an electric current, passing from the hand of Miss Fetters through my own into the table. Presently the great wooden mass began to move,—stopped,—moved again,—turned in a circle, we following, without changing the position of our hands,—and finally began to rock from side to side, with increasing violence. Some of the circle were thrown off by the movements; others withdrew their hands in affright; and but four, among whom were Miss Fetters and myself, retained their hold. My outward consciousness appeared to be somewhat benumbed, as if by some present fascination or approaching trance, but I retained curiosity enough to look at my companion. Her eyes, sparkling with a strange, steady light, were fixed upon the table; her breath came quick and short, and her cheek had lost every trace of color. Suddenly, as if by a spasmodic effort, she removed her hands; I did the same, and the table stopped. She threw

herself into a seat, as if exhausted, yet, during the whole time, not a muscle of the hand which lay upon mine had stirred. I solemnly declare that my own hands had been equally passive, yet I experienced the same feeling of fatigue,—not muscular fatigue, but a sense of *deadness*, as if every drop of nervous energy had been suddenly taken from me.

Further experiments, the same evening, showed that we two, either together or alone, were able to produce the same phenomena without the assistance of the others present. We did not succeed, however, in obtaining any answers to our questions, nor were any of us impressed by the idea that the spirits of the dead were among us. In fact, these table-movings would not, of themselves, suggest the idea of a spiritual manifestation. "The table is bewitched," said Thompson, a hard-headed young fellow, without a particle of imagination; and this was really the first impression of all: some unknown force, latent in the dead matter, had been called into action. Still, this conclusion was so strange, so incredible, that the agency of supernatural intelligences finally presented itself to my mind as the readiest solution.

It was not long before we obtained rappings, and were enabled to repeat all the experiments which I had tried during my visit to the Fox family. The spirits of our deceased relatives and friends announced themselves, and generally gave a correct account of their earthly lives. I must confess, however, that, whenever we attempted to pry into the future, we usually received answers as ambiguous as those of the Grecian oracles, or predictions which failed to be realized. Violent knocks or other unruly demonstrations would sometimes interrupt an intelligent communication which promised us some light on the other life: these, we were told, were occasioned by evil or mischievous spirits, whose delight it was to create disturbances. They never occurred, I now remember, except when Miss Fetters was present. At the time,

we were too much absorbed in our researches to notice the fact.

The reader will perceive, from what he knows of my previous mental state, that it was not difficult for me to accept the theories of the Spiritualists. Here was an evidence of the immortality of the soul,—nay, more, of its continued individuality through endless future existences. The idea of my individuality being lost had been to me the same thing as complete annihilation. The spirits themselves informed us that they had come to teach these truths. The simple, ignorant faith of the Past, they said, was worn out; with the development of science, the mind of man had become skeptical; the ancient fountains no longer sufficed for his thirst; each new era required a new revelation; in all former ages there had been single minds pure enough and advanced enough to communicate with the dead and be the mediums of their messages to men, but now the time had come when the knowledge of this intercourse must be declared unto all; in its light the mysteries of the Past became clear; in the wisdom thus imparted, that happy Future which seems possible to every ardent and generous heart would be secured. I was not troubled by the fact that the messages which proclaimed these things were often incorrectly spelt, that the grammar was bad and the language far from elegant. I did not reflect that these new and sublime truths had formerly passed through my own brain as the dreams of a wandering imagination. Like that American philosopher who looks upon one of his own neophytes as a man of great and profound mind because the latter carefully remembers and repeats to him his own carelessly uttered wisdom, I saw in these misty and disjointed reflections of my own thoughts the precious revelation of departed and purified spirits.

How a passion for the unknown and unattainable takes hold of men is illustrated by the search for the universal solvent, by the mysteries of the Rosicrucians, by the patronage of fortune-tellers,

even. Wholly absorbed in spiritual researches,—having, in fact, no vital interest in anything else,—I soon developed into what is called a Medium. I discovered, at the outset, that the peculiar condition to be attained before the tables would begin to move could be produced at will.\* I also found that the passive state into which I naturally fell had a tendency to produce that trance or suspension of the will which I had discovered when a boy. External consciousness, however, did not wholly depart. I saw the circle of inquirers around me, but dimly, and as phantoms,—while the impressions which passed over my brain seemed to wear visible forms and to speak with audible voices.

I did not doubt, at the time, that spirits visited me, and that they made use of my body to communicate with those who could hear them in no other way. Beside the pleasant intoxication of the semi-trance, I felt a rare joy in the knowledge that I was elected above other men to be their interpreter. Let me endeavor to describe the nature of this possession. Sometimes, even before a spirit would be called for, the figure of the person, as it existed in the mind of the inquirer, would suddenly present itself to me,—not to my outward senses, but to my interior, instinctive knowledge. If the recollection of the other embraced also the voice, I heard the voice in the same manner, and unconsciously imitated it. The answers to the questions I knew by the same instinct, as soon as the questions were spok-

\* In attempting to describe my own sensations, I labor under the disadvantage of speaking mostly to those who have never experienced anything of the kind. Hence, what would be perfectly clear to myself, and to those who have passed through a similar experience, may be unintelligible to the former class. The Spiritualists excuse the crudities which their Plato, St. Paul, and Shakespeare utter, by ascribing them to the imperfection of human language; and I may claim the same allowance in setting forth mental conditions of which the mind itself can grasp no complete idea, seeing that its most important faculties are paralyzed during the existence of those conditions.

en. If the question was vague, asked for information rather than *confirmation*, either no answer came, or there was an impression of a *wish* of what the answer might be, or, at times, some strange involuntary sentence sprang to my lips. When I wrote, my hand appeared to move of itself; yet the words it wrote invariably passed through my mind. Even when blindfolded, there was no difference in its performance. The same powers developed themselves in a still greater degree in Miss Feters. The spirits which spoke most readily through her were those of men, even coarse and rude characters, which came unsummoned. Two or three of the other members of our circle were able to produce motions in the table; they could even feel, as they asserted, the touch of spiritual hands; but, however much they desired it, they were never personally possessed as we, and therefore could not properly be called Mediums.

These investigations were not regularly carried on. Occasionally the interest of the circle flagged, until it was renewed by the visit of some apostle of the new faith, usually accompanied by a "Preaching Medium." Among those whose presence especially conduced to keep alive the flame of spiritual inquiry was a gentleman named Stilton, the editor of a small monthly periodical entitled "*Revelations from the Interior*." Without being himself a Medium, he was nevertheless thoroughly conversant with the various phenomena of Spiritualism, and both spoke and wrote in the dialect which its followers adopted. He was a man of varied, but not profound learning, an active intellect, giving and receiving impressions with equal facility, and with an unusual combination of concentrativeness and versatility in his nature. A certain inspiration was connected with his presence. His personality overflowed upon and influenced others. "My mind is not sufficiently submissive," he would say, "to receive impressions from the spirits, but my atmosphere attracts them and encourages them to speak." He was a stout, strongly built man, with coarse black hair,

gray eyes, large animal mouth, square jaws, and short, thick neck. Had his hair been cropped close, he would have looked very much like a prize-fighter; but he wore it long, parted in the middle, and as meek in expression as its stiff waves would allow.

Stilton soon became the controlling spirit of our circle. His presence really seemed, as he said, to encourage the spirits. Never before had the manifestations been so abundant or so surprising. Miss Feters, especially, astonished us by the vigor of her possessions. Not only Samson and Peter the Great, but Gibbs the Pirate, Black Hawk, and Joe Manton, who had died the previous year in a fit of delirium-tremens, prophesied, strode, swore, and smashed things in turn, by means of her frail little body. As Cribb, a noted pugilist of the last century, she floored an incautious spectator, giving him a black eye which he wore for a fortnight afterwards. Singularly enough, my visitors were of the opposite cast. Hypatia, Petrarch, Mary Magdalen, Abelard, and, oftenest of all, Shelley, proclaimed mystic truths from my lips. They usually spoke in inspired monologues, without announcing themselves beforehand, and often without giving any clue to their personality. A practised stenographer, engaged by Mr. Stilton, took down many of these communications as they were spoken, and they were afterwards published in the "*Revelations*." It was also remarked, that, while Miss Feters employed violent gestures and seemed to possess a superhuman strength, I, on the contrary, sat motionless, pale, and with little sign of life except in my voice, which, though low, was clear and dramatic in its modulations. Stilton explained this difference without hesitation. "Miss Abby," he said, "possesses soul-matter of a texture to which the souls of these strong men naturally adhere. In the spirit-land the superfluities repel each other; the individual souls seek to remedy their imperfections: in the union of opposites only is to be found the great harmonia of life. You, John, move up-

on another plane; through what in you is undeveloped, these developed spirits are attracted."

For two or three years, I must admit, my life was a very happy one. Not only were those occasional trances an intoxication, nay, a coveted indulgence, but they cast a consecration over my life. My restored faith rested on the sure evidence of my own experience; my new creed contained no harsh or repulsive feature; I heard the same noble sentiments which I uttered in such moments repeated by my associates in the faith, and I devoutly believed that a complete regeneration of the human race was at hand. Nevertheless, it struck me sometimes as singular that many of the Mediums whom I met — men and women chosen by spiritual hands to the same high office — excited in my mind that instinct of repulsion on which I had learned to rely as a sufficient reason for avoiding certain persons. Far as it would have been from my mind, at that time, to question the manifestations which accompanied them, I could not smother my mistrust of their characters. Miss Fetters, whom I so frequently met, was one of the most disagreeable. Her cold, thin lips, pale eyes, and lean figure gave me a singular impression of voracious hunger. Her presence was often announced to me by a chill shudder, before I saw her. Centuries ago one of her ancestors must have been a ghoul or vampire. The trance of possession seemed, with her, to be a form of dissipation, in which she indulged as she might have catered for a baser appetite. The new religion was nothing to her; I believe she valued it only on account of the importance she obtained among its followers. Her father, a vain, weak-minded man, who kept a grocery in the town, was himself a convert.

Stilton had an answer for every doubt. No matter how tangled a labyrinth might be exhibited to him, he walked straight through it.

"How is it," I asked him, "that so many of my fellow-mediums inspire me with an instinctive dislike and mistrust?"

"By mistrust you mean dislike," he answered; "since you know of no reason to doubt their characters. The elements of soul-matter are differently combined in different individuals, and there are affinities and repulsions, just as there are in the chemical elements. Your feeling is chemical, not moral. A want of affinity does not necessarily imply an existing evil in the other party. In the present ignorance of the world, our true affinities can only be imperfectly felt and indulged; and the entire freedom which we shall obtain in this respect is the greatest happiness of the spirit-life."

Another time I asked, —

"How is it that the spirits of great authors speak so tamely to us? Shakspeare, last night, wrote a passage which he would have been heartily ashamed of, as a living man. We know that a spirit spoke, calling himself Shakspeare; but, judging from his communication, it could not have been he."

"It probably was not," said Mr. Stilton. "I am convinced that all malicious spirits are at work to interrupt the communications from the higher spheres. We were thus deceived by one professing to be Benjamin Franklin, who drew for us the plan of a machine for splitting shingles, which we had fabricated and patented at considerable expense. On trial, however, it proved to be a miserable failure, a complete mockery. When the spirit was again summoned, he refused to speak, but shook the table to express his malicious laughter, went off, and has never since returned. My friend, we know but the alphabet of Spiritualism, the mere A B C; we can no more expect to master the immortal language in a day than a child to read Plato after learning his letters."

Many of those who had been interested in the usual phenomena gradually dropped off, tired, and perhaps a little ashamed, in the reaction following their excitement; but there were continual accessions to our ranks, and we formed, at last, a distinct clan or community. Indeed, the number of *secret* believers

in Spiritualism would never be suspected by the uninitiated. In the sect, however, as in Masonry and the Catholic Church, there are circles within circles, — concentric rings, whence you can look outwards, but not inwards, and where he alone who stands at the centre is able to perceive everything. Such an inner circle was at last formed in our town. Its object, according to Stilton, with whom the plan originated, was to obtain a purer spiritual atmosphere, by the exclusion of all but Mediums and those non-mediumistic believers in whose presence the spirits felt at ease, and thus invite communications from the farther and purer spheres.

In fact, the result seemed to justify the plan. The character of the trance, as I had frequently observed, is vitiated by the consciousness that disbelievers are present. The more perfect the atmosphere of credulity, the more satisfactory the manifestations. The expectant company, the dim light, the conviction that a wonderful revelation was about to dawn upon us, excited my imagination, and my trance was really a sort of delirium, in which I spoke with a passion and an eloquence I had never before exhibited. The fear, which had previously haunted me, at times, of giving my brain and tongue into the control of an unknown power, was forgotten; yet, more than ever, I was conscious of some strong controlling influence, and experienced a reckless pleasure in permitting myself to be governed by it. "Prepare," I concluded, (I quote from the report in the "Revelations,") "prepare, sons of men, for the dawning day! Prepare for the second and perfect regeneration of man! For the prison-chambers have been broken into, and the light from the interior shall illuminate the external! Ye shall enjoy spiritual and passionless freedom; your guides shall no longer be the despotism of ignorant laws, nor the whip of an imaginary conscience,—but the natural impulses of your nature, which are the melody of Life, and the natural affinities, which are its harmony! The reflections from the upper spheres shall irradiate the

lower, and Death is the triumphal arch through which we pass from glory to glory!"

— I have here paused, deliberating whether I should proceed farther in my narrative. But no; if any good is to be accomplished by these confessions, the reader must walk with me through the dark labyrinth which follows. He must walk over what may be considered delicate ground, but he shall not be harmed. One feature of the trance condition is too remarkable, too important in its consequences, to be overlooked. It is a feature of which many Mediums are undoubtedly ignorant, the existence of which is not even suspected by thousands of honest Spiritualists.

Let me again anticipate the regular course of my narrative, and explain. A suspension of the Will, when indulged in for any length of time, produces a suspension of that inward consciousness of good and evil which we call Conscience, and which can be actively exercised only through the medium of the Will. The mental faculties and the moral perceptions lie down together in the same passive sleep. The subject is, therefore, equally liable to receive impressions from the minds of others, and from their passions and lusts. Besides this, the germs of all good and of all evil are implanted in the nature of every human being; and even when some appetite is buried in a crypt so deep that its existence is forgotten, let the warder be removed, and it will gradually work its way to the light. Persons in the receptive condition which belongs to the trance may be surrounded by honest and pure-minded individuals, and receive no harmful impressions; they may even, if of a healthy spiritual temperament, resist for a time the aggressions of evil influences; but the final danger is always the same. The state of the Medium, therefore, may be described as one in which the Will is passive, the Conscience passive, the outward senses partially (sometimes wholly) suspended, the mind helplessly subject to the operations of other minds, and the



passions and desires released from all restraining influences.\* I make the statement boldly, after long and careful reflection, and severe self-examination.

As I said before, I did not entirely lose my external consciousness, although it was very dim and dream-like. On returning to the natural state, my recollection of what had occurred during the trance became equally dim; but I retained a general impression of the character of the possession. I knew that some foreign influence—the spirit of a dead poet, or hero, or saint, I then believed—governed me for the time; that I gave utterance to thoughts unfamiliar to my mind in its conscious state; and that my own individuality was lost, or so disguised that I could no longer recognize it. This very circumstance made the trance an indulgence, a spiritual intoxication, no less fascinating than that of the body, although accompanied by a similar reaction. Yet, behind all, dimly evident to me, there was an element of terror. There were times when, back of the influences which spoke with my voice, rose another,—a vast, overwhelming, threatening power, the nature of which I could not grasp, but which I knew was evil. Even when in my natural state, listening to the harsh utterances of Miss Feters or the lofty spiritual philosophy of Mr. Stilton, I have felt, for a single second, the touch of an icy wind, accompanied by a sensation of unutterable dread.

Our secret circle had not held many sessions before a remarkable change took place in the character of the revelations. Mr. Stilton ceased to report them for his paper.

"We are on the threshold, at last," said he; "the secrets of the ages lie beyond. The hands of spirits are now lifting the veil, fold by fold. Let us not be

startled by what we hear: let us show that our eyes can bear the light,—that we are competent to receive the wisdom of the higher spheres, and live according to it."

Miss Feters was more than ever possessed by the spirit of Joe Manton, whose allowance of grog having been cut off too suddenly by his death, he was continually clamoring for a dram.

"I tell you," yelled he, or rather she, "I won't stand sich meanness. I ha'n't come all the way here for nothin'. I'll knock Erasmus all to thunder, if you go for to turn me out dry, and let him come in."

Mr. Stilton thereupon handed him, or her, a tumbler half-full of brandy, which she gulped down at a single swallow. Joe Manton presently retired to make room for Erasmus, who spoke for some time in Latin, or what appeared to be Latin. None of us could make much of it; but Mr. Stilton declared that the Latin pronunciation of Erasmus was probably different from ours, or that he might have learned the true Roman accent from Cicero and Seneca, with whom, doubtless, he was now on intimate terms. As Erasmus generally concluded by throwing his arms, or rather the arms of Miss Feters, around the neck of Mr. Stilton,—his spirit fraternizing, apparently, with the spirit of the latter,—we greatly regretted that his communications were unintelligible, on account of the superior wisdom which they might be supposed to contain.

I confess, I cannot recall the part I played in what would have been a pitiable farce, if it had not been so terribly tragical, without a feeling of utter shame. Nothing but my profound sympathy for the thousands and tens of thousands who are still subject to the same delusion could compel me to such a sacrifice of pride. Curiously enough, (as I thought then, but not now,) the enunciation of sentiments opposed to my moral sense—the abolition, in fact, of all moral restraint—came from my lips, while the actions of Miss Feters hinted at their practical application. Upon the ground

\* The recent experiments in *Hypnotism*, in France, show that a very similar psychological condition accompanies the trance produced by gazing fixedly upon a bright object held near the eyes. I have no doubt, in fact, that it belongs to every abnormal state of the mind.

that the interests of the soul were paramount to all human laws and customs, I declared — or rather, *my voice* declared — that self-denial was a fatal error, to which half the misery of mankind could be traced; that the passions, held as slaves, exhibited only the brutish nature of slaves, and would be exalted and glorified by entire freedom; and that our sole guidance ought to come from the voices of the spirits who communicated with us, instead of the imperfect laws constructed by our benighted fellow-men. How clear and logical, how lofty, these doctrines seemed! If, at times, something in their nature repelled me, I simply attributed it to the fact that I was still but a neophyte in the Spiritual Philosophy, and incapable of perceiving the truth with entire clearness.

Mr. Stilton had a wife, — one of those meek, amiable, simple-hearted women whose individuality seems to be completely absorbed into that of their husbands. When such women are wedded to frank, tender, protecting men, their lives are truly blessed; but they are willing slaves to the domestic tyrant. They bear uncomplainingly, — many of them even without a thought of complaint, — and die at last with their hearts full of love for the brutes who have trampled upon them. Mrs. Stilton was perhaps forty years of age, of middle height, moderately plump in person, with light-brown hair, soft, inexpressive gray eyes, and a meek, helpless, imploring mouth. Her voice was mild and plaintive, and its accents of anger (if she ever gave utterance to such) could not have been distinguished from those of grief. She did not often attend our sessions, and it was evident, that, while she endeavored to comprehend the revelations, in order to please her husband, their import was very far beyond her comprehension. She was now and then a little frightened at utterances which no doubt sounded lewd or profane to her ears; but after a glance at Mr. Stilton's face, and finding that it betrayed neither horror nor surprise, would persuade herself that everything must be right.

"Are you sure," she once timidly whispered to me, "are you very sure, Mr. ———, that there is no danger of being led astray? It seems strange to me; but perhaps I don't understand it."

Her question was so indefinite, that I found it difficult to answer. Stilton, however, seeing me engaged in endeavoring to make clear to her the glories of the new truth, exclaimed, —

"That's right, John! Your spiritual plane slants through many spheres, and has points of contact with a great variety of souls. I hope my wife will be able to see the light through you, since I appear to be too opaque for her to receive it from me."

"Oh, Abijah!" said the poor woman, "you know it is my fault. I try to follow, and I hope I have faith, though I don't see everything as clearly as you do."

I began also to have my own doubts, as I perceived that an "affinity" was gradually being developed between Stilton and Miss Fetters. She was more and more frequently possessed by the spirit of Erasmus, whose salutations, on meeting and parting with his brother-philosopher, were too enthusiastic for merely masculine love. But, whenever I hinted at the possibility of mistaking the impulses of the soul, or at evil resulting from a too sudden and universal liberation of the passions, Stilton always silenced me with his inevitable logic. Having once accepted the premises, I could not avoid the conclusions.

"When our natures are in harmony with spirit-matter throughout the spheres," he would say, "our impulses will always be in accordance. Or, if there should be any temporary disturbance, arising from our necessary intercourse with the gross, blinded multitude, we can always fly to our spiritual monitors for counsel. Will not they, the immortal souls of the ages past, who have guided us to a knowledge of the truth, assist us also in preserving it pure?"

In spite of this, in spite of my admiration of Stilton's intellect, and my yet unshaken faith in Spiritualism, I was conscious that the harmony of the circle was

becoming impaired to me. Was I falling behind in spiritual progress? Was I too weak to be the medium for the promised revelations? I threw myself again and again into the trance, with a recklessness of soul which fitted me to receive any, even the darkest impressions, to catch and proclaim every guilty whisper of the senses, and, while under the influence of the excitement, to exult in the age of license which I believed to be at hand. But darker, stronger grew the terror which lurked behind this spiritual carnival. A more tremendous power than that which I now recognized as coming from Stilton's brain was present, and I saw myself whirling nearer and nearer to its grasp. I felt, by a sort of blind instinct, too vague to be expressed, that some demoniac agency had thrust itself into the manifestations,—perhaps had been mingled with them from the outset.

For two or three months, my life was the strangest mixture of happiness and misery. I walked about with the sense of some crisis hanging over me. My "possessions" became fiercer and wilder, and the reaction so much more exhausting that I fell into the habit of restoring myself by means of the bottle of brandy which Mr. Stilton took care should be on hand, in case of a visit from Joe Manton. Miss Fetters, strange to say, was not in the least affected by the powerful draughts she imbibed. But, at the same time, my waking life was growing brighter and brighter under the power of a new and delicious experience. My nature is eminently social, and I had not been able—indeed, I did not desire—wholly to withdraw myself from intercourse with non-believers. There was too much in society that was congenial to me to be given up. My instinctive dislike to Miss Abby Fetters and my compassionate regard for Mrs. Stilton's weakness only served to render the company of intelligent, cultivated women more attractive to me. Among those whom I met most frequently was Miss Agnes Honeywood, a calm, quiet, unobtrusive girl, the characteristic

of whose face was sweetness rather than beauty, while the first feeling she inspired was respect rather than admiration. She had just that amount of self-possession which conceals without conquering the sweet timidity of woman. Her voice was low, yet clear; and her mild eyes, I found, were capable, on occasion, of both flashing and melting. Why describe her? I loved her before I knew it; but, with the consciousness of my love, that clairvoyant sense on which I had learned to depend failed for the first time. Did she love me? When I sought to answer the question in her presence, all was confusion within.

This was not the only new influence which entered into and increased the tumult of my mind. The other half of my two-sided nature—the cool, reflective, investigating faculty—had been gradually ripening, and the questions which it now began to present seriously disturbed the complacency of my theories. I saw that I had accepted many things on very unsatisfactory evidence; but, on the other hand, there was much for which I could find no other explanation. Let me be frank, and say, that I do not *now* pretend to explain all the phenomena of Spiritualism. This, however, I determined to do,—to ascertain, if possible, whether the influences which governed me in the trance state came from the persons around, from the exercise of some independent faculty of my own mind, or really and truly from the spirits of the dead. Mr. Stilton appeared to notice that some internal conflict was going on; but he said nothing in regard to it, and, as events proved, he entirely miscalculated its character.

I said to myself,—“If this chaos continues, it will drive me mad. Let me have one bit of solid earth beneath my feet, and I can stand until it subsides. Let me throw over the best bower of the heart, since all the anchors of the mind are dragging!” I summoned resolution. I made that desperate venture which no true man makes without a pang of forced courage; but, thank God! I did not make



it in vain. Agnes loved me, and in the deep, quiet bliss which this knowledge gave I felt the promise of deliverance. She knew and lamented my connection with the Spiritualists; but, perceiving my mental condition from the few intimations which I dared to give her, discreetly held her peace. But I could read the anxious expression of that gentle face none the less.

My first endeavor to solve the new questions was to check the *abandon* of the trance condition, and interfuse it with more of sober consciousness. It was a difficult task; and nothing but the circumstance that my consciousness had never been entirely lost enabled me to make any progress. I finally succeeded, as I imagined, (certainty is impossible,) in separating the different influences which impressed me,—perceiving where one terminated and the other commenced, or where two met and my mind vibrated from one to the other until the stronger prevailed, or where a thought which seemed to originate in my own brain took the lead and swept away with me like the mad rush of a prairie colt. When out of the trance, I noticed attentively the expressions made use of by Mr. Stilton and the other members of the circle, and was surprised to find how many of them I had reproduced. But might they not, in the first place, have been derived from me? And what was the vague, dark Presence which still overshadowed me at such times? What was that Power which I had tempted,—which we were all tempting, every time we met,—and which continually drew nearer and became more threatening? I knew not; and I know not. I would rather not speak or think of it any more.

My suspicions with regard to Stilton and Miss Fetters were confirmed by a number of circumstances which I need not describe. That he should treat his wife in a harsh, ironical manner, which the poor woman felt, but could not understand, did not surprise me; but at other times there was a treacherous tenderness about him. He would dilate eloquently

upon the bliss of living in accordance with the spiritual harmonies. Among us, he said, there could be no more hatred or mistrust or jealousy,—nothing but love, pure, unselfish, perfect love. “You, my dear,” (turning to Mrs. Stilton,) “belong to a sphere which is included within my own, and share in my harmonies and affinities; yet the soul-matter which adheres to you is of a different texture from mine. Yours has also its independent affinities; I see and respect them; and even though they might lead our bodies—our outward, material lives—away from one another, we should still be true to that glorious light of love which permeates all soul-matter.”

“Oh, Abijah!” cried Mrs. Stilton, really distressed, “how can you say such a thing of me? You know I can never adhere to anybody else but you!”

Stilton would then call in my aid to explain his meaning, asserting that I had a faculty of reaching his wife’s intellect, which he did not himself possess. Feeling a certain sympathy for her painful confusion of mind, I did my best to give his words an interpretation which soothed her fears. Then she begged his pardon, taking all the blame to her own stupidity, and received his grudging, unwilling kiss with a restored happiness which pained me to the heart.

I had a growing presentiment of some approaching catastrophe. I felt, distinctly, the presence of unhallowed passions in our circle; and my steadfast love for Agnes, borne thither in my bosom, seemed like a pure white dove in a cage of unclean birds. Stilton held me from him by the superior strength of his intellect. I began to mistrust, even to hate him, while I was still subject to his power, and unable to acquaint him with the change in my feelings. Miss Fetters was so repulsive that I never spoke to her when it could be avoided. I had tolerated her, heretofore, for the sake of her spiritual gift; but now, when I began to doubt the authenticity of that gift, her hungry eyes, her thin lips, her flat breast, and cold, dry hands excit-

ed in me a sensation of absolute abhorrence.

The doctrine of Affinities had some time before been adopted by the circle, as a part of the Spiritual Truth. Other circles, with which we were in communication, had also received the same revelation; and the ground upon which it was based, in fact, rendered its acceptance easy. Even I, shielded as I was by the protecting arms of a pure love, sought in vain for arguments to refute a doctrine, the practical operation of which, I saw, might be so dangerous. The soul had a right to seek its kindred soul: that I could not deny. Having found, they belonged to each other. Love is the only law which those who love are bound to obey. I shall not repeat all the sophistry whereby these positions were strengthened. The doctrine soon blossomed and bore fruit, the nature of which left no doubt as to the character of the tree.

The catastrophe came sooner than I had anticipated, and partly through my own instrumentality; though, in any case, it must finally have come. We were met together at the house of one of the most zealous and fanatical believers. There were but eight persons present,—the host and his wife, (an equally zealous proselyte,) a middle-aged bachelor neighbor, Mr. and Mrs. Stilton, Miss Fetters and her father, and myself. It was a still, cloudy, sultry evening, after one of those dull, oppressive days when all the bad blood in a man seems to be uppermost in his veins. The manifestations upon the table, with which we commenced, were unusually rapid and lively. "I am convinced," said Mr. Stilton, "that we shall receive important revelations to-night. My own mind possesses a clearness and quickness, which, I have noticed, always precede the visit of a superior spirit. Let us be passive and receptive, my friends. We are but instruments in the hands of loftier intelligences, and only through our obedience can this second advent of Truth be fulfilled."

He looked at me with that expression which I so well knew, as the signal for a

surrender of my will. I had come rather unwillingly, for I was getting heartily tired of the business, and longed to shake off my habit of (spiritual) intoxication, which no longer possessed any attraction, since I had been allowed to visit Agnes as an accepted lover. In fact, I continued to hold my place in the circle principally for the sake of satisfying myself with regard to the real nature and causes of the phenomena. On this night, something in Mr. Stilton's face arrested my attention, and a rapid inspiration flashed through my mind. "Suppose," I thought, "I allow the usual effect to be produced, yet reverse the character of its operation? I am convinced that he has been directing the current of my thought according to his will; let me now render myself so thoroughly passive, that my mind, like a mirror, shall reflect what passes through his, retaining nothing of my own except the simple consciousness of what I am doing." Perhaps this was exactly what he desired. He sat, bending forward a little over the table, his square jaws firmly set, his eyes hidden beneath their heavy brows, and every long, wiry hair on his head in its proper place. I fixed my eyes upon him, threw my mind into a state of perfect receptivity, and waited.

It was not long before I felt his approach. Shadow after shadow flitted across the still mirror of my inward sense. Whether the thoughts took words in his brain or in mine,—whether I first caught his disjointed musings, and, by their utterance reacting upon him, gave system and development to his thoughts,—I cannot tell. But this I know: what I said came wholly from him,—not from the slandered spirits of the dead, not from the vagaries of my own imagination, but from *him*. "Listen to me!" I said. "In the flesh I was a martyr to the Truth, and I am permitted to communicate only with those whom the Truth has made free. You are the heralds of the great day; you have climbed from sphere to sphere, until now you stand near the fountains of light. But it is not enough

that you see : your lives must reflect the light. The inward vision is for you, but the outward manifestation thereof is for the souls of others. Fulfil the harmonies in the flesh. Be the living music, not the silent instruments."

There was more, much more of this,—a plenitude of eloquent sound, which seems to embody sublime ideas, but which, carefully examined, contains no more palpable substance than sea-froth. If the reader will take the trouble to read an "Epic of the Starry Heavens," the production of a Spiritual Medium, he will find several hundred pages of the same character. But, by degrees, the revelation descended to details, and assumed a personal application. "In you, in all of you, the spiritual harmonies are still violated," was the conclusion. "You, Abijah Stilton, who are chosen to hold up the light of truth to the world, require that a transparent soul, capable of transmitting that light to you, should be allied to yours. She who is called your wife is a clouded lens; she can receive the light only through John —, who is her true spiritual husband, as Abby Feters is *your* true spiritual wife!"

I was here conscious of a sudden cessation of the influence which forced me to speak, and stopped. The members of the circle opposite to me—the host, his wife, neighbor, and old Mr. Feters—were silent, but their faces exhibited more satisfaction than astonishment. My eye fell upon Mrs. Stilton. Her face was pale, her eyes widely opened, and her lips dropped apart, with a stunned, bewildered expression. It was the blank face of a woman walking in her sleep. These observations were accomplished in an instant; for Miss Feters, suddenly possessed with the spirit of Black Hawk, sprang upon her feet. "Ugh! ugh!" she exclaimed, in a deep, harsh voice, "where's the pale-face? Black Hawk, he like him,—he love him much!"—and therewith threw her arms around Stilton, fairly lifting him off his feet. "Ugh! fire-water for Black Hawk!—big Injun drink!"—and she tossed off a tumbler of

brandy. By this time I had wholly recovered my consciousness, but remained silent, stupefied by the extraordinary scene.

Presently Miss Feters became more quiet, and the possession left her. "My friends," said Stilton, in his cold, unmoved voice, "I feel that the spirit has spoken truly. We must obey our spiritual affinities, or our great and glorious mission will be unfulfilled. Let us rather rejoice that we have been selected as the instruments to do this work. Come to me, Abby; and you, Rachel, remember that our harmony is not disturbed, but only made more complete."

"Abijah!" exclaimed Mrs. Stilton, with a pitiful cry, while the tears burst hot and fast from her eyes; "dear husband, what does this mean? Oh, don't tell me that I'm to be cast off! You promised to love me and care for me, Abijah! I'm not bright, I know, but I'll try to understand you; indeed I will! Oh, don't be so cruel!—don't"—And the poor creature's voice completely gave way.

She dropped on the floor at his feet, and lay there, sobbing piteously.

"Rachel, Rachel," said he,—and his face was not quite so calm as his voice,— "don't be rebellious. We are governed by a higher Power. This is all for our own good, and for the good of the world. Besides, ours was not a perfect affinity. You will be much happier with John, as he harmonizes"—

I could endure it no longer. Indignation, pity, the full energy of my will, possessed me. He lost his power over me then, and forever.

"What!" I exclaimed, "you, blasphemer, beast that you are, you dare to dispose of your honest wife in this infamous way, that you may be free to indulge your own vile appetites?—you, who have outraged the dead and the living alike, by making me utter your forgeries? Take her back, and let this disgraceful scene end!—take her back, or I will give you a brand that shall last to the end of your days!"

He turned deadly pale, and trembled. I knew that he made a desperate effort to bring me under the control of his will, and laughed mockingly as I saw his knit brow and the swollen veins in his temples. As for the others, they seemed paralyzed by the suddenness and fierceness of my attack. He wavered but for an instant, however, and his self-possession returned.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "it is the Spirit of Evil that speaks in him! The Devil himself has risen to destroy our glorious fabric! Help me, friends! help me to bind him, and to silence his infernal voice, before he drives the pure spirits from our midst!"

With that, he advanced a step towards me, and raised a hand to seize my arm, while the others followed behind. But I was too quick for him. Weak as I was, in comparison, rage gave me strength, and a blow, delivered with the rapidity of lightning, just under the chin, laid him senseless on the floor. Mrs. Stilton screamed, and threw herself over him. The rest of the company remained as if stupefied. The storm which had been gathering all the evening at the same instant broke over the house in simultaneous thunder and rain.

I stepped suddenly to the door, opened it, and drew a long, deep breath of relief, as I found myself alone in the darkness. "Now," said I, "I have done tampering with God's best gift; I will be satisfied with the natural sunshine which beams from His Word and from His Works; I have learned wisdom at the expense of shame!" I exulted in my new freedom, in my restored purity of soul; and the wind, that swept down the dark, lonely street, seemed to exult with me. The rains beat upon me, but I heeded them not; nay, I turned aside from the homeward path, in order to pass by the house where Agnes lived. Her window was dark, and I knew she was sleeping, lulled by the storm; but I stood a moment below, in the rain, and said aloud, softly,—

"Now, Agnes, I belong wholly to you!

Pray to God for me, darling, that I may never lose the true light I have found at last!"

My healing, though complete in the end, was not instantaneous. The habit of the trance, I found, had really impaired the action of my will. I experienced a periodic tendency to return to it, which I have been able to overcome only by the most vigorous efforts. I found it prudent, indeed, to banish from my mind, as far as was possible, all subjects, all memories, connected with Spiritualism. In this work I was aided by Agnes, who now possessed my entire confidence, and who willingly took upon herself the guidance of my mind at those seasons when my own governing faculties flagged. Gradually my mental health returned, and I am now beyond all danger of ever again being led into such fatal dissipations. The writing of this narrative, in fact, has been a test of my ability to overlook and describe my experience without being touched by its past delusions. If some portions of it should not be wholly intelligible to the reader, the defect lies in the very nature of the subject.

It will be noticed that I have given but a partial explanation of the spiritual phenomena. Of the genuineness of the physical manifestations I am fully convinced, and I can account for them only by the supposition of some subtle agency whereby the human will operates upon inert matter. Clairvoyance is a sufficient explanation of the utterances of the Mediums,—at least of those which I have heard; but there is, as I have said before, *something* in the background, which I feel too indistinctly to describe, yet which I know to be Evil. I do not wonder at, though I lament, the prevalence of the belief in Spiritualism. In a few individual cases it may have been productive of good, but its general tendency is evil. There are probably but few Stiltons among its apostles, few Miss Fetteresses among its Mediums; but the condition which accompanies the trance, as I have shown, inevitably removes the wholesome check which holds our baser passions in

subjection. The Medium is at the mercy of any evil will, and the impressions received from a corrupt mind are always liable to be accepted by innocent believers as revelations from the spirits of the holy dead. I shall shock many honest souls by this confession, but I hope and believe that it may awaken and enlighten others. Its publication is necessary, as an expiation for some of the evil which has been done through my own instrumentality.

I learned, two days afterwards, that Stilton (who was not seriously damaged by my blow) had gone to New York, taking Miss Fetters with him. Her ignorant, weak-minded father was entirely satisfied with the proceeding. Mrs. Stil-

ton, helpless and heart-broken, remained at the house where our circle had met, with her only child, a boy of three years of age, who, fortunately, inherited her weakness rather than his father's power. Agnes, on learning this, insisted on having her removed from associations which were at once unhappy and dangerous. We went together to see her, and, after much persuasion, and many painful scenes which I shall not recapitulate, succeeded in sending her to her father, a farmer in Connecticut. She still remains there, hoping for the day when her guilty husband shall return and be instantly forgiven.

My task is ended; may it not have been performed in vain!

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## JOHN ANDRE AND HONORA SNEYD.

MANY of our readers will remember the exquisite lines in which Béranger paints the connection between our mortal lives and the stars of the sky. With every human soul that finds its way to earth, a new gem is added to the azure belt of heaven. Thenceforth the two exist in mutual dependence, each influencing the other's fate; so that, when death comes to seal the lips of the man, a flame is paled and a lamp extinguished in the gulf above. In every loosened orb that shoots across the face of night the experienced eye may trace the story and the fall of a fellow-being. Youth, beauty, wealth, the humility of indigence and the pride of power, alike find their term revealed in the bright, silent course of the celestial spark; and still new signs succeed to provoke the sympathy or dazzle the philosophy of the observer.

*"Quelle est cette étoile qui file,  
Qui file, file, et disparaît?"*

It is unfortunate that such a pretty manner of accounting for the nature and origin of falling stars should be unus-

tained by sound astronomical data, and utterly discountenanced by Herschel and Bond. There is something in the theory very pleasant and very flattering to human nature; and there are passages in the history of our race that might make its promulgation not unacceptable. When, among the innumerable "patines of bright gold" that strew the floor of heaven, we see one part from the sphere of its undistinguished fellows, and, filling its pathway with radiant light, vanish noiselessly into annihilation, we cannot but be reminded of those characters that, with no apparent reason for being segregated from the common herd, are, through some strange conjuncture, hurried from a commonplace life by modes of death that illuminate their memory with immortal fame. It is thus that the fulfilment of the vow made in the heat of battle has given Jephthah's name a melancholy permanence above all others of the captains of Israel. Mutius would long ago have been forgotten, among the thousands of Roman soldiers



**Confessions of a Medium**  
**London: Henry James Tressider, 1861**





THE  
CONFESSIONS OF A MEDIUM.

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It is not yet a year since I ceased to act as a Spiritual Medium. (I am forced to make use of this title as the most intelligible, but I do it with a strong mental protest.) At first, I desired only to withdraw myself quietly from the peculiar associations into which I had been thrown by the exercise of my faculty, and be content with the simple fact of my escape. A man who joins the Dashaways does not care to have the circumstance announced in the newspapers. "So he was an habitual drunkard," the public would say. I was overcome by a similar reluctance—nay, I might honestly call it shame—since, although I had at intervals officiated as a Medium for a period of seven years, my name had been mentioned, incidentally, only once or twice in the papers devoted especially to Spiritualism. I had no such reputation as that of Hume, or Andrew Jackson Davis, which would call for a public statement of my recantation. The result would be, therefore, to give prominence to a weakness, which, however manfully overcome, might be remembered to my future prejudice.

I find, however, that the resolution to be silent leaves me restless and unsatisfied. And in reflecting calmly—objectively, for the first time—upon the experience of those seven years, I recognize so many points wherein my case is undoubtedly analogous to that of hundreds of others who may be still entangled in the same labyrinth whence I have but recently escaped—so clear a solution of much that is enigmatical, even to those who reject Spiritualism—that the impulse to write weighs upon me with the pressure of a neglected duty. I *cannot* longer be

silent; and, in the conviction that the truth of my statement will be evident enough to those most concerned in hearing it, without the authority of any name (least of all of one so little known as mine), I now give my confession to the world. The names of the individuals whom I shall have occasion to introduce are, of course, disguised; but, with this exception, the narrative is the plainest possible record of my own experience. Many of the incidents which I shall be obliged to describe are known only to the actors therein, who, I feel assured, will never foolishly betray themselves. I have therefore no fear that any harm can result from my disclosures.

In order to make my views intelligible to those readers who have paid no attention to psychological subjects, I must commence a little in advance of my story. My own individual nature is one of those apparently inconsistent combinations which are frequently found in the children of parents whose temperaments and mental personalities widely differ. This class of natures is much larger than would be supposed. Inheriting opposite, even conflicting, traits from father and mother, they assume, as either element predominates, diverse characters; and that which is the result of temperament (in fact, congenital inconsistency) is set down by the unthinking world as moral weakness or duplicity. Those who have sufficient skill to perceive and reconcile—or, at least, govern—the opposing elements, are few indeed. Had the power come to me sooner, I should have been spared the necessity of making these confessions.

From one parent I inherited an extraordinarily active and sensitive imagination—from the other, a sturdy practical sense; a disposition to weigh and balance with calm fairness the puzzling questions which life offers to every man. These conflicting qualities—as is usual in all similar natures—were not developed in equal order of growth. The former governed my childhood, my youth, and enveloped me with spells, which all the force of the latter and more

slowly ripened faculty was barely sufficient to break. Luxuriant weeds and brambles covered the soil which should have been ploughed and made to produce honest grain. Unfortunately, I had no teacher who was competent to understand and direct me. The task was left for myself; and I can only wonder, after all that has occurred, how it has been possible for me to succeed. Certainly, this success has not been due to any vigorous exercise of virtue on my part, but solely to the existence of that cool, reflective reason which lay *perdue* beneath all the extravagances of my mind.

I possessed, even as a child, an unusual share of what phrenologists call Concentrativeness. The power of absorption, of self-forgetfulness, was at the same time a source of delight and a torment. Lost in some wild dream or absurd childish speculation, my insensibility to outward things was chastised as carelessness or a hardened indifference to counsel. With a memory almost marvellous to retain those things which appealed to my imagination, I blundered painfully over the commonest tasks. While I frequently repeated the Sunday hymn at dinner, I was too often unable to give the least report of the sermon. Withdrawn into my corner of the pew, I gave myself up, after the enunciation of the text, to a complete abstraction, which took no note of time or place. Fixing my eyes upon a knot in one of the panels under the pulpit, I sat moveless during the hour and a half which our worthy old clergyman required for the expounding of the seven parts of his discourse. They could never accuse me of sleeping, however, for I rarely even winked. The closing hymn recalled me to myself, always with a shock, or sense of pain, and sometimes even with a temporary nausea.

This habit of abstraction—properly a complete *passivity* of the mind—after a while developed another habit, in which I now see the root of that peculiar condition which made me a Medium. I shall therefore endeavour to describe it. I was sitting, one Sunday,

just as the minister was commencing his sermon, with my eyes carelessly following the fingers of my right hand, as I drummed them slowly across my knee. Suddenly, the wonder came into my mind, How is it my fingers move? What set them going? What is it that stops them? The mystery of that communication between will and muscle, which no physiologist has ever fathomed, burst upon my young intellect. I had been conscious of no intention of thus drumming my fingers; they were in motion when I first noticed them: they were certainly a part of myself, yet they acted without my knowledge or design! My left hand was quiet; why did its fingers not move also? Following these reflections came a dreadful fear, as I remembered Jane, the blacksmith's daughter, whose elbows and shoulders sometimes jerked in such a way as to make all the other scholars laugh; although we were sorry for the poor girl, who cried bitterly over her unfortunate, ungovernable limbs. I was comforted, however, on finding that I could control the motion of my fingers at pleasure; but my imagination was too active to stop there. What if I should forget how to direct my hands? What if they should refuse to obey me? What if my knees, which were just as still as the hymn-books in the rack before me, should cease to bend, and I should sit there for ever? These very questions seemed to produce a temporary paralysis of the will. As my right hand lay quietly on my knee, and I asked myself, with a stupid wonder, "Now, can I move it?" it lay as still as before. I had only questioned, not willed. "No, I cannot move it," I said, in real doubt. I was conscious of a blind sense of exertion, wherein there was yet no proper exertion, but which seemed to exhaust me. Fascinated by this new mystery, I contemplated my hand as something apart from myself; something subordinate to, but not identical with, me. The rising of the congregation for the hymn broke the spell, like the snapping of a thread.

The reader will readily understand that I carried

these experiences much farther. I gradually learned to suspend (perhaps in imagination only, but therefore none the less really) the action of my will upon the muscles of my arms and legs; and I did it with the greater impunity, from knowing that the stir consequent upon the conclusion of the services would bring me to myself. In proportion as the will became passive, the activity of my imagination was increased, and I experienced a new and strange delight in watching the play of fantasies which appeared to come and go independently of myself. There was still a dim consciousness of outward things mingled with my condition: I was not beyond the recall of my senses. But one day, I remember, as I sat motionless as a statue, having ceased any longer to attempt to control my dead limbs, more than usually passive, a white, shining mist gradually stole around me; my eyes finally ceased to take cognizance of objects; a low, musical humming sounded in my ears, and those creatures of the imagination which had hitherto crossed my brain as *thoughts* now spoke to me as audible voices. If there is any happy delirium in the first stages of intoxication (of which, thank Heaven, I have no experience), it must be a sensation very much like that which I felt. The death of external and the birth of internal consciousness overwhelmed my childish soul with a dumb, ignorant ecstasy, like that which savages feel on first hearing the magic of music.

How long I remained thus I know not. I was aroused by feeling myself violently shaken. "John!" exclaimed my mother, who had grasped my arm with a determined hand. "Bless the boy! what ails him? Why, his face is as white as a sheet!" Slowly I recovered my consciousness, saw the church and the departing congregation, and mechanically followed my parents. I could give no explanation of what had happened, except to say that I had fallen asleep. As I ate my dinner with a good appetite, my mother's fears were quieted. I was left at home the following

Sunday, and afterwards only ventured to indulge sparingly in the exercise of my newly discovered faculty. My mother, I was conscious, took more note of my presence than formerly, and I feared a repetition of the same catastrophe. As I grew older and my mind became interested in a wider range of themes, I finally lost the habit, which I classed among the many follies of childhood.

I retained, nevertheless, and still retain, something of that subtle instinct which mocks and yet surpasses reason. My feelings with regard to the persons whom I met were quite independent of their behaviour towards me, or the estimation in which they were held by the world. Things which puzzled my brain in waking hours were made clear to me in sleep, and I frequently felt myself blindly impelled to do or to avoid doing certain things. The members of my family, who found it impossible to understand my motives of action—because, in fact, there were no *motives*—complacently solved the difficulty by calling me “queer.” I presume there are few persons who are not occasionally visited by the instinct, or impulse, or faculty, or whatever it may be called, to which I refer. I possessed it in a more than ordinary degree, and was generally able to distinguish between its suggestions and the mere humours of my imagination. It is scarcely necessary to say that I assume the existence of such a power, at the outset. I recognise it as a normal faculty of the human mind, not therefore universal, any more than the genius which makes a poet, a painter, or a composer.

My education was neither general nor thorough; hence I groped darkly with the psychological questions which were presented to me. Tormented by those doubts which at some period of life assail the soul of every thinking man, I was ready to grasp at any solution which offered, without very carefully testing its character. I eagerly accepted the theory of Animal Magnetism, which, so far as it went, was satisfactory; but it only illustrated the powers and

relations of the soul in its present state of existence; it threw no light upon that future which I was not willing to take upon faith alone. Though sensible to mesmeric influences, I was not willing that my spiritual nature should be the instrument of another's will—that a human being, like myself, should become possessed of all my secrets and sanctities, touching the keys of every passion with his unhallowed fingers. In the phenomena of clairvoyance I saw only other and more subtile manifestations of the power which I knew to exist in my own mind. Hence, I soon grew weary of prosecuting inquiries which, at best, would fall short of solving my own great and painful doubt, Does the human soul continue to exist after death? That it could take cognizance of things beyond the reach of the five senses, I was already assured. This, however, might be a sixth sense, no less material and perishable in its character than the others. My brain, as yet, was too young and immature to follow the thread of that lofty spiritual logic in the light of which such doubts melt away like mists of the night. Thus, uneasy because undeveloped, erring because I had never known the necessary guidance, seeking, but almost despairing of enlightenment, I was a fit subject for any spiritual epidemic which seemed to offer me a cure for worse maladies.

At this juncture occurred the phenomena known as the "Rochester Knockings." (My home, let me say, is in a small town not far from New York.) I shared in the general interest aroused by the marvellous stories, which, being followed by the no less extraordinary display of some unknown agency at Norwalk, Connecticut, excited me to such a degree that I was half converted to the new faith before I had witnessed any spiritual manifestation. Soon after the arrival of the Misses Fox in New York, I visited them in their rooms at the Howard House. Impressed by their quiet, natural demeanour, the absence of anything savouring of jugglery, and the peculiar character of the raps and movements of the table, I asked my

questions and applied my tests, in a passive, if not a believing frame of mind. In fact, I had not long been seated, before the noises became loud and frequent.

"The spirits like to communicate with you," said Mrs. Fish: "you seem to be nearer to them than most people."

I summoned, in succession, the spirits of my mother, a younger brother, and a cousin to whom I had been much attached in boyhood, and obtained correct answers to all my questions. I did not then remark, what has since occurred to me, that these questions concerned things which I knew, and that the answers to them were distinctly impressed on my mind at the time. The result of one of my tests made a very deep impression upon me. Having mentally selected a friend whom I had met in the train that morning, I asked, "Will the spirit whose name is now in my mind communicate with me?" To this came the answer, slowly rapped out, on calling over the alphabet, "*He is living!*"

I returned home, very much puzzled. Precisely those features of the exhibition (let me call it such) which repulse others attracted me. The searching daylight, the plain, matter-of-fact character of the manifestations, the absence of all solemnity and mystery, impressed me favourably towards the spiritual theory. If disembodied souls, I said, really exist, and can communicate with those in the flesh, why should they choose moonlight or darkness, graveyards or lonely bed-chambers, for their visitations? What is to hinder them from speaking at times and in places where the senses of men are fully awake and alert, rather than when they are liable to be the dupes of the imagination? In such reflections as these I was the unconscious dupe of my own imagination, while supposing myself thoroughly impartial and critical.

Soon after this, circles began to be formed in my native town, for the purpose of table-moving. A number of persons met, secretly at first—for as yet



there were no avowed converts—and quite as much for sport as for serious investigation. The first evening there was no satisfactory manifestation. The table moved a little, it is true, but each one laughingly accused his neighbours of employing some muscular force. All isolated attempts were vain. I was conscious, nevertheless, of a curious sensation of numbness in the arms, which recalled to mind my forgotten experiments in church. No rappings were heard, and some of the participants did not scruple to pronounce the whole thing a delusion.

A few evenings after this we met again. Those who were most incredulous happened to be absent, while, accidentally, their places were filled by persons whose temperaments disposed them to a passive seriousness. Among these was a girl of sixteen—Miss Abby Fetters—a pale, delicate creature, with blond hair and light blue eyes. Chance placed her next to me in forming the ring, and her right hand lay lightly upon my left. We stood around a heavy circular dining-table. A complete silence was preserved, and all minds gradually sank into a quiet, passive expectancy. In about ten minutes I began to feel, or to imagine that I felt a stream of light—if light were a palpable substance—a something far finer and more subtile than an electric current, passing from the hand of Miss Fetters through my own into the table. Presently the great wooden mass began to move—stopped—moved again—turned in a circle, we following, without changing the position of our hands—and finally began to rock from side to side, with increasing violence. Some of the circle were thrown off by the movements; others withdrew their hands in affright; and but four, among whom were Miss Fetters and myself, retained their hold. My outward consciousness appeared to be somewhat benumbed, as if by some present fascination or approaching trance; but I retained curiosity enough to look at my companion. Her eyes, sparkling with a strange, steady light, were fixed upon the table; her breath

came quick and short, and her cheek had lost every trace of colour. Suddenly, as if by a spasmodic effort, she removed her hands; I did the same, and the table stopped. She threw herself into a seat, as if exhausted; yet, during the whole time, not a muscle of the hand which lay upon mine had stirred. I solemnly declare that my own hands had been equally passive, yet I experienced the same feeling of fatigue—not muscular fatigue, but a sense of *deadness*, as if every drop of nervous energy had been suddenly taken from me.

Further experiments, the same evening, showed that we two, either together or alone, were able to produce the same phenomena without the assistance of the others present. We did not succeed, however, in obtaining any answers to our questions, nor were any of us impressed by the idea that the spirits of the dead were among us. In fact, these table-movings would not, of themselves, suggest the idea of a spiritual manifestation. "The table is bewitched," said Thompson, a hard-headed young fellow, without a particle of imagination; and this was really the first impression of all: some unknown force, latent in the dead matter, had been called into action. Still, this conclusion was so strange, so incredible, that the agency of supernatural intelligences finally presented itself to my mind as the readiest solution.

It was not long before we obtained rappings, and were enabled to repeat all the experiments which I had tried during my visit to the Fox family. The spirits of our deceased relatives and friends announced themselves, and generally gave a correct account of their earthly lives. I must confess, however, that, whenever we attempted to pry into the future, we usually received answers as ambiguous as those of the Grecian oracles, or predictions which failed to be realized. Violent knocks or other unruly demonstrations would sometimes interrupt an intelligent communication which promised us some light on the other life. These, we were told, were occasioned by evil or

mischievous spirits, whose delight it was to create disturbances. They never occurred, I now remember, except when Miss Feters was present. At the time, we were too much absorbed in our researches to notice the fact.

The reader will perceive, from what he knows of my previous mental state, that it was not difficult for me to accept the theories of the Spiritualists. Here was an evidence of the immortality of the soul; nay, more, of its continued individuality through endless future existences. The idea of my individuality being lost had been to me the same thing as complete annihilation. The spirits themselves informed us that they had come to teach these truths. The simple, ignorant faith of the Past, they said, was worn out. With the development of science, the mind of man had become sceptical. The ancient fountains no longer sufficed for his thirst. Each new era required a new revelation. In all former ages there had been single minds pure enough and advanced enough to communicate with the dead, and be the mediums of their messages to men, but now the time had come when the knowledge of this intercourse must be declared unto all. In its light the mysteries of the Past became clear: in the wisdom thus imparted, that happy Future which seems possible to every ardent and generous heart would be secured. I was not troubled by the fact that the messages which proclaimed these things were often incorrectly spelt, that the grammar was bad, and the language far from elegant. I did not reflect that these new and sublime truths had formerly passed through my own brain as the dreams of a wandering imagination. Like that American philosopher who looks upon one of his own neophytes as a man of great and profound mind because the latter carefully remembers and repeats to him his own carelessly uttered wisdom, I saw in these misty and disjointed reflections of my own thoughts the precious revelation of departed and purified spirits.

How a passion for the unknown and unattainable takes hold of men is illustrated by the search for the

universal solvent; by the mysteries of the Rosicrucians; by the patronage of fortune-tellers, even. Wholly absorbed in spiritual researches—having, in fact, no vital interest in anything else—I soon developed into what is called a Medium. I discovered, at the outset, that the peculiar condition to be attained before the tables would begin to move could be produced at will. I also found that the passive state into which I naturally fell had a tendency to prove that trance or suspension of the will which I had discovered when a boy. External consciousness, however, did not wholly depart. I saw the circle of inquirers around me—but dimly, and as phantoms—while the impressions which passed over my brain seemed to wear visible forms and to speak with audible voices.

I did not doubt, at the time, that spirits visited me, and that they made use of my body to communicate with those who could hear them in no other way. Beside the pleasant intoxication of the semi-trance, I felt a rare joy in the knowledge that I was elected above other men to be their interpreter. Let me endeavour to describe the nature of this possession. Sometimes, even before a spirit would be called for, the figure of the person, as it existed in the mind of the inquirer, would suddenly present itself to me—not to my outward senses, but to my interior, instinctive knowledge. If the recollection of the other embraced also the voice, I heard the voice in the same manner, and unconsciously imitated it. The answers to the questions I knew by the same instinct, as soon as the questions were spoken. If the question was vague, asked for information rather than *confirmation*, either no answer came, or there was an impression of a *wish* of what the answer might be, or, at times, some strange involuntary sentence sprang to my lips. When I wrote, my hand appeared to move of itself; yet the words it wrote invariably passed through my mind. Even when blindfolded, there was no difference in its performance. The same powers developed themselves in a still greater degree in Miss Feters. The spirits

which spoke most readily through her were those of men, even coarse and rude characters, which came unsummoned. Two or three of the other members of our circle were able to produce motions in the table: they could even feel, as they asserted, the touch of spiritual hands; but, however much they desired it, they were never personally possessed as we, and therefore could not properly be called Mediums.

These investigations were not regularly carried on. Occasionally the interest of the circle flagged, until it was renewed by the visit of some apostle of the new faith, usually accompanied by a "Preaching Medium." Among those whose presence especially conduced to keep alive the flame of spiritual inquiry, was a gentleman named Stilton, the editor of a small monthly periodical entitled "Revelations from the Interior." Without being himself a Medium, he was nevertheless thoroughly conversant with the various phenomena of Spiritualism, and both spoke and wrote in the dialect which its followers adopted. He was a man of varied but not profound learning, an active intellect, giving and receiving impressions with equal facility, and with an unusual combination of concentrativeness and versatility in his nature. A certain inspiration was connected with his presence. His personality overflowed upon and influenced others. "My mind is not sufficiently submissive," he would say, "to receive impressions from the spirits, but my atmosphere attracts them and encourages them to speak." He was a stout, strongly built man, with coarse black hair, grey eyes, large animal mouth, square jaws, and short, thick neck. Had his hair been cropped close, he would have looked very much like a prize-fighter; but he wore it long, parted in the middle, and as meek in expression as its stiff waves would allow.

Stilton soon became the controlling spirit of our circle. His presence really seemed, as he said, to encourage the spirits. Never before had the manifestations been so abundant or so surprising. Miss Fetters, especially, astonished us by the vigour of her

possessions. Not only Samson and Peter the Great, but Gibbs the Pirate, Black Hawk, and Joe Manton, who had died the previous year in a fit of delirium-tremens, prophesied, strode, swore, and smashed things in turn, by means of her frail little body. As Cribb, a noted pugilist of the last century, she floored an incautious spectator, giving him a black eye which he wore for a fortnight afterwards. Singularly enough, my visitors were of the opposite cast. Hypatia, Petrarch, Mary Magdalen, Abelard, and, oftenest of all, Shelley, proclaimed mystic truths from my lips. They usually spoke in inspired monologues, without announcing themselves beforehand, and often without giving any clue to their personality. A practised stenographer, engaged by Mr. Stilton, took down many of these communications as they were spoken, and they were afterwards published in the "Revelations." It was also remarked, that, while Miss Fetters employed violent gestures, and seemed to possess a superhuman strength, I, on the contrary, sat motionless, pale, and with little sign of life except in my voice, which, though low, was clear and dramatic in its modulations. Stilton explained this difference without hesitation. "Miss Abby," he said, "possesses soul-matter of a texture to which the souls of these strong men naturally adhere. In the spirit-land the superfluities repel each other; the individual souls seek to remedy their imperfections: in the union of opposites only is to be found the great harmonia of life. You, John, move upon another plane: through what in you is undeveloped, these developed spirits are attracted."

For two or three years, I must admit, my life was a very happy one. Not only were those occasional trances an intoxication, nay, a coveted indulgence, but they cast a consecration over my life. My restored faith rested on the sure evidence of my own experience; my new creed contained no harsh or repulsive feature; I heard the same noble sentiments which I uttered in such moments repeated by my associates in

the faith, and I devoutly believed that a complete regeneration of the human race was at hand. Nevertheless, it struck me sometimes as singular that many of the Mediums whom I met—men and women chosen by spiritual hands to the same high office—excited in my mind that instinct of repulsion on which I had learned to rely as a sufficient reason for avoiding certain persons. Far as it would have been from my mind, at that time, to question the manifestations which accompanied them, I could not smother my distrust of their characters. Miss Feters, whom I so frequently met, was one of the most disagreeable. Her cold, thin lips, pale eyes, and lean figure gave me a singular impression of voracious hunger. Her presence was often announced to me by a chill shudder, before I saw her. Centuries ago one of her ancestors must have been a ghoul or vampire. The trance of possession seemed, with her, to be a form of dissipation, in which she indulged as she might have catered for a baser appetite. The new religion was nothing to her: I believe she valued it only on account of the importance she obtained among its followers. Her father, a vain, weak-minded man, who kept a grocery in the town, was himself a convert.

Stilton had an answer for every doubt. No matter how tangled a labyrinth might be exhibited to him, he walked straight through it.

"How is it," I asked him, "that so many of my fellow Mediums inspire me with an instinctive dislike and mistrust?"

"By mistrust you mean dislike," he answered; "since you know of no reason to doubt their characters. The elements of soul-matter are differently combined in different individuals, and there are affinities and repulsions, just as there are in the chemical elements. Your feeling is chemical, not moral. A want of affinity does not necessarily imply an existing evil in the other party. In the present ignorance of the world, our true affinities can only be imperfectly felt and indulged; and the entire freedom

which we shall obtain in this respect is the greatest happiness of the spirit-life."

Another time I asked, "How is it that the spirits of great authors speak so tamely to us? Shakspeare, last night, wrote a passage which he would have been heartily ashamed of, as a living man. We know that a spirit spoke, calling himself Shakspeare; but, judging from his communication, it could not have been he."

"It probably was not," said Mr. Stilton. "I am convinced that all malicious spirits are at work to interrupt the communications from the higher spheres. We were thus deceived by one professing to be Benjamin Franklin, who drew for us the plan of a machine for splitting shingles, which we had fabricated and patented at considerable expense. On trial, however, it proved to be a miserable failure, a complete mockery. When the spirit was again summoned, he refused to speak, but shook the table to express his malicious laughter, went off, and has never since returned. My friend, we know but the alphabet of Spiritualism—the mere A B C: we can no more expect to master the immortal language in a day than a child to read Plato after learning his letters."

Many of those who had been interested in the usual phenomena gradually dropped off, tired, and perhaps a little ashamed, in the reaction following their excitement; but there were continual accessions to our ranks, and we formed, at last, a distinct clan or community. Indeed, the number of *secret* believers in Spiritualism would never be suspected by the uninitiated. In the sect, however, as in Masonry and the Catholic Church, there are circles within circles—concentric rings, whence you can look outwards, but not inwards, and where he alone who stands at the centre is able to perceive everything. Such an inner circle was at last formed in our town. Its object, according to Stilton, with whom the plan originated, was to obtain a purer spiritual atmosphere, by the exclusion of all but Mediums, and those non-mediumistic believers in



whose presence the spirits felt at ease, and thus invite communications from the farther and purer spheres.

In fact, the result seemed to justify the plan. The character of the trance, as I had frequently observed, is vitiated by the consciousness that disbelievers are present. The more perfect the atmosphere of credulity, the more satisfactory the manifestations. The expectant company, the dim light, the conviction that a wonderful revelation was about to dawn upon us, excited my imagination, and my trance was really a sort of delirium, in which I spoke with a passion and an eloquence I had never before exhibited. The fear, which had previously haunted me, at times, of giving my brain and tongue into the control of an unknown power, was forgotten; yet, more than ever, I was conscious of some strong controlling influence, and experienced a reckless pleasure in permitting myself to be governed by it. "Prepare," I concluded (I quote from the report in the "Revelations"), "prepare, sons of men, for the dawning day! Prepare for the second and perfect regeneration of man! For the prison-chambers have been broken into, and the light from the interior shall illuminate the external! Ye shall enjoy spiritual and passional freedom. Your guides shall no longer be the despotism of ignorant laws, nor the whip of an imaginary conscience, but the natural impulses of your nature, which are the melody of Life and the natural affinities, which are its harmony! The reflections from the upper spheres shall irradiate the lower, and Death is the triumphal arch through which we pass from glory to glory!"

—I have here paused, deliberating whether I should proceed farther in my narrative. But no; if any good is to be accomplished by these confessions, the reader must walk with me through the dark labyrinth which follows. He must walk over what may be considered delicate ground, but he shall not be harmed. One feature of the trance condition is too remarkable, too important in its consequences, to be overlooked. It is a feature of which many Mediums

are undoubtedly ignorant, the existence of which is not even suspected by thousands of honest Spiritualists.

Let me again anticipate the regular course of my narrative, and example. A suspension of the Will, when indulged in for any length of time, produces a suspension of that inward consciousness of good and evil which we call Conscience, and which can be actively exercised only through the medium of the Will. The mental faculties and the moral perceptions lie down together in the same passive sleep. The subject is, therefore, equally liable to receive impressions from the minds of others, and from their passions and lusts. Besides this, the germs of all good and of all evil are implanted in the nature of every human being; and even when some appetite is buried in a crypt so deep that its existence is forgotten, let the warder be removed, and it will gradually work its way to the light. Persons in the receptive condition which belongs to the trance may be surrounded by honest and pure-minded individuals, and receive no harmful impressions. They may even, if of a healthy spiritual temperament, resist for a time the aggressions of evil influences; but the final danger is always the same. The state of the Medium, therefore, may be described as one in which the Will is passive, the Conscience passive, the outward senses partially (sometimes wholly) suspended, the mind helplessly subject to the operations of other minds, and the passions and desires released from all restraining influences. I make the statement boldly, after long and careful reflection, and severe self-examination.

As I said before, I did not entirely lose my external consciousness, although it was very dim and dream-like. On returning to the natural state, my recollection of what had occurred during the trance became equally dim; but I retained a general impression of the character of the possession. I knew that some foreign influence—the spirit of a dead poet, or hero, or saint, I then believed—governed me for the time; that I gave utterance to thoughts unfamiliar to my mind in its

conscious state; and that my own individuality was lost, or so disguised that I could no longer recognize it. This very circumstance made the trance an indulgence, a spiritual intoxication, no less fascinating than that of the body, although accompanied by a similar reaction. Yet, behind all, dimly evident to me, there was an element of terror. There were times when, back of the influences which spoke with my voice, rose another—a vast, overwhelming, threatening power, the nature of which I could not grasp, but which I knew was evil. Even when in my natural state, listening to the harsh utterances of Miss Feters or the lofty spiritual philosophy of Mr. Stilton, I have felt, for a single second, the touch of an icy wind, accompanied by a sensation of unutterable dread.

Our secret circle had not held many sessions before a remarkable change took place in the character of the revelations. Mr. Stilton ceased to report them for his paper.

"We are on the threshold, at last," said he. "The secrets of the ages lie beyond. The hands of spirits are now lifting the veil, fold by fold. Let us not be startled by what we hear: let us show that our eyes can bear the light; that we are competent to receive the wisdom of the higher spheres, and live according to it."

Miss Feters was more than ever possessed by the spirit of Joe Manton, whose allowance of grog having been cut off too suddenly by his death, he was continually clamouring for a dram.

"I tell you," yelled he, or rather she, "I won't stand sich meanness. I ha'n't come all the way here for nothin'. I'll knock Erasmus all to thunder, if you go for to turn me out dry, and let him come in."

Mr. Stilton thereupon handed him, or her, a tumbler half full of brandy, which she gulped down at a single swallow. Joe Manton presently retired to make room for Erasmus, who spoke for some time in Latin, or what appeared to be Latin. None of us could make much of it; but Mr. Stilton

declared that the Latin pronunciation of Erasmus was probably different from ours, or that he might have learned the true Roman accent from Cicero and Seneca, with whom, doubtless, he was now on intimate terms. As Erasmus generally concluded by throwing his arms, or rather the arms of Miss Fetters, around the neck of Mr. Stilton—his spirit fraternizing, apparently, with the spirit of the latter—we greatly regretted that his communications were unintelligible, on account of the superior wisdom which they might be supposed to contain.

I confess I cannot recall the part I played in what would have been a pitiable farce, if it had not been so terribly tragical, without a feeling of utter shame. Nothing but my profound sympathy for the thousands and tens of thousands who are still subject to the same delusion could compel me to such a sacrifice of pride. Curiously enough (as I thought *then*, but not now), the enunciation of sentiments opposed to my moral sense—the abolition, in fact, of all moral restraint—came from my lips, while the actions of Miss Fetters hinted at their practical application. Upon the ground that the interests of the soul were paramount to all human laws and customs, I declared—or rather, *my voice* declared—that self-denial was a fatal error, to which half the misery of mankind could be traced; that the passions, held as slaves, exhibited only the brutish nature of slaves, and would be exalted and glorified by entire freedom; and that our sole guidance ought to come from the voices of the spirits who communicated with us, instead of the imperfect laws constructed by our benighted fellow men. How clear and logical, how lofty, these doctrines seemed! If, at times, something in their nature repelled me, I simply attributed it to the fact that I was still but a neophyte in the Spiritual Philosophy, and incapable of perceiving the truth with entire clearness.

Mr. Stilton had a wife: one of those meek, amiable, simple-hearted women whose individuality seems to be completely absorbed into that of their husbands.

When such women are wedded to frank, tender, protecting men, their lives are truly blessed; but they are willing slaves to the domestic tyrant. They bear uncomplainingly—many of them even without a thought of complaint—and die at last with their hearts full of love for the brutes who have trampled upon them. Mrs. Stilton was perhaps forty years of age, of middle height, moderately plump in person, with light-brown hair, soft, inexpressive grey eyes, and a meek, helpless, imploring mouth. Her voice was mild and plaintive, and its accents of anger (if she ever gave utterance to such) could not have been distinguished from those of grief. She did not often attend our sessions; and it was evident, that, while she endeavoured to comprehend the revelations, in order to please her husband, their import was very far beyond her comprehension. She was now and then a little frightened at utterances which no doubt sounded lewd or profane to her ears; but after a glance at Mr. Stilton's face, and finding that it betrayed neither horror nor surprise, would persuade herself that everything must be right.

"Are you sure," she once timidly whispered to me, "are you very sure, Mr.—, that there is no danger of being led astray? It seems strange to me; but perhaps I don't understand it."

Her question was so indefinite, that I found it difficult to answer. Stilton, however, seeing me engaged in endeavouring to make clear to her the glories of the new truth, exclaimed, "That's right John! Your spiritual plane slants through many spheres, and has points of contact with a great variety of souls. I hope my wife will be able to see the light through you, since I appear to be too opaque for her to receive it from me."

"Oh, Abijah!" said the poor woman, "you know it is my fault. I try to follow, and I hope I have faith, though I don't see everything as clearly as you do."

I began also to have my own doubts, as I perceived that an "affinity" was gradually being developed

between Stilton and Miss Fetters. She was more and more frequently possessed by the spirit of Erasmus, whose salutations, on meeting and parting with his brother philosopher, were too enthusiastic for merely masculine love. But, whenever I hinted at the possibility of mistaking the impulses of the soul, or at evil resulting from a too sudden and universal liberation of the passions, Stilton always silenced me with his inevitable logic. Having once accepted the premises, I could not avoid the conclusions.

"When our natures are in harmony with spirit-matter throughout the spheres," he would say, "our impulses will always be in accordance. Or, if there should be any temporary disturbance, arising from our necessary intercourse with the gross, blinded multitude, we can always fly to our spiritual monitors for counsel. Will not they, the immortal souls of the ages past, who have guided us to a knowledge of the truth, assist us also in preserving it pure?"

In spite of this, in spite of my admiration of Stilton's intellect, and my yet unshaken faith in Spiritualism, I was conscious that the harmony of the circle was becoming impaired to me. Was I falling behind in spiritual progress? Was I too weak to be the medium for the promised revelations? I threw myself again and again into the trance, with a recklessness of soul which fitted me to receive any, even the darkest impressions, to catch and proclaim every guilty whisper of the senses, and, while under the influence of the excitement, to exult in the age of license which I believed to be at hand. But darker, stronger grew the terror which lurked behind this spiritual carnival. A more tremendous power than that which I now recognized as coming from Stilton's brain was present, and I saw myself whirling nearer and nearer to its grasp. I felt, by a sort of blind instinct, too vague to be expressed, that some demoniac agency had thrust itself into the manifestations, perhaps had been mingled with them from the outset.

For two or three months, my life was the strangest

mixture of happiness and misery. I walked about with the sense of some crisis hanging over me. My "possessions" became fiercer and wilder, and the reaction so much more exhausting that I fell into the habit of restoring myself by means of the bottle of brandy which Mr. Stilton took care should be on hand, in case of a visit from Joe Manton. Miss Feters, strange to say, was not in the least affected by the powerful draughts she imbibed. But, at the same time, my waking life was growing brighter and brighter under the power of a new and delicious experience. My nature is eminently social, and I had not been able—indeed, I did not desire—wholly to withdraw myself from intercourse with non-believers. There was too much in society that was congenial to me to be given up. My instinctive dislike to Miss Abby Feters, and my compassionate regard for Mrs. Stilton's weakness, only served to render the company of intelligent, cultivated women more attractive to me. Among those whom I met most frequently was Miss Agnes Honeywood, a calm, unobtrusive girl, the characteristic of whose face was sweetness rather than beauty, while the first feeling she inspired was respect rather than admiration. She had just that amount of self-possession which conceals without conquering the sweet timidity of woman. Her voice was low, yet clear; and her mild eyes, I found, were capable, on occasion, of both flashing and melting. Why describe her? I loved her before I knew it; but, with the consciousness of my love, that clairvoyant sense on which I had learned to depend failed for the first time. Did she love me? When I sought to answer the question in her presence, all was confusion within.

This was not the only new influence which entered into and increased the tumult of my mind. The other half of my two-sided nature—the cool, reflective, investigating faculty—had been gradually ripening, and the questions which it now began to present seriously disturbed the complacency of my theories. I saw that I had accepted many things on very

unsatisfactory evidence; but, on the other hand, there was much for which I could find no other explanation. Let me be frank, and say, that I do not *now* pretend to explain all the phenomena of Spiritualism. This, however, I determined to do: to ascertain, if possible, whether the influences which governed me in the trance state came from the persons around, from the exercise of some independent faculty of my own mind, or really and truly from the spirits of the dead. Mr. Stilton appeared to notice that some internal conflict was going on; but he said nothing in regard to it, and, as events proved, he entirely miscalculated its character.

I said to myself, "If this chaos continues, it will drive me mad. Let me have one bit of solid earth beneath my feet, and I can stand until it subsides. Let me throw over the best bower of the heart, since all the anchors of the mind are dragging!" I summoned resolution. I made that desperate venture which no true man makes without a pang of forced courage; but, thank God! I did not make it in vain. Agnes loved me; and in the deep, quiet bliss which this knowledge gave I felt the promise of deliverance. She knew and lamented my connection with the Spiritualists; but, perceiving my mental condition from the few intimations which I dared to give her, discreetly held her peace. But I could read the anxious expression of that gentle face none the less.

My first endeavour to solve the new questions was to check the *abandon* of the trance condition, and interfuse it with more of sober consciousness. It was a difficult task; and nothing but the circumstance that my consciousness had never been entirely lost enabled me to make any progress. I finally succeeded, as I imagined (certainty is impossible), in separating the different influences which impressed me—perceiving where one terminated and the other commenced, or where two met and my mind vibrated from one to the other until the stronger prevailed, or where a thought which seemed to originate in my own brain took the



lead and swept away with me like the mad rush of a prairie colt. When out of the trance, I noticed attentively the expressions made use of by Mr. Stilton and the other members of the circle, and was surprised to find how many of them I had reproduced. But might they not, in the first place, have been derived from me? And what was the vague, dark Presence which still overshadowed me at such times? What was that Power which I had tempted—which we were all tempting, every time we met—and which continually drew nearer and became more threatening? I knew not; *and I know not*. I would rather not speak or think of it any more.

My suspicions with regard to Stilton and Miss Fetters were confirmed by a number of circumstances which I need not describe. That he should treat his wife in a harsh, ironical manner, which the poor woman felt, but could not understand, did not surprise me; but at other times there was a treacherous tenderness about him. He would dilate eloquently upon the bliss of living in accordance with the spiritual harmonies. Among *us*, he said, there could be no more hatred, or mistrust, or jealousy; nothing but love, pure, unselfish, perfect love. "You, my dear" (turning to Mrs. Stilton), "belong to a sphere which is included within my own, and share in my harmonies and affinities; yet the soul-matter which adheres to you is of a different texture from mine. Yours has also its independent affinities: I see and respect them: and even though they might lead our bodies—our outward, material lives—away from one another, we should still be true to that glorious light of love which permeates all soul-matter."

"Oh, Abijah!" cried Mrs. Stilton, really distressed, "how can you say such a thing of me? You know I can never adhere to anybody else but you!"

Stilton would then call in my aid to explain his meaning, asserting that I had a faculty of reaching his wife's intellect, which he did not himself possess. Feeling a certain sympathy for her painful confusion

of mind, I did my best to give his words an interpretation which soothed her fears. Then she begged his pardon, taking all the blame to her own stupidity, and received his grudging, unwilling kiss with a restored happiness which pained me to the heart.

I had a growing presentiment of some approaching catastrophe. I felt, distinctly, the presence of unhallowed passions in our circle; and my steadfast love for Agnes, borne thither in my bosom, seemed like a pure white dove in a cage of unclean birds. Stilton held me from him by the superior strength of his intellect. I began to mistrust, even to hate him, while I was still subject to his power, and unable to acquaint him with the change in my feelings. Miss Fetters was so repulsive that I never spoke to her when it could be avoided. I had tolerated her, heretofore, for the sake of her spiritual gift; but now, when I began to doubt the authenticity of that gift, her hungry eyes, her thin lips, her flat breast, and cold, dry hands, excited in me a sensation of absolute abhorrence.

The doctrine of Affinities had some time before been adopted by the circle, as a part of the Spiritual Truth. Other circles, with which we were in communication, had also received the same revelation; and the ground upon which it was based, in fact, rendered its acceptance easy. Even I, shielded as I was by the protecting arms of a pure love, sought in vain for arguments to refute a doctrine, the practical operations of which I saw might be so dangerous. The soul had a right to seek its kindred soul: that I could not deny. Having found, they belonged to each other. Love is the only law which those who love are bound to obey. I shall not repeat all the sophistry whereby these positions were strengthened. The doctrine soon blossomed and bore fruit, the nature of which left no doubt as to the character of the tree.

The catastrophe came sooner than I had anticipated, and partly through my own instrumentality; though, in any case, it must finally have come. We were met

together at the house of one of the most zealous and fanatical believers. There were but eight persons present: the host and his wife (an equally zealous proselyte), a middle-aged bachelor neighbour, Mr. and Mrs. Stilton, Miss Fetters, and her father, and myself. It was a still, cloudy, sultry evening, after one of those dull, oppressive days when all the bad blood in a man seems to be uppermost in his veins. The manifestations upon the table, with which we commenced, were unusually rapid and lively. "I am convinced," said Mr. Stilton, "that we shall receive important revelations to-night. My own mind possesses a clearness and quickness, which, I have noticed, always precede the visit of a superior spirit. Let us be passive and receptive, my friends. We are but instruments in the hands of loftier intelligences, and only through our obedience can this second advent of truth be fulfilled."

He looked at me with that expression which I so well knew, as the signal for a surrender of my will. I had come rather unwillingly, for I was getting heartily tired of the business, and longed to shake off my habit of (spiritual) intoxication, which no longer possessed any attraction since I had been allowed to visit Agnes as an accepted lover. In fact, I continued to hold my place in the circle principally for the sake of satisfying myself with regard to the real nature and causes of the phenomena. On this night, something in Mr. Stilton's face arrested my attention, and a rapid inspiration flashed through my mind. "Suppose," I thought, "I allow the usual effect to be produced, yet reverse the character of its operation? I am convinced that he has been directing the current of my thought according to his will; let me now render myself so thoroughly passive, that my mind, like a mirror, shall reflect what passes through his, retaining nothing of my own except the simple consciousness of what I am doing." Perhaps this was exactly what he desired. He sat, bending forward a little over the table, his square jaws firmly set, his eyes hidden beneath their heavy brows, and every

long, wiry hair on his head in its proper place. I fixed my eyes upon him, threw my mind into a state of perfect receptivity, and waited.

It was not long before I felt his approach. Shadow after shadow flitted across the still mirror of my inward sense. Whether the thoughts took words in his brain or in mine—whether I first caught his disjointed musings, and, by their utterance reacting upon him, gave system and development to *his* thoughts—I cannot tell. But this I know: what I said came wholly from him, not from the slandered spirits of the dead, not from the vagaries of my own imagination, but from *him*. “Listen to me!” I said. “In the flesh I was a martyr to the Truth, and I am permitted to communicate only with those whom the Truth has made free. You are the heralds of the great day. You have climbed from sphere to sphere, until now you stand near the fountains of light. But it is not enough that you see: your lives must reflect the light. The inward vision is for you, but the outward manifestation thereof is for the souls of others. Fulfil the harmonies in the flesh. Be the living music, not the silent instruments.”

There was more, much more of this—a plenitude of eloquent sound, which seems to embody sublime ideas, but which, carefully examined, contains no more palpable substance than sea-froth. If the reader will take the trouble to read an “Epic of the Starry Heavens,” the production of a Spiritual Medium, he will find several hundred pages of the same character. But, by degrees, the revelation descended to details, and assumed a personal application. “In you, in all of you, the spiritual harmonies are still violated,” was the conclusion. “You, Abijah Stilton, who are chosen to hold up the light of truth to the world, require that a transparent soul, capable of transmitting that light to you, should be allied to yours. She who is called your wife is a clouded lens: she can receive the light only through John ———, who is her true spiritual husband, as Abby Fetters is *your* true spiritual wife!”

I was here conscious of a sudden cessation of the

influence which forced me to speak, and stopped. The members of the circle opposite to me—the host, his wife, neighbour, and old Mr. Fetters—were silent, but their faces exhibited more satisfaction than astonishment. My eye fell upon Mrs. Stilton. Her face was pale, her eyes widely opened, and her lips dropped apart, with a stunned, bewildered expression. It was the blank face of a woman walking in her sleep. These observations were accomplished in an instant; for Miss Fetters, suddenly possessed with the spirit of Black Hawk, sprang upon her feet. “Ugh! ugh!” she exclaimed, in a deep, harsh voice, “where’s the pale-face? Black Hawk, he like him—he love him much!”—and therewith threw her arms around Stilton, fairly lifting him off his feet. “Ugh! fire-water for Black Hawk!—big Injun drink!”—and she tossed off a tumbler of brandy. By this time I had wholly recovered my consciousness, but remained silent, stupefied by the extraordinary scene.

Presently Miss Fetters became more quiet, and the possession left her. “My friends,” said Stilton, in his cold, unmoved voice, “I feel that the spirit has spoken truly. We must obey our spiritual affinities, or our great and glorious mission will be unfulfilled. Let us rather rejoice that we have been selected as the instruments to do this work. Come to me, Abby; and you, Rachel, remember that our harmony is not disturbed, but only made more complete.”

“Abijah!” exclaimed Mrs. Stilton, with a pitiful cry, while the tears burst hot and fast from her eyes; “dear husband, what does this mean? Oh, don’t tell me that I’m to be cast off! You promised to love me and care for me, Abijah! I’m not bright, I know, but I’ll try to understand you; indeed I will! Oh, don’t be so cruel!—don’t!”—And the poor creature’s voice completely gave way.

She dropped on the floor at his feet, and lay there, sobbing piteously.

“Rachel, Rachel,” said he—and his face was not quite so calm as his voice—“don’t be rebellious. We are governed by a higher Power. This is all for our

own good, and for the good of the world. Besides, ours was not a perfect affinity. You will be much happier with John, as he harmonizes——”

I could endure it no longer. Indignation, pity, the full energy of my will, possessed me. He lost his power over me then, and for ever.

“What!” I exclaimed, “you, blasphemer, beast that you are, you dare to dispose of your honest wife in this infamous way, that you may be free to indulge your own vile appetites?—you, who have outraged the dead and the living alike, by making me utter your forgeries? Take her back, and let this disgraceful scene end! Take her back, or I will give you a brand that shall last to the end of your days!”

He turned deadly pale, and trembled. I knew that he made a desperate effort to bring me under the control of his will, and laughed mockingly as I saw his knit brow and the swollen veins in his temples. As for the others, they seemed paralyzed by the suddenness and fierceness of my attack. He wavered but for an instant, however, and his self-possession returned.

“Ha!” he exclaimed, “it is the Spirit of Evil that speaks in him! The Devil himself has risen to destroy our glorious fabric! Help me, friends! help me to bind him, and to silence his infernal voice, before he drives the pure spirits from our midst!”

With that he advanced a step towards me, and raised a hand to seize my arm, while the others followed behind. But I was too quick for him. Weak as I was, in comparison, rage gave me strength, and a blow, delivered with the rapidity of lightning, just under the chin, laid him senseless on the floor. Mrs. Stilton screamed and threw herself over him. The rest of the company remained as if stupefied. The storm which had been gathering all the evening at the same instant broke over the house in simultaneous thunder and rain.

I stepped suddenly to the door, opened it, and drew a long, deep breath of relief, as I found myself alone in the darkness. “Now,” said I, “I have done tam-

pering with God's best gift; I will be satisfied with the natural sunshine which beams from His Word and from His works. I have learned wisdom at the expense of shame!" I exulted in my new freedom, in my restored purity of soul; and the wind, that swept down the dark, lonely street, seemed to exult with me. The rains beat upon me, but I heeded them not; nay, I turned aside from the homeward path, in order to pass by the house where Agnes lived. Her window was dark, and I knew she was sleeping, lulled by the storm; but I stood a moment below, in the rain, and said aloud, softly,

"Now, Agnes, I belong wholly to you! Pray to God for me, darling, that I may never lose the true light I have found at last!"

My healing, though complete in the end, was not instantaneous. The habit of the trance, I found, had really impaired the action of my will. I experienced a periodic tendency to return to it, which I have been able to overcome only by the most vigorous efforts. I found it prudent, indeed, to banish from my mind, as far as was possible, all subjects, all memories, connected with Spiritualism. In this work I was aided by Agnes, who now possessed my entire confidence, and who willingly took upon herself the guidance of my mind at those seasons when my own governing faculties flagged. Gradually my mental health returned, and I am now beyond all danger of ever again being led into such fatal dissipations. The writing of this narrative, in fact, has been a test of my ability to overlook and describe my experience without being touched by its past delusions. If some portions of it should not be wholly intelligible to the reader, the defect lies in the very nature of the subject.

It will be noticed that I have given but a partial explanation of the spiritual phenomena. Of the genuineness of the physical manifestations I am fully convinced, and I can account for them only by the supposition of some subtile agency whereby the human will operates upon inert matter. Clairvoyance is a

sufficient explanation of the utterances of the Mediums; at least of those which I have heard; but there is, as I have said before, *something* in the background, which I feel too indistinctly to describe, yet which I know to be Evil. I do not wonder at, though I lament, the prevalence of the belief in Spiritualism. In a few individual cases it may have been productive of good, but its general tendency is evil. There are probably but few Stiltons among its apostles, few Miss Fetteres among its Mediums; but the condition which accompanies the trance, as I have shown, inevitably removes the wholesome check which holds our baser passions in subjection. The Medium is at the mercy of any evil will, and the impressions received from a corrupt mind are always liable to be accepted by innocent believers as revelations from the spirits of the holy dead. I shall shock many honest souls by this confession, but I hope and believe that it may awaken and enlighten others. Its publication is necessary, as an expiation for some of the evil which has been done through my own instrumentality.

I learned, two days afterwards, that Stilton (who was not seriously damaged by my blow) had gone to New York, taking Miss Fetter with him. Her ignorant, weak-minded father was entirely satisfied with the proceeding. Mrs. Stilton, helpless and heart-broken, remained at the house where our circle had met, with her only child, a boy of three years of age, who, fortunately, inherited her weakness rather than his father's power. Agnes, on learning this, insisted on having her removed from associations which were at once unhappy and dangerous. We went together to see her, and, after much persuasion, and many painful scenes which I shall not recapitulate, succeeded in sending her to her father, a farmer in Connecticut. She still remains there, hoping for the day when her guilty husband shall return and be instantly forgiven.

My task is ended: may it not have been performed in vain!



## Appendices



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*Our New Rector*: or, the Village of Norton. Edited by Cuthbert Bode, Author of "Mr. Verdant Green." London: Saunders, Otley, and Co. In the absence of any special denial of the imputation, we always consider ourselves justified in assuming that the acknowledgment of the editorship of a novel is equivalent to a tacit confession of its authorship. We have, therefore, no scruple in regarding this story as the work of the gentleman whose name appears on its title-page, who is principally known as the author of a particularly lively misrepresentation of Oxford life. It is of quite a different stamp from any of its author's former works; being, in fact, a singularly harmless story, of high-church tendencies, which, but for its feebleness, might have been written by Miss Yonge herself. The author is better than his word, for, though he promises us only one new rector, he in fact gives us two, the first being killed off in the middle of the volume. He takes occasion to give us incidentally his views on several points of Church government, expressing a fervent hope that "the day may not be far distant when all Church preferment shall be put into the proper hands, viz. those of the bishops of our Church; when we may hope that many a good living will fall to the lot of hard-working and struggling curates, instead of to unworthy branches of worldly families." Mr. Cuthbert Bode is reckoning without his bishops—at least, without the Bishop of Durham. Although the story is quite a modern one, being of the date of the Crimean war, it is printed in the quasi-antique style which was brought into fashion by *Mary Powell*, and other books of the same class. This is, we think, a great mistake. The appearance of the antique type, with its prodigal display of italics and capital letters, is pretty enough in itself, but is absurdly inappropriate when employed as a vehicle for a narrative which is essentially modern in its tone and character. The following speech, for instance, is not very brilliant in itself, but it certainly gains nothing from the peculiar manner in which it is printed: "'Nothing of the kind,' replied Pop; 'only a huge Cat; and—would you believe it?—the dear old Lady puts Walnut-shells on its Feet when the Weather is Damp, because it has a delicate Persian Constitution!'"

*The Auber Witch*. London: Tinsley.—Stimulated, we may fairly presume, by the success of Mr. Wallace's new opera, Mr. Tinsley has published a translation of the German account of what he calls, not incorrectly, "the most romantic and extraordinary case of witchcraft extant." It will doubtless be acceptable to those who are unacquainted with the details of this singular history, and who wish for fuller information respecting it than can be derived from the libretto of the opera.

*The Character of Jesus*. By Horace Bushnell, D.D., Author of "The New Life," &c. *Christian Nurture*. By the Same. Edinburgh: Strahan and Co. London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co.—Some of our readers may not be aware that Dr. Bushnell is an American divine, who occupies a prominent position in that school of theology which, while denying the sacrificial nature of the Atonement—i.e. the punishment of the innocent for the guilty—still insists upon a belief in Christ as the Son of God as an essential point in the Christian doctrine. The first of the volumes now before us, which is a reprint of the tenth chapter of the Doctor's treatise on *Nature and the Supernatural*, is a very able and closely-reasoned argument, drawn from the facts of the Gospel narrative, in proof of the Divine nature of our Lord; and it may be read with both pleasure and profit by those who do not coincide with its author's opinions on all points. The second is a collection of sound practical discourses, somewhat of the nature of sermons, on the subject of Christian education. The former work, especially, induces us to form a high estimate of Dr. Bushnell's ability.

*The Confessions of a Medium*. London: H. J. Tresidder.—This very singular and very small book—or tract, as it might more properly be called—is the work of a gentleman who was for a considerable time a medium of more than common sensibility and power, and who, having seen cause to abandon the profession and practice of spiritualism, wishes to warn the public against the dangers from which he has himself escaped. According to him, spiritualism is to be feared rather than despised. It is not an imposture; at least, not in the ordinary sense of the word. Table-rapping and turning are not affected by physical means, but can only be accounted for "by the supposition of some subtle agency whereby the human will operates upon inert matter." The spirit-utterances are not fabricated by the medium, who is merely a passive vehicle for their publication. He is, in fact, under the influence of a kind of spiritual intoxication, during which he speaks without any consciousness of what he is saying. And herein lies the danger. While he is in this condition, his will and conscience are passive, and his mind helplessly subject to the operations of other minds; so that the utterances for which spirits get the credit, may be, and generally are, dictated by some person present, to whose will that of the medium is in temporary subjection. The danger, therefore, is that "the impressions received from a corrupt mind are always liable to be accepted by innocent believers as revelations from the spirits of the holy dead." It was at the close of a particularly lively session, in which our author, under the influence of his spiritual instructor, had favoured the company with some grossly immoral advice, that he awoke to the true state of the case, promptly felled the source of his inspiration by a well-directed blow under the chin, and broke with the spiritualists at once and for ever. Although we think that the phenomena of spiritualism are susceptible of a simpler explanation than that given by our author, there is no doubt that his actual experiences as a medium are sufficiently grotesque to ensure a few minutes' amusement to any one into whose hands his pamphlet may fall.

*The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Translated from the French. London: Reeves and Turner.—No more thoroughly hopeless task could we should have thought, be possibly undertaken, than that of endeavouring to render Rousseau's *Confessions* popular in England. It would be difficult to name a book which is more completely un-English in tone and spirit; and whatever charms it possesses cannot be appreciated unless it be read in the original. Messrs. Reeves and Turner, however, appear to be of a different opinion. The trans-

lation which they have just issued is indifferently printed, but fairly executed, and is carried quite as near to completeness as decency will allow. It is illustrated by engravings which are obviously of French origin.

*The Authorized Report of the Conference on Ragged Schools, held at Birmingham, January 23, 1861*. London: Longman and Co.—The promoters of Ragged Schools, feeling not unnaturally somewhat aggrieved that, in spite of their numerous representations, the Committee of Council of Education could not be induced to extend any pecuniary support to the admirable institutions whose interests they are anxious to advance, held a conference at Birmingham, at the commencement of the present year, in order to take their grievance into consideration, and to discuss the best and most appropriate remedy. The pamphlet before us contains a detailed account of what took place on that occasion, including a full report of the various speeches, the most important of which were delivered by Sir John Pakington (the Chairman), the Recorder of Birmingham, and Dr. Guthrie.

*The Handbook of Letter-Writing*. London and New York: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin.—The peculiarity of this Handbook is that the models provided for imitation are all genuine letters that have actually been written, and are in no case fancy productions fabricated for the occasion. This is, as far as it goes, a decided improvement upon any other manual of the kind with which we are acquainted. A few specimens of handwriting are given at the end of the volume, the two first of which are ingeniously made to serve as advertisements of Messrs. Cassell's publications.

*The Castle and the Cottage in Spain*. From the Spanish of Fernan Caballero. By Lady Wallace, Translator of "Clara; or, Slave-Life in Europe." 2 vols. London: Saunders, Otley, and Co.—We are obliged to Lady Wallace for giving us the means of forming an estimate of the Spanish romantic literature of the present day. Her volumes contain four tales, all of which purport to be sketches of life in Spain at a comparatively modern date, two being appropriated to the Castle and two to the Cottage. For the stories themselves we cannot say much. They are of the flimsiest possible construction, and are all more or less tragic in their denouements. On the whole, we are inclined to think that the inhabitants of the Cottage are more amusing companions than those of the Castle; for the talk of the former, though not particularly brilliant, is not quite so like a dreary book as that of their wealthier neighbours. We do not know in what repete Señor Caballero is held in his own country, but in England his rank as a novelist would not, we imagine, be very high.

1. *The Providence of God manifested in Natural Law*. By John Duncanson, M.D. 2. *The Law of Impersonation as applied to Abstract Ideas and Religious Dogmas*. By S. W. Hall. London: Manwaring.—The object which Dr. Duncanson proposes to attain by means of the first of these two volumes is to advocate a conception of the Divine agency which is adapted to the present state of our knowledge. The conclusion at which he arrives is that Providence is expressed by the uniform and unalterable action of natural laws. There can be no such thing as a fortuitous or a supernatural occurrence, and to call an event either one or the other is merely another mode of acknowledging our ignorance of its cause. He rejects the doctrine of special providence as unnecessary when the constitution of nature is properly interpreted, and as tending to encourage superstition rather than a sense of dependence. He has evidently devoted considerable attention to the study of the subject, and he states his views in a very temperate manner. We are afraid that we can scarcely say so much for Mr. Hall. This gentleman regards Christianity, as it is at present received, as a collection of impersonations of abstract ideas. Thus, the origin of the Trinity is to be sought in the impersonations of the spiritual entities or activities composing the human soul; our spiritual idea of God being impersonated in the Father, the atoning conscience of the soul in the Son, and our subjective sense of divine agency in the Holy Ghost. It is necessary to assign to these impersonations some place of abode, and they are accordingly located in Heaven, just as the classical divinities were placed on Mount Olympus. This system of impersonation is necessarily provisional, and belongs to a state of imperfection; and our ascent from the symbols to the truths which they represent, the necessity for which is just beginning to dawn upon the world, will, when completed, constitute the consummation of the second coming of Christ on the earth. The reader will perceive that Mr. Hall has arranged everything very much to his own satisfaction.

*The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*. Second edition. Being the first part of a series of Lectures on Jurisprudence, or the Philosophy of Positive Law. By the late John Austin Esq., of the Inner Temple, Barrister-at-Law. *The Dangers and Safeguards of Modern Theology*: containing "Suggestions offered to the Theological Student under Present Difficulties" (a revised edition), and other discourses. By Archibald Campbell, Lord Bishop of London.

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#### ALMANACK.

*The Southern Province Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1861*. Incorporating the New Zealand Almanac and Nelson Directory.

NOTE.—In the notice on Mr. Palmer's *Egyptian Chronology*, in our last number, we inadvertently omitted on Mr. Kenrick a statement made by his reviewer in the "Prospect," a statement which, though it requires qualification, is essentially correct. We have not, however, succeeded in verifying the observation attributed to Mr. Sharpe, that the sums by which the Septuagint has lengthened the Hebrew Text amount to the precise length of a Sothic cycle—1460 Julian or 1461 Egyptian years, a distinction not correctly indicated in our notice.



