

The President's Medium

John Conklin, Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation

John Benedict Buescher



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May 2015



President Lincoln, writing the Proclamation of Freedom, Jan 1, 1863
David Gilmour, Lithograph, 1863
Library of Congress

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Preface and Acknowledgements

John B. Conklin — *there* is a name to conjure with.

For seven score years and twelve, some have said that at the beginning of the Civil War the spirits of heaven opened up a new era upon earth by dictating to Abraham Lincoln, through Conklin as their human instrument, the terms and even the phrases of the Emancipation Proclamation that the President would issue. And they have said that it was through John Conklin that the spirits announced to Lincoln that he would be assassinated.

That has been their claim. It is no surprise that serious historians have simply dismissed it without much thought when they have come across it, and have had little interest in seeking out information about Conklin, apart from noting that he was alleged to have conducted séances for Lincoln in and out of the White House. Yet it is clear, too, that many historians have simply been indisposed to consider the possibility that Lincoln may have sat at séances. For them, Lincoln was such an object of their profound admiration, for his common sense, for his shrewd political and military savvy, and for his high ideals, that they could not conceive that he would do something that they could not countenance. Their logic goes something like this: Spiritualism is stupid. Lincoln was not stupid. Therefore, Lincoln was not a spiritualist. Nor could he have been seriously affected by any spiritualist nonsense that might have been going on around him (such as at Mary Todd Lincoln's instigation).

That is wrong-headed. There were many shrewd, respectable people who investigated spiritualism at the time to one degree or another, who did not regard it as a primitive superstition, but rather as a democratic kind of empirical science, and who were at least willing to give it a hearing, to allow themselves some suspension of disbelief, whether or not they would become so convinced that they might express their belief publicly.

At the time, spiritualism was particularly strong in the North, among those who were the most radical exponents of the entire constellation of reform efforts, such as abolitionism, that the Republican Lincoln was associated with. It is not enough to disprove that Lincoln had spiritualist convictions, deep or shallow, by demonstrating his obvious progressive freethought or "nondenominational" leanings. During that period, progressive freethought and spiritualism intermingled — promiscuously, perhaps — and were reconciled even within the same minds. In any event, it should be of profound interest to historians of American history to look into the claims of séances at the White House, even though it is also clear that the President's mere attendance at séances can do very little at indicating how seriously he

might have taken them to heart or whether he might have believed he was being guided by spirits or, much less (need we say it?), whether he was in fact being guided by spirits, consciously or unconsciously.

As for spiritualists, many of them have been disposed to accept these claims uncritically, simply because they have confirmed what they already believed — that spirits are actively at work in shaping the intimate details of human lives. Some have been indisposed to look much further into the historical details of their movement beyond potted histories filled with extraordinary claims and testimonies. Perhaps some have not been interested to go much further because of their conviction that they are living in spirit where “time and space has been annihilated” and that applying the mundane tools of the historian to the unfolding saga of providential spirits upon the earth will do nothing but mar the face of the Infinite.

Nevertheless, there has always been a current in spiritualism counter to this anti-historical sentiment, for “modern” spiritualism, which is to say, what crystallized in the mid-19th century, has always based its claims to truth on the testimonies of serious investigators who examined empirical evidence and tried to assess the phenomena that lay at the far edge of human experience, where skepticism and wonder meet. So what investigators uncover, including with the mundane tools of the historian, has never been irrelevant within the spiritualist narrative, but has been fundamental to its extraordinary claims.

An investigation of the shadowy figure of John Conklin even using such lowly tools that a historian has to hand, must be of significance, whether one believes that spirits guided Abraham Lincoln or not. At the very least, it will clear away some of the fog surrounding that moment in the nation’s history when he walked upon its stage.

So, on the question of whether Lincoln was a spiritualist: merely attending a séance — or even many of them — does not in itself make one a “spiritualist.” One can attend séances holding almost any manner of belief about what is happening there. It depends instead on one’s belief about the nature of things, the belief that one can communicate directly with the spirits of the deceased through sensitive human mediums. So, too, for the most part, whether one was a spiritualist has not depended on one’s membership in an organization of spiritualists (even though such organizations have existed and still exist), but rather on an ambiguous combination of factors in one’s inner convictions as displayed to the outside world. And, the strength and nature of such convictions might well change over time, or even from moment to moment. What a person believes does have particular contours. But

considered over the span of a lifetime, some things change (sometimes drastically) and some things persist.

Abraham Lincoln is probably the most analyzed figure in American history. And perhaps the most admired. Consequently, admirers (spiritualists included), from the moment that he drew his last breath, have tried to claim him, and to identify their beliefs as his beliefs. Every utterance he ever made, it seems, has provided someone somewhere with evidence on which to hang chains of inference about his beliefs. So it is obvious that the mere testimony of many people about whether he believed this or that must be sifted together with other kinds of evidence — their intimacy with him, for example, must be weighed, and whether they had their own interests to advance by portraying him one way or another. This has to be considered even with someone as close to him as, for example, his son Robert, who loathed spiritualism, had his mother committed to an insane asylum because of her recourse to spirit mediums, who assiduously protected the purity of his father's reputation in the public's estimation, who had his own political ambitions, and who retained possession of his father's papers until he died.

In addition, in the case of Lincoln, historians have had to contend with a series of hoaxed letters and memoirs purporting to be from Lincoln or his friends or family, or purporting to be interviews or conversations with him that have turned out to be fraudulent.¹ Spiritualists have even gone so far as to publish his post-mortem adventures and opinions given to spirit mediums, which have told what his disembodied spirit was supposedly then unhindered in relating. In one case, "Lincoln's" spirit even gave instructions on how to forge papers and letters relating to his early life and romances that for a few months succeeded in deceiving some of the nation's leading Lincoln scholars and caused a scandal for *The Atlantic Monthly*, which had begun serializing them, until the fraud was proved.²

Marc Demarest is a brilliant and indefatigable historian of spiritualism and the occult, and a visionary organizer and publisher of rare historical sources of fundamental value to any research on the subject. He solicited a number of academic historians in an effort to collect from far-flung archives and libraries a complete run of John Conklin's *The Life of a Medium*,

¹ "The Diary of a Public Man," *North American Review* 129 (August-November 1879): 125-140, 259-273, 376-388; probably written by Julia Ward Howe's brother Sam Howe. Frank Maloy Anderson, *The Mystery of a "Public Man": A Historical Detective Story*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948).

² "Lincoln the Lover," *Atlantic Monthly*, in three installments from December 1928 through February 1929.

which was serialized in *Nichols' Monthly* from 1854 to 1855. This was Conklin's autobiography, up to that point in his life. The claims about his séances with Abraham Lincoln are a part of his later career, but *The Life of a Medium* provides plenty of information about him that bears on those claims. It is mainly through Marc's effort, therefore, that *The Life of a Medium* is republished in this volume. When I learned about his intention to reconstitute it from the various pieces of it that were scattered around the country, I said that I would be willing to walk a mile or ten to be able to read it, and Marc immediately asked me to write the introduction to its publication (which has also evolved to include here the pamphlet Conklin published, *Digging for Captain Kydd's Treasure*, and the pamphlet *Spirit-Rapping in Glasgow in 1864*).

I believe that I have milepost ten now in sight, having hiked a long way in the company of John Conklin. It has been fascinating and surprising, and I thank Marc for the opportunity to do this research. Through his collecting and publishing efforts, Marc has provided the material that has been essential to writing this extended introduction. But more than that, he sat on my shoulders as a whispering spirit (by email) as I pursued the elusive John Conklin. I think it fair to declare to the readers of this introduction that if you see anything in it that you wish to find fault with, then you should direct your complaint to me, but if you see anything that you wish to praise, then direct that praise to Marc, for he well deserves it.

I also wish to thank Pat Deveney for his insightful comments and help throughout the research and writing of this essay, and Patrick Bowen for his assistance in locating original portions of Conklin's serialized autobiography from the issues of *Nichols' Monthly*.

1 Conklin the Sailor Man



*John Benjamin Conklin
from The Life of a Medium*

Because no one has ever published any historical research on our man John B. Conklin, we are forced to begin by fishing for the most basic details of his life, without being able to get our bearings by consulting

anyone's previous work. Part of the problem, we realize after we begin to look, is that the waters in which we have to fish for him — the greater metropolitan region of New York — even in the 19th century, were filled with Conklins. And not just Conklins, but John Conklins. And even an uncomfortably large number of John B. Conklins. When we drop our nets, we pull them back in full, almost to breaking. So how do we find the one who has swallowed the diamond?³

Given the difficulty, I believe it will be a kindness to readers to lay out the details of his early life as a sort of narrative of my research, marking out the anchor holds as I go along and showing the course I have taken. It may seem tedious at first, but it will ultimately allow readers to have more confidence in the results, as well as honestly showing them where, in their estimation, I may have gone off course, and why, if I have done so. So we begin by looking for some evidence that will anchor our search for John B. Conklin.

But before we do, let us just observe that genealogical sources from the 19th century often did not discriminate between a name like "Conklin," "Conkling," and "Concklin." Many of the 19th-century bearers of these names did not worry overly much about their precise spelling. From one generation or branch of a family to another, such differences were not necessarily seen as significant. For some people, or in some circumstances, a distinction might be insisted upon, but the spelling of personal names was more fluid than it is now. The subject of our research, in fact, not only tolerated others spelling his name in a variety of ways, but also gave his own name with alternative spellings. I will default to "Conklin," since that is how it most often appeared in the press.

³ Should you decide to start out on your own research into the 19th century life of J. B. Conklin, spirit medium from New York, and you decide to start from scratch, may I introduce you to some of the people who will stop you along the way and try to have a word or two? Here is: J. B. Conklin, importer and purveyor of French pickled pig's feet, tripe, and lambs' feet, from Long Island and doing business in Manhattan; J. B. Conklin, bookbindery supervisor who committed suicide at work in 1870 in Brooklyn; J. B. Conklin, 2nd Cavalry Battalion, 24th Brigade, New York National Guard, from Albany, writer of execrable poetry and a handy book for war veterans on how to collect their pensions; J. B. Conklin, also from Albany, physician, anti-vivisectionist and tout for Quickine antiseptic; J. B. Conklin, Republican Party activist, and collector of information about the local spread of the English sparrow into Springport, Michigan; J. B. Conklin, member of Masonic Lodge, no. 49 in Watertown, Massachusetts; J. B. Conklin, land bounty hunter from Cincinnati; J. B. Conklin, poultry breeder from Middlesex County, Massachusetts. And so many more, lined up along the way, including such curious folks as John Conklin, "The American Atlas," exhibiting his powers with Campbell's Caravan and Circus in Gallipolis, Ohio. And you will meet other Conklins crowding close around our J. B. Conklin, such as "Dr." C. Conklin, associate of spirit medium Charles Colchester, and spiritual healing clairvoyant and peripatetic conniver in spirit materialization frauds in Chicago, St. Louis, Trenton, and New York City. And, of course, there is U.S. Senator from New York Roscoe Conkling. He will always be there, ready to have a talk with you.

Here then is our first anchor point: The 1860 Federal Census for New York City has the following listing (recorded August 27th) for the residents of a single dwelling among its entries for the 14th Ward, District 2, in Manhattan:

John B. Conkling	age: 37	occupation: Spirit Medium	born: New York
Sarah E.	“	30	“
Alonzo	“	12	“
Samuel	“	10	“
Maria L.	“	9	“

The census entry also lists the value of John’s real estate wealth as zero and the value of his personal estate as \$500.

This is our man. Definitely. Without question. The spirit medium.

However, the family appears again in the same 1860 Census, in Morrisania, Westchester County, New York. Morrisania is a previous name for the South Bronx:

Jno. B. Concklin	age: 37	occupation: Baker	born: New York
Sarah	30		“
Alonzo	“	12	“
Saml	10		“
Maria L Concklin	9		“
Margt A Powers	39		“

So, the Conklins were keeping two households, one in Morrisania, the other in Manhattan. Perhaps John himself was not actually in Morrisania when the census taker came by, but was registered there anyway — presumably as having the trade he had been in before becoming a professional medium. (The census also records that he declared ownership of real estate that had a value of \$2000.) The census taker, of course, would not have required proof of what he was told, even if it really were a member of the family who had told him.

In fact, by about 1855 John B. Conklin had opened up a room or office in Manhattan and was working there as a professional medium, and by 1860 had already shifted his rooms there a couple of times, listing himself in the 1859 *Trow’s New York City Directory* as: John B. Conklin, medium, 469 Broadway, h. Morrisania.

We can now turn to the earlier 1850 Federal Census, and locate him among the many Conklings and Conklins there, using the children’s names to

triangulate. And we find the following entry (recorded August 13th) listing the inhabitants of a single dwelling in the township of Greenburgh in Westchester County, New York, north of the Bronx, on the eastern bank of the Hudson River, and including within it the villages of Dobbs Ferry, Hastings-on-Hudson, Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow, and Irvington:

Samuel Bowers	age: 66	occupation: Farmer	born: America
Maria	“ 57		
Margaret	24		
Ebenezer	25		
Sarah	19		
Alonzo Conklin	3		
Samuel Conklin	2		
John Conklin	25		

Samuel Bowers’ real estate wealth is here given as \$2000. John Conklin’s wealth is not listed — which, in the census, would often mean that he had none. The fact that the 1860 Census (the listing for Morrisania) shows John Conklin possessing real estate valued at \$2000, whereas this 1850 entry shows him having none, but living with his in-laws whose real estate was valued precisely at that value, suggests that by 1860, Sarah’s parents had passed away and that she and her husband John had inherited the property.

The 1850 entry is interesting. It shows our John Conklin with his children Alonzo and Samuel Conklin. The Sarah just above them is the Sarah who is Conklin’s wife in the 1860 census (for example, the age difference with John is consistent). Yet she is on the last of the list of the Bowers family, with the last name of Bowers. That was almost certainly the census taker’s mistake — that is, he understood that she was indeed the Bowers’ daughter, but did not understand that she was also married to John. Conklin says in *The Life of a Medium* that when he first heard about the Rochester rappings, he sat down at his kitchen table *with his wife* and tried, successfully, to reproduce them; so, assuming that was some time between 1848 (when the “rappings” first appeared on the national scene) and 1850, we assume that she was John’s wife at the time of the census. And we can provisionally fix the date of John and Sarah’s marriage at 1846 or 1847.

Margaret Powers, who was living with the Conklins in 1860 was therefore most probably John Conklin’s sister-in-law, whose maiden name then was Sarah E. Powers (or Bowers).

Ages reported in the mid-19th century censuses are somewhat approximate, partly because they are self-reported. John said he was 37 in

August 1860, but said his age was 25 in August 1850. So let us say that, according to his own testimony in 1850 and in 1860, the census tells us that he was born sometime between 1823 and 1825.

Again, using the family names to triangulate, we can locate them in the 1870 Census, where, in Manhattan (1st District, 21st Ward), the following are listed among the residents of a multi-unit residential building:

Sarah Conklin	age: 39	born: New York
Maria Conklin	19	"
Alonzo Conklin	23 occupation: Clerk	"
Samuel Conklin	22	"

Note that the family is now reporting their name as "Conklin," not "Conkling" or "Concklin."

But John is not with his family for the 1870 census (it was recorded on January 12th of that year). Perhaps he was traveling at the time, but perhaps he was not living with them. He has no obvious presence elsewhere in the 1870 census. An ad in *The New York Times* on November 11, 1868, invites those seeking the services of a clairvoyant or test medium to consult J. B. Conklin during regular office hours at 229 Bowery, and at other times at private rooms at 100 East 12th Street, at the corner of 4th Avenue. And an ad in the *New York Tribune*, on January 3, 1870, says that J. B. Conklin's daily circles were being held at 67 East 10th Street ("opposite Stewart's" Hotel).

With those factual anchors, let us drift a bit: I already mentioned that I would show my work, so you have to follow my wandering for a while.

If we turn to John Conklin's own account of his early years, as he described them in *The Life of a Medium*, we find this: "I was born in the city of New York, in 1825, and remained with my family till the age of nineteen years, when I went to sea." Unfortunately, he tells us nothing here about that family — who his parents and siblings were, what his father did for a living, and so on. And nothing about having worked as a baker. The census information seems to allow us to grant him his date and place of birth (more or less), but if we do, there are plain reasons to doubt the rest of his statement.

He would have been nineteen years old only in 1844, by his own reckoning (or possibly as early as 1842, if we go by the age he reported in 1860). Yet he then tells us that this early "seafaring experience," which he had begun at age nineteen, "had made it easy for me to obtain employment with those who 'go down upon the sea in ships,'" and that, on account of that

experience, he was then hired to ship out on the pilot-boat *John McKeon*, but providentially missed it before it left port on the trip on which it was lost at sea.

But that would be impossible. The *John McKeon* was indeed lost at sea in a gale, but it was on August 29, 1839.⁴ Conklin would have been fourteen years old, by his own account, and perhaps only as old as sixteen if we say he was born in 1823. That is far from the nineteen plus years he claims for himself as a new sailor in *The Life of a Medium*, having already gained seafaring experience before he was to ship on the *John McKeon*. A hypothesis: Conklin fabricated his connection to a true incident, in order to portray himself as the beneficiary of providential attention.⁵

Next he says that in 1841 he then shipped out on the *Zephyr*, but that midway through that voyage he jumped ship in response to another providential premonition, which eventually saved him from being onboard when the ship was lost. Yet by the birthdate he has given, he would still have been only sixteen years old — and we can grant him only a little leeway on this from the 1860 census birthdate, making him as old as 18 in 1841. But then, remember, by his account, he lived with his family until the age of nineteen, when he went to sea. And there is a further complication — the *Zephyr* loss did not occur in 1841, but on November 30, 1840. Its captain and crew, however, were rescued by a passing ship and brought into the port of New York in mid-December, when its fate began to be reported in the city's newspapers.⁶ A hypothesis: Conklin again confabulated a tale that connected

⁴ Named for U.S. Rep. John McKeon of New York; foundered, in late 1839, "Disasters at Sea," *Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal*, 12.5 (Jan 1840): 163, "A vessel, bottom up, supposed to be the pilot boat, John McKeon, was passed near the latitude of Cape Henry [in Virginia]." The Commissioners of Pilotage for the State of New Jersey, report to the New Jersey Legislature, October 26, 1839, in *Proceedings of the Sixty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of New Jersey* (1840), 31: "The Commissioners with deep regret have to state the loss of one of the Pilot Boats belonging to the establishment (the John McKeon) which from the circumstance of her not being heard of since August 29th, doubtless took place in the almost unexampled gale of that date, which swept along our coast, and proved so fatal and so injurious to the navigating interests. She had on board at the time, one apprentice and three boatmen. The New-York Pilot boat Gratitude having not been heard of since the same gale, like fears of her loss are entertained, and increases our regret that so many valuable lives, whose most unremitting exertions had been used to benefit the wayworn mariner, should be taken at the same time."

⁵ Emma Hardinge Britten published the record of a séance held by Conklin on October 2, 1854 during which he became inhabited by the salty and somewhat comical "spirit of a sailor on board a New York pilot boat, which left the port fifteen years ago, and was not heard of afterwards," for the benefit of a sailor who had come to the circle to inquire about the ship's fate, "Modern Spiritualism in America," *Western Star* 1.4 (October 1872): 266.

⁶ The British barque *Zephyr* (Newcastle), "from Quebec and London shipped a sea, ... which swept the decks, and did so much damage otherwise that she filled with water, and was abandoned on the 30th, the crew being taken off by the [American] ship Sheridan, which brought the *Zephyr*'s

him with a real event, which made it seem that he was under divine protection. And a secondary hypothesis: He created his connections to the *John McKeon* and the *Zephyr* at a later date, when he would have vaguely remembered the losses as they were reported in the papers, but when he could only construct his tale by consulting a list of annual shipping losses.

Next, to put it in his own words, “after this, I made several voyages to the West Indies. In 1844, I went before the mast, in the schooner ‘Red Jacket,’ on a southern voyage.” On the next voyage, he says, he was made first mate, and was promised that he would be made captain on the next voyage, but he demurred, did not sail, and, again, the ship he had almost been on was lost at sea.

Oh? In 1844, he was now, finally, reaching the tender age of nineteen, the age at which he said earlier that he first went to sea. Stretching it, we can make him as old as twenty-one at this time. If, at such an age, he were made the first mate and given a promise of being made a captain that same year, the ship — a schooner, he says — would have to have been something that could have floated in a bathtub. I see a record of a schooner *Red Jacket* in service during that time, but nothing about its ever having been lost. A hypothesis: the *John McKeon*, the *Zephyr*, and the *Red Jacket* — three for three. Conklin may have had some seafaring experience — it would have been very hard to fake that later on, in the neighborhood of the port of New York. But it is impossible, based on the birthdate he gives us, to place him at the center of the oceanic saga he tells, in which, through the intervention of Providence, he repeatedly escaped destruction on the high seas.⁷

captain and crew into the port of New York,” arriving on December 18. Queen Victoria sent a gold medal to Captain Depeyster of the *Sheridan*. “Disasters at Sea in 1840,” *Sailor’s Magazine and Naval Journal* (New York) 8.13 (April 1841): 240; and a notice in the *London Standard*, January 12, 1841.

⁷ In his *Life of a Medium* Conklin also offered another example, from August 1853, of what he was convinced was a providential voice, this one urging him to change his seat while traveling on the Camden and Amboy Railroad, which he did, minutes before a train collision which would have killed him if he had been sitting where he had been only a few minutes before. There was indeed a railroad accident on the Camden and Amboy Railroad, on the date he mentions, at Old Bridge, eight miles from Amboy, New Jersey, on a long turn with limited visibility, on the only (and single track) line between New York and Philadelphia, resulting in four dead — one of whom was an unidentified German immigrant gentleman — and twenty wounded. It was a head-on collision of the northbound train from Philadelphia and the southbound train from New York, one of which was slightly late. The first passenger car on the southbound train was jammed backward into the second passenger car, collapsing the second car almost completely — the casualties were in this collapsed car. None of the voluminous press coverage of the accident appears to have mentioned Conklin, although there is mention of another “providential” exchange of seats in the crushed car, saving one of the passengers — “A friend who was in the New York train, with his wife and two children, one in his arms, and the other on the lap of his wife, were pushed forward by the entering car, two thirds of its length, carrying him and his boy to the top on the crushed timbers,

Keeping sight of him through his life, it already seemed clear, without landmarks but only through what he tells us, would be a struggle, and would require something like advanced celestial navigation skills. Sailing through the clouds of rumor and fable swirling around this man who communed with the spirits of the departed would require a sort of dead reckoning.

And would require providential fortune as well. After struggling with the census data and trying without success to make it fit Conklin's account in *The Life of a Medium*, I then happened to wave the magical internet mouse in some obscure way over the laptop on my parlor table and bundled our John Conklin together with his family's names into a little package, inserted it gently into the computer oracle's mouth — and materialized a little treasure from the aether, in the form of a genealogical account of the Conklin family of Long Island, compiled mostly around the turn of the twentieth century (and submitted to the Tarrytown DAR somewhat later) by John Inglis Conklin, Jr. — whose father, it turns out, was our John B. Conklin's older brother. That gives us confidence that our extraordinarily diligent genealogist was in an excellent position to know the facts about his close kin.⁸ I summarize here what he reveals to us about his uncle John B. Conklin and his family:

John Benjamin Conklin was the last of seven children of Philip Conklin (1788-1838) and Harriet Whitfield Keech.

John's father Philip was born at Southold on Long Island and also died on Long Island, but moved his family to New York City in between in order to ply his trade. He was a hatter, living in at least two places — 107 Thompson Street and 90 Reed Street, both in Manhattan.

while his wife and child were forced out at the bottom, all escaping any serious injury. Jas. McCormick, Esq., of Harrisburg, with his wife and daughter, and Miss Alricks and Miss Beuhler, were in the same car. At the request of Mr. McCormick, Miss Alricks exchanged seats with an old lady. Ten minutes after, the old lady [an "unidentified Irishwoman"] was crushed to death, and all near her, on that side. How true it is that in 'the midst of life we are in death,'" Henry B. Masser, "Letter from the Editor Dated *Philadelphia*, August 16, 1853," *Sunbury American and Shamokin Journal* (Sunbury, Penn.), August 20, 1853. Conklin was still telling this story in 1868. In a lecture he gave at Dodworth Hall, however, according to Thomas Hazard's account, the German gentleman who died was not sitting behind Conklin before he changed his seat, as he describes in *The Life of a Medium*, but rather beside him, *Newport (Rhode Island) Mercury*, May 16, 1868; according to "Particulars of the Railroad Accident," *Legal Journal (Pittsburgh)*, August 13, 1853, Conklin was a member of a committee "to draft resolutions expressing the sentiments of the passengers" of the train after the accident.

⁸ Tarrytown Chapter DAR, Long Island Genealogy — Joseph Inglis Conklin, Jr. (compiler) (submitted February 1947), 77, 159-160.

John Benjamin Conklin was a 7th generation descendent of John Conklin ("Capt. John Conkelyne"), born in 1600 in Nottinghamshire, England, who arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1638, moved to Southold, Long Island, New York, and died there in 1683.

John Benjamin Conklin's parents Philip and Harriet had seven children:

Ellen E. Conklin, born 1808 (married Jacob C. Abel).

Maria Conklin, born 1810.

Harriet Virginia Conklin, born 1812 (married D. Harrington of Philadelphia; then William Cash of Boston), died 1882.

Angeline Conklin, born 1813.

Joseph Inglis Conklin, born May 18, 1816, on Thompson Street, New York City, between Spring and Prince Streets; married Sarah Hanna with whom he had ten children (among whom was Joseph Inglis Conklin, Jr., our genealogist). The first of these children was named John Benjamin Conklin, born on September 4, 1838 and died as an infant in September 1839.

John Benjamin Conklin, born September 24, 1820, in New York City; died August 4, 1870; buried at the Cemetery of the Evergreens, Brooklyn and Queens, New York City.

Of John B. Conklin himself, we also learn:

John Benjamin Conklin married Sarah Powers of Greenburg, Westchester County, New York, on December 30, 1846.

Sarah was born February 15, 1829, and died October 25, 1908 at Cornwall, New York.

Of John and Sarah's children, we learn:

Alonzo, born October 25, 1847; died, unmarried, May 11, 1881.

Samuel Powers, born December 9, 1848; died July 23, 1893 at Hartsdale, New York.

Maria Louise, born January 29, 1851; married Ferdinand Reed; died April 18, 1897.

Among all the details that John I. Conklin, Jr.'s dogged genealogical work has bequeathed us about his uncle, notice this one: John Benjamin

Conklin, he tells us, was born on September 24, 1820. Not in 1825. If that is true — and it mostly likely is true, for it probably came from something like the family Bible — then it means that not only did John misreport his true age in both the 1850 and 1860 censuses by saying that he was five years younger than he actually was, but also that he misreported it in the same way in *The Life of a Medium*. I cannot imagine a convincing reason for why he would have done that, but I do now believe that he did, even though by claiming a birth date of 1825 he quite clearly makes a wreck of the chronology of the events of his early life that he immediately afterwards wrote about in *The Life of a Medium* and that made me suspect him of being a sort of Munchausen fabulist about his seagoing experiences.⁹ By adjusting the chronology and accepting his true birth date as 1820, we can allow him the extra years to mature before he “went down to the sea in ships.” Welcome back before the mast, Seaman Conklin.¹⁰ That was a stormy beginning, but now we can set course through the rest of his life under nearly full sail.

I note here, dear reader, that our genealogist detailed hundreds of others of his kin — Conklins, Concklins, Concklings, Conklyns, Conklines, Conklynnes, and Conklands — shoaling together around New York. As was fitting for a genealogist, he did not give “peripheral” information about their lives, and did not mention anything about his uncle being a spirit medium with a notorious career. So our earlier tortuous drifting through the census waters, messing about in boats, was not in vain because without first having done that, we would not have been able to recognize “our” John Conklin among all those swimming in the genealogical sea.

⁹ Later on in conducting my research, I discovered that in 1885, Albany spiritualist Cyrus Poole wrote, of Conklin, that he “knew him well and intimately from the year 1853 up to the time of his death about 1866, then aged forty-eight...” Cyrus O. Poole, “The Religious Convictions of Abraham Lincoln. A Study,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, November 28, 1885. That would have made Conklin’s date of birth 1818, closer to what we now know was the real date, 1820. Poole remembered his year of death incorrectly, too — it was 1870, not “about 1866,” but perhaps he did that because he did know that Conklin was almost fifty years old (actually, he was 49) when he died, so Conklin, at least on the evidence of this account, may have represented himself, to his friends, anyway, as being older than he said he was in *The Life of a Medium*.

¹⁰ Subsequent research uncovered that John B. Conklin applied for a Seaman’s Protection Certificate on February 15, 1844, listing his age as 23. This is probably our Conklin, although it should be noted that there was yet another John B. Conklin, who was a New York naval seaman (and definitely not our Conklin) served on board the Monitor when it engaged the Merrimac, serving as Quarter Gunner; Frank B. Butts, “The Monitor and the Merrimac,” *Personal Narratives of Events in the War of the Rebellion: Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society of Rhode Island, 4th Series* (1889-90): 16.

2 Young Conklin and His Spirits

In 1845, Conklin tells us in *The Life of a Medium*, he visited his sister in Philadelphia (who we can now, thanks to our Conklin genealogist, identify almost certainly as his older sister Harriet Virginia Harrington). One night while he was there, he says, a ghost visited the room in which he was sleeping, moved a lamp, and put the bedclothes over him. It was not his sister playing a joke on him, he knew, because she denied it the next morning, and she was no liar.

But the night before, a group that had gathered at the house had thought they heard a ghostly visitor moving about — the house was allegedly haunted. This happened, he says, while he was “explaining Signor Blitz’s thimble trick, for the amusement of the assembled group.”¹¹



Signor Blitz (Antonio Van Zandt)

¹¹ British magician, ventriloquist, juggler, and animal trainer (“learned canaries”) Antonio van Zandt (1810-1877), emigrated to the United States in 1834, settled in Philadelphia, and performed under the name “Signor Blitz”; Antonio Blitz, *Life and Adventures of Signor Blitz; being an account of the author’s professional life; his wonderful tricks and feats; with laughable incidents, and adventures as a magician, necromancer, and ventriloquist* (Hartford, Ct.: T. Belknap, 1872). According to Blitz’s account, 155-158, spiritualism was “preposterous,” “nonsensical,” and “offensive.” He wrote, “In all my perambulations, I never encountered such perverse people as the Spiritualists. Blind to the convictions of truth, and uncompromising in their belief of phenomena, they defend fiction, and emphatically ignore the Divine laws. Their principles not only conflict with the doctrines of all religion, but invade the domestic happiness of homes and peace of families to an alarming extent, the character of which has established nothing tangible in science, or, on investigation, to encourage or satisfy the inquirer, and the whole subject is unprofitable and dangerous. It is truly but a factitious effort to combat and unsettle the laws which God, in His wisdom, has proclaimed as eternal.”

A loud klaxon should sound at this point in the mind of anyone attempting to get a fix on Conklin. Here he was, by his own account, “a poor Methodist church member, ignorant of the world’s lore,” but demonstrating for the group the sleight of hand, including one can presume, the palming of pellets, required for the proper execution of a professional magician’s thimble-rigging. That in itself would be quite enough to inspire many a sister to play a practical joke on her know-it-all younger brother. Be that as it may, his passing admission to detailed knowledge of close-work legerdemain and his willingness to entertain a group of people with it would seem to cast an illuminating gleam on his further career.

Sometime after January 1852, when the eldest Fox Sister, Leah Brown, moved to New York City and began giving “sittings” at her new home on West 26th Street, Conklin visited her, having become excited by the claims of the new “spiritualists,” that they were able to receive communications from the spirits of the deceased through the instrumentality of sensitive human mediums via mysterious table-tippings and sonorous rappings that would spell out messages by indicating the letters of the alphabet.

At the sitting with Leah Brown, he received a message in just that way, purporting to come from his deceased mother-in-law. He carried the message home and sat down at the kitchen table with his wife and one of his children. The table tipped, and then a message was rapped out. “My wife, after the first surprise,” he writes, “very naturally thought that I had been amusing myself by playing off some trick I had seen and detected; and accused me of doing expertly, what I could not have done, if disposed, without great difficulty.”

The sounds became louder, however, like drum beats, eventually becoming audible throughout the neighborhood, and alarming and exciting those who heard them. Very quickly, over the next two months, Conklin became the object of celebration, wonder, and scorn in the village (Morrisania we now presume) for having become a medium of the spirits. As a result, he became recruited as a sort of spirit metal detector in a fruitless neighborhood expedition to dig for a pot of money supposedly hidden nearby during the Revolutionary War by Hessian soldiers. Conklin tells us about the failure or deliberate misdirection of his spirit guides — primarily, the ghost of a little girl murdered decades before — that resulted in his and his coadjutors’ failure to uncover any money. There are hints in this of the tale of the murdered peddler supposed to be buried under the Fox sisters’ house in Hydesville, as well as an atmosphere saturated with the stories of Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe.

His role in this misfired treasure hunt must have made him an object of widespread mockery, for he spends an entire chapter in *The Life of a Medium* recounting it and then shifting whatever blame might be thought to accrue to his failure to the spirits themselves, protesting that he was only the instrument for what they said, and that, anyway, perhaps they had intended all along for their several mortal partners to fail, so that they would learn a high-minded lesson not to use spirit guidance for selfish, pecuniary gain. Nevertheless, Conklin continued to cultivate his supposed power to see hidden or lost objects — under the earth or the water, or behind or within buildings or furniture or mechanical devices, or into the past or the future, or across the far corners of the earth, or across space to other planets — and to offer that power as a significant part of the mediumistic gifts he displayed to the public.

3 A Metropolitan Medium

Because of (or despite) his disappointment with the treasure hunt, he soon spent two or three months “developing” more fully as a medium — by extended sittings with other mediums, whose names he does not reveal. During that time, he tells us, he began receiving messages from the spirit of George Fox, the founder of the Quakers who promoted the notion that one should rely on no external authority but only on the “inner light.” Conklin said he did not know who “Fox” was when he received the first of these messages, but eventually came to understand whose spirit was guiding him. Having the spirit of the independent George Fox would suit Conklin well, because about this time, for his dabbling in necromancy, he was being excluded from membership in the Methodist Church, in which he had been raised. “George Fox” would continue to be Conklin’s inspiring or controlling spirit for messages about religion. Out of Conklin’s mouth, “Fox” tended to excoriate institutions for hide-bound belief, hypocrisy, and a refusal to carry out the radical anti-authoritarian principles of the Protestant Reformation.

In addition to the spirit of George Fox, Conklin also eventually added the spirit of freethinker Thomas Paine to his roster of familiar guiding lights. Having awakened after death as an immortal spirit, “Paine” had obviously had to adjust his previous earthbound embrace of rationalism, but his messages via Conklin would still often strike some of those who heard them as harsh, extreme, and even blasphemous.

After his mediumistic training, Conklin moved to Manhattan some time in 1852, the year, we note, that the master medium of “phenomenal”

manifestations, Daniel Home, came to New York for a while to give séances.¹² Conklin opened rooms for business at 31 Howard Street, advertising himself as a “test medium.”

With only a couple of exceptions over the years, he did not attempt to deliver trance or inspirational lectures or speeches, as some other spiritualist mediums did. He was short, about five feet tall, and was not an effective orator, “his diction when in his normal state being most irregular. He was almost uneducated, and had been a common sailor; but when under the influence his language was free, and the words correctly spelt” when he wrote messages from the spirits.¹³

His work consisted mainly in setting up in various places and advertising himself as ready to receive inquirers. These he would typically welcome for free into group séances. These would generate interest and publicity, and instill in some of his visitors enough confidence in his powers that they would then pay fees for private sessions at which Conklin would focus on them entirely and their pressing personal requests for assurance or guidance from their departed. In the free circles, visitors would enter the room and sit in an array of chairs away from a central table. They would take a numbered slip of paper as they entered and, as individuals seated at the table with Conklin would leave, people from the outer circle would fill in the spaces according to whose number was next.

In one of the exceptional times that Conklin did offer a lecture to a large group in a hall, one of the attendees, Francis Gerry Fairfield, an editor of poetry at Nathaniel P. Willis’ *Home Journal*, described Conklin on stage as “subject to well-marked attacks of cerebral epilepsy, with its faded and blood-suffused eye, cadaverous pallor, and heavy and lost expression, who illustrated the phenomenon of nervous atmosphere, and the disturbances of surrounding objects incident to the malady, to a greater extent than any person I have ever met.”¹⁴ Gerry noted that, “owing to feebleness of physical organization, he did not excel in dynamic phenomena, though disturbances of the lesser sort, and particularly rappings, were generally present as the exponents of the clairvoyant state. I saw a glass of water fall from the desk at

¹² It is unclear whether Conklin’s family came with him at that time. They were there by the 1860 Census (or at least, one might say, there and back in Morrisania as well). He appears to have simply opened rooms in New York City — his work office, one might say, that he could sleep in as well, and that he shifted from time to time around the city — while still sometimes commuting back to Morrisania to his family.

¹³ Review of “Relations between Spiritualism and Science: Mr. A. R. Wallace and R. M. N,” *Journal of Science*, August-September, 1885,” *Light* 5.245 (September 12, 1885): 435.

¹⁴ Francis Gerry Fairfield, *Ten Years with Spiritual Mediums: an inquiry concerning the etiology of certain phenomena called spiritual* (New York: Appleton, 1875), 128.

Dodworth Hall on one occasion, when he certainly was not within six feet of it, and no other person was within ten.” In other words, Conklin was not particularly impressive as a public speaker, but was most effective in private, close work in his sitting rooms, where he either provided personal answers to inquirers, or produced an array of uncanny phenomena in the near dark.

Over the almost two decades that followed his move to New York City at 31 Howard Street, he shifted his rooms around Manhattan, to a couple of different addresses on Canal Street (134 and 154), and then up Broadway to various different addresses (469, 477, 486, 553, and 599), and then elsewhere (304 West 16th Street).

From the beginning of his career in New York he connected himself with the leading lights of spiritualism in the city — with Samuel Byron Brittan and industrialist Charles Partridge, for example — the editor and the publisher of *The Spiritual Telegraph* — Dr. Robert Titus Hallock, Judge John Worth Edmonds and his mediumistic daughter Laura, Leah Fox Brown, and others. He sought and found financial patronage from Charles Partridge and Horace Day, who, as directors of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, which they headquartered at 553 Broadway, provided the financial subsidies needed to populate the city with a roster of test-mediums whom the public might consult.¹⁵ Conklin offered sittings at that address for a while.

He was also instrumental through his sittings in converting some prominent people in New York to the cause of spiritualism. He attended gatherings and meetings of spiritualists in New York City, and sometimes acted as the practical demonstrator of spirit contact within a roster of featured speakers: At a gathering, Samuel Byron Brittan, for example, might deliver an address to the crowd; then, there might be a musical interlude with piano and song compositions by Emma Hardinge; then, Conklin, in a practical demonstration of spirit work, might produce rappings or, entranced, answer questions submitted by the audience.

Conklin was involved in the spiritualist press, as well, although, with each briefly-lived journal he “edited” and published, he relied on a partner, who, it may be suspected, provided the bulk of the writing and editing, while

¹⁵ Conklin mentions going to Taylor’s for oysters in his *Digging for Captain Kydd’s Treasure*. Taylor’s had two “saloons” — that is, restaurants. One was a huge and sumptuous eatery located at 365 Broadway, expensively furnished in marble and gilt. The other Taylor’s was the “Upper Saloon,” at 555 Broadway, which was more a place where “sporting men” might drop in “with a ‘fair critter’ of a certain stamp.” It was directly next door to the building that housed the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, at 553 Broadway. The entire fourth floor of the building that housed Taylor’s Upper Saloon was taken over twice a week in the summer and fall of 1855 for social gatherings of the “Free Love League” or “Progressive Union Club,” at the head of which was Stephen Pearl Andrews, Albert Brisbane, and Thomas and Mary Nichols.

Conklin provided the “inspiration” from on high and his valuable name as a public test medium. Conklin’s spirit manifestations had converted John F. Whitney (one of the founders of the *Boston Herald*, and the then-editor of the *New-York Commercial Pathfinder*) to belief in the reality of spirit communications.¹⁶ Whitney and Conklin then undertook to open rooms at 553 Broadway, “handsomely furnished, in which circles, public and private, are held daily, affording the inquirers every opportunity for a thorough investigation.”¹⁷ Whitney paid for it all, including the publication of *The Messenger of Light*, whose editors were listed as Whitney and Conklin, along with Frances H. Green, which ran for twelve issues in the first part of 1854, before it shut down and its publisher turned over its subscription list to another new journal, *The Christian Spiritualist*, and the premises itself to Horace Day, the industrialist who bankrolled the operations there under the new name of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge.

Conklin was also the guiding intelligence, as it were, for *The Public Circle*, actually written and edited by one of his devotees, Michael A. Curran (a public school teacher at P.S. 5 in New York City), which lasted perhaps for one year during 1855-1856, and finally — together with William M. Laning of Baltimore, a painter, and one of his spiritualist converts — edited and published *The Principle*, a short-lived publication which ran during 1858-1859.¹⁸ From *The Principle’s* New York office and bookstore at 54 Great Jones Street, Conklin also in 1859 published (and most likely wrote) *Digging for Captain Kydd’s Treasure*, a short, lugubrious romance of ghosts, mediums, and pirate treasure, in which he plays a barely disguised part as a spirit medium, guiding others under the control of Kydd’s spirit, from Manhattan across the Hudson River to a treasure buried near Hoboken.¹⁹

¹⁶ Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism; a twenty years’ record of the communion between earth and the world of spirits* (New York: The Author, 1870), 243-244, quotes from an account by Whitney of going to a medium and getting a successful test, which was instrumental in converting him to spiritualism. From the description of the séance and the place and the medium’s *modus operandi*, it is clear that the medium was Conklin.

¹⁷ *Washington Evening Star*, March 23, 1854, reprinting an article from the *New York Pathfinder*.

¹⁸ Laning’s “Pilgrims Arriving at Shore,” which recently sold at auction, was inscribed on the back of the canvas, “To my friend G[eorge] A. Redman,” one of Conklin’s fellow mediums in New York City.

¹⁹ The British Frigate HMS Hussar sank in the tidal currents off Hell Gate in the East River in November 1780. It was said to have been carrying a large quantity of gold and silver. Abner Kneeland consulted fortune-tellers in his search for the spot. Quite a few people have sought Captain Kydd’s supposed buried treasure on the coast of New Jersey, but not in Hoboken — over the years, Mamaroneck has been the more favored spot. More relevant to Conklin’s interests, rumors that Kydd sailed up the Hudson River as far as the Hudson Highlands — the area in which we find Conklin in the 1850 Census — were longstanding. From an early historian of Westchester County, for example, we learn that the accidental find of a cannon in the river at Peekskill was believed to be from Kydd’s ship and promoted as such in order to enlist investors in a project to

The writing he published in these short-lived journals was apt to arouse indignation among the unenlightened who had not already become convinced of what Conklin called the “immortality of the communicating spirits of the deceased.” *The Public Circle*, in particular, was simply a kind of publicity notice for Conklin’s abilities: It read like a chronicle of successful tests by inquirers and, implicitly, testimonials for his power to contact the spirits. A reporter from the *New-York Tribune* described for his readers a meeting of spiritualists at the Stuyvesant Institute, at 659 Broadway in August 1855:

The meeting then broke up; and one of the officiating Deacons [probably Conklin] undertook the sale of a little pamphlet called *The Public Circle*, containing the revelations of the Spirits on various occasions, — their answers to questions, — solutions of enigmas, &c. Whatever the subject, there was one sentiment pervading them all, — *hostility to recognized Christianity*, and advice not to heed it or the opposition of those who hold it. As an example, we quote the following from counsel given by the Spirit of North, the young man who committed suicide in this city a few months since, — to some friend:

“You are favored above many mortals. You are the recipient of the influx of Divine Truth from a higher sphere than that of the earth. You will continue to be a recipient of that Truth. Spirits are operating on you, and will soon open to you a source of higher and more glorious thought. Be bold, and fearlessly pursue every thought pertaining to man’s immortality to its ultimate; whether it come to you with an electric leap, or gently as the distilling dew. Fear not to speak the truth, and speak it boldly. *No matter if for it you are considered an unprincipled outcast, and the religious world points at you with the finger of scorn. No matter if you are denounced by orthodox ministers from daintily cushioned pulpits.* Push steadily and unflinchingly onward. As by labor and perseverance the mariner pursues his way across the trackless waste, through storm and tempest, and at last reaches the place of destination on some island known only to science; so you, by patient toil and an unwavering determination, must approach the haven of your desires.

“Your love is above that sympathetic love which is recognized by the world. It is elevated to that plane where it becomes a part of the Great Truth.

“I am drawn to you by a peculiar sympathy. Since I left the body, I have wandered over the world, catching the thoughts of earth’s children as

erect a cofferdam and dredge for the ship. The cannon, however, was undoubtedly one that had been shipped by Anthony Wayne in 1779 as part of his operations at the battle of Stony Point — Robert Bolton, *The History of the Several Towns, Manors, and Patents of the County of Westchester, from Its First Settlement to the Present Time*, revised edition, volume 2 (New York: C. F. Roper, 1881), 161. Even more to the point, as far as Conklin is concerned, is an article (“Capt. Kidd’s Treasures. Working with the Spirits”) *New-York Times*, November 22, 1870 (about eight months after Conklin’s demise). The story was widely copied in the national press, and even in *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, for it involved spiritualist clairvoyants guiding the treasure seekers to the site they excavated, and to their finding of what was said to be Captain Kydd’s treasure, and the events were said to have occurred at the Hudson River Highlands, near West Point.

they waft their way to the spheres. Seldom have I found a mind as willing as yours to receive and express my thoughts. You have yielded obedience to my wishes, and the evidence is now on record.

“You will be impressed from superior sources; while inferior Spirits will control your physical organization, and cause your hand to vibrate in obedience to your thoughts. By this will you know they are of Spiritual origin.

“The one who addresses you, while he inhabited earth, was a despised ‘INFIDEL.’ *He was scorned by the religious as an unprincipled outcast. But the sneers of the world had no terrors for him.* He was known by the name of

NORTH.”²⁰

The secular press did not treat Conklin as well as he treated himself in *The Life of a Medium*, which reads very much like a work of personal apologetics, a sort of auto-hagiography. If we go by that work, he seems to have uncovered no faults within himself, except perhaps the fault of being too trusting of and charitable to others who, it turned out, would do him ill. In *The Life of a Medium*, his standard response to others’ criticism of him seemed to be *honi soit qui mal y pense*. But the very fact that he devoted a chapter of the work (chapter 12 — “What is the Good of It?”) to justifying what looks like his paying off a brothel owner or orphanage directress, in order to have her turn over to him one of the young women who had been under her control, and then setting her up in an apartment (perhaps his sitting rooms), suggests that the criticism he had received for that was widespread and deep, and that he had to write in order to explain his actions in the best possible light.

I have yet to find anything definitive about the incident having been published in the press. Nevertheless, there is a hint about it that can be

²⁰ “The Spirit-Rapping Propaganda,” *Christian Spiritualist* (New York), September 8, 1855, reprinting an article on spiritualism in the city in the *New-York Tribune*. “North” was William North, author of *The Infinite Republic: a spiritual revolution* (London: H. G. Clarke, 1851), an Idealist and Monist tract on progress, social theory, and radicalism. A substantial quote from North’s *Infinite Republic* is in T. L. Nichols, *Religions of the World: An impartial history of religious creeds, forms of worship, sects, controversies, and manifestations, from the earliest period to the present time* (Cincinnati: V. Nicholson, 1855), 20. Robert G. Ingersoll, in Van Buren Denslow, *Modern Thinkers Principally upon Social Science*, (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, 1882), xxix, also seems to have read North’s work: “The Universe ought to be a pure democracy — an infinite republic without a tyrant and without a chain.” North was an English gadabout who was an intimate of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his family, “an eccentric literary man, not without a spice of genius,” as William Rossetti put it, who had emigrated to New York, contributed articles to journals like *Putnam’s Monthly* and *Knickerbocker*, and committed suicide in New York the year before “he” appeared in Conklin’s séance, by swallowing prussic acid, leaving a note saying his life had been a failure, and leaving as well a novel in the works (*The Slave of the Lamp*, which was subsequently published) — “Suicide of an Author and Poet,” *New-York Tribune*, November 15, 1854; “William North, the student, linguist, writer and poet, whose death by suicide took place subsequently in November [1854] was present on nearly every occasion” of the meeting of Stephen Pearl Andrews’ Free-Love League, as were Thomas and Mary Nichols — “‘The Club’ Described by one of its members,” *New-York Tribune*, October 16, 1855.

mentioned here. John F. Whitney, who not only had been converted to spiritualism by Conklin, but also had used his editorial seat at the *Pathfinder* to promote spiritualism, and then had entered into a partnership with Conklin to publish a spiritualist periodical and to open up an office for Conklin's séances, severed that relationship after perhaps little more than a year. Then, as he put it, despite having spent "months in constant communication with the spirits, at the head of the most extensive establishment in existence, for the investigation of the phenomena, publishing one of the leading journals, devoted entirely to the cause, and employing about the premises no less than eight mediums, for public sittings, for investigation and instructions," and paying for it all himself, he abandoned it and denounced spiritualism in the *Pathfinder*, in an article that would come to be quoted over and over again by the opponents of spiritualism:

Now after a long and constant watchfulness, seeing for months and years its progress and its practical workings upon its devotees, its believers and its mediums, we are compelled to speak our honest conviction, which is that the manifestations coming through the acknowledged mediums, who are designated as rapping, tipping, writing and entrance mediums, have a baneful influence upon believers, and create discord and confusion; that the generality of these teachings inculcate false ideas, approve of selfish individual acts, and endorse theories and principles which, when carried out, *debase* and make man *little better than the brute*. ... Seeing, as we have, the gradual progress it makes with its believers, particularly its mediums, from lives of *morality* to those of *sensuality* and *immorality*, gradually, and cautiously undermining the foundations of good principles, we look back with amazement at the radical changes that a few months will bring about in individuals; for its tendency is to approve and endorse each individual act and character, however good or bad these acts may be.

One of the first of spiritualism's opponents to quote Whitney, Reverend J. W. Daniels, preceded the quote by this paragraph in his 1856 anti-spiritualism book:

A married man, in this city, is now living in adultery with an orphan girl, by the authority of the spirits — one pretending to be the spirit of her father, tells her she is doing right!²¹

Its juxtaposition with the Whitney statement warrants us, I believe (along with an attentive reading of Conklin's "What is the Good of It?" in *The Life of a Medium*), to suspect that Daniels is referring here to Conklin. As a

²¹ J. W. Daniels, *Spiritualism versus Christianity; or, Spiritualism thoroughly exposed* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856), 295-298.

consequence, it makes us realize that we have no evidence that Conklin was in fact really living with his wife and children — the 1860 Census, it will be remembered, suggests that he was keeping two households, one in the Bronx and one in Manhattan.

Conklin traveled often to other cities, renting rooms by the day or the month, publicizing his presence through local spiritualist groups, and advertising his availability for sittings in the local newspapers and by distributing handbills. He did this in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and Baltimore, for longer periods, but also made several tours to other cities, including one in the spring of 1856 with trance-speaker and fellow test-medium Levi Judd Pardee, to Boston, Buffalo (where he sat at a séance of the Davenport brothers), Rochester, Syracuse, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Nashville, where he stayed for a few days at a time — the trip perhaps including, as he explains in *The Life of a Medium*, his visit to the famous “spirit-room” of Jonathan Koons in rural Athens County, Ohio.²²

In his early sittings in New York, he developed himself into an exhibitor of an array of mediumistic “manifestations” that were prevalent among test-mediums of the time. His services were popular. A visit to his rooms became, for tourists to Gotham, a sort of second-tier attraction, something one might take in after a trip to see the curiosities at Barnum’s American Museum, not far away on Broadway.

Some of Conklin’s visitors accused him of trickery and fraud. The Reverend Samuel C. Chandler, author of *The Theology of the Bible*, for example, after a visit to the city from his home in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, wrote to the *New-York Tribune*:

SIR: Visiting your City, among other places of interest and curiosity I called yesterday afternoon at a place to which I had been directed by gentlemen of *The Spiritual Telegraph* Office. They assured me that Mr. — held free day-circles and by calling there I could witness some of the wonderful manifestations of the departed spirits. I was introduced into a small room in the third story, in the center of which stood a table. I was told by Mr. — , previous to the commencement of operations, that I could ask questions

²² Theo Levi Judd Pardee (1831-1865) — like Conklin, a peripatetic test medium, who was based for fairly extended periods in Buffalo, New York City, and Philadelphia, as well as Washington. Starting in 1870, spiritualist David Densmore believed that the spirit of the deceased Pardee assisted him in editing the *Voice of Angels* newspaper that Densmore published: David C. Densmore, *The Halo: An Autobiography of D. C. Densmore* (Boston: Voice of Angels Publishing House, 1876), 347-359. For a jaundiced view of Pardee’s spirit oratory, see Napoleon Bonaparte Wolfe, *Startling Facts in Modern Spiritualism* (Cincinnati, 1874), 70-75. Spiritualist Sara Hoyt penned a favorable description of Pardee, “Spiritual Workers in and around New York. L. Judd Pardee,” *Herald of Progress*, February 2, 1861. For one of several detailed descriptions of the Koons’ “spirit room,” see Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 319-333.

audibly, mentally, or by writing. Mr. — took his seat on one side of the table, the opposite legs being held in their place by circular pieces of wood fastened to the floor. His hands were placed on the table in such a position as to form a good shoulder on the edge next to him, so that through him it was very easy for the spirits, or his spirit, to tip the table, the opposite legs being kept from slipping by the pieces of wood mentioned. I took my seat at the table at the call of No. 3, as that was my turn and number. He directed me to write on the table, directly opposite to him. I had noticed that he watched very carefully the motion of the pencil, and could see also the writing. I was to write down the name of some departed friend, and the spirit would present itself and answer my questions. I thought I saw through this jugglery, and refused to write; but proposed to ask questions mentally. This Mr. — refused, and said I should write. I still insisted on asking questions my own way. He flew in a passion and ordered me from the chair and the room. I told him I thought I would sit my time out (10 minutes), as I wished to get a communication. He still refused, and ordered me to leave. To that I told him I was convinced that the whole thing was a d — d humbug. At that he sprang and jerked me from the chair. I did not, however, leave the room. I took a seat close to him, and to try the strength of the spirits, I put the toe of my boot against the leg of the table. Upon this Mr. — yelled out, "What do you wish to obstruct the communications of the spirits for? you scamp," and "rascal," &c.; and with the rage of a tiger he pounced upon me, striking, kicking, and pushing me to the door of the room.

This, Sir, is my first lesson of experience in trying to find out the truth of spiritual communications. No one can dispute that I have "seen the elephant" in this my first degree, and I shall always consider myself lucky above many who spend much time and money to know the reality of this mysterious monster.

S. C. CHANDLER."²³

²³ "Spiritual Manifestations," *New-York Tribune*, July 14, 1855. Chandler's phrase "seeing the elephant," which gained currency as early as 1840, ultimately referred to a story about a farmer who had never seen an elephant, but who wished to see one, so, hearing that a circus was coming to town, loaded his wagon with eggs and vegetables and started for the market, thinking he might see the circus parade. He did, but when his horses saw them, they were spooked and overturned the wagon, scattering his eggs and vegetables. But, "I don't give a hang," the farmer said in an effort to console himself, "I have seen the elephant." The phrase came to be popular among veterans of the Mexican-American War and then among settlers in the West — especially during the California Gold Rush — to signify having experienced some humiliation or disappointment during their adventures, e.g., not finding any gold. (Bartlett's 1848 *Dictionary of Americanisms* says it was also used by or of girls to refer to their losing their virginity.) The *New York Spirit of the Times* (September 3, 1842) quoted the *New-Orleans Picayune's* story about a country rube named Jim Griswell, who, at the end of a visit to the city, "was hauled up for 'cutting up shines' and getting 'maxy.'" When he appeared before the recorder-magistrate, he made these remarks: "'Squire,' said Jim — and his eye showed a desire to assume the melting mood — 'Squire, it's a delicate pint for a young man like me to touch on, but Jim Griswell will tell the truth if he loses his hat. You see, I came down from old Kaintuck with a right decent sort of a broad horn and considerable plunder. I sold them off at a smart chance of a profit, and as I never was in Orleans before, I thought I wouldn't go hum without letting folks know I seed somethin'. So I went on a regular wake snakes sort of a spree, and I went here and there, turning', twistin', and doublin' about until I didn't know where or who I was. But spare my feelings, Squire, and don't ask me to

His letter goaded Conklin to write one in reply. However, Conklin was unhappy with how the *Tribune* edited his letter, and so sent another copy of it to *The New-York Weekly Dispatch*, which was reprinted in *The Christian Spiritualist* of New York:

MR. EDITOR: "Knowing the liberality of the *Dispatch*, and its desire to tell the truth and do justice to all parties, I venture to send you the following explanation of a transaction in which I was involved — the same having been misrepresented by a correspondent of the N. Y. *Tribune*, setting the matter in its true light, but the said paper has so garbled and cut it down, that it only serves to *confirm* rather than *correct* my assailants' misrepresentations. The portions of the following contained in brackets were *omitted* by the *Tribune* — for what purpose, those acquainted with the sheet can judge as well as I:

To the Editor of the N. Y. Tribune,

SIR: "A friend has called my attention to a communication signed S. C. Chandler, and published in last Saturday's *Tribune*. As the communication is [false and] malicious in spirit, I beg leave to give the true version of the story through your columns. A gentleman, as I supposed, called at my rooms on Wednesday, and received ticket No. 3. When his turn came, he was told he could ask questions "audibly, mentally, and by writing." — He preferred asking them mentally. After a few moments, he looked up, and said, "I have asked a question." I replied, "Then the Spirits can't answer it — if they could, they would." He hastily replied, "I am satisfied the whole thing is a d — d humbug." This burst of ill-feeling on his part of course somewhat excited me, as I am but human; and I told him he would oblige me by giving up his seat to some one else, there being some twenty-five or thirty ladies and gentlemen present. He replied that he would not do it — he would sit his ten minutes out anyhow! I then rose, laid my hand on his shoulder, and told him he *must* get up, which he did, without further resistance. Another person took a seat at the table, and was proceeding with his investigation, when Mr. Chandler, as he calls himself, came back, and interrupted operations by placing his feet on the ball at the bottom of the table leg. I then took him by the shoulder, and led him to the door, he resisting but slightly; and, as I closed the door, I told him I hoped that the next time he came among ladies and gentlemen, he would try to behave himself *as a gentleman*. This is the entire amount of *screaming, kicking, striking, and pushing* that occurred. [Had physical force been necessary, the probability is, I should have suffered — if no one

tell any more. Here I am in town, without a rock in my pocket, without a skirt to my coat, or a crown to my hat, without — but, Squire, I'll say no more, *I've seen the elephant*, and if you let me off now, I'll make a straight shute for old Kaintuck, and I'll give you leave to bake me into hoe cakes if ever you catch me here again." Thus Chandler's jesting use of the phrase to describe his visit to Conklin's séance room. A sort of tongue-in-cheek tourists' guide to New York's more *outré* attractions around this time, including psychics and fortune-tellers (but none of the top spiritualist mediums working in the city), is Mortimer Thomson ("Q. K. Philander Doesticks"), *The Witches of New York* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1859).

interfered — as I weigh but 125 pounds, while Mr. Chandler must weigh 180.]

[Now a word or two, by way of explanation. — My rooms are *freely* thrown open to the public, by order of the Spirits, and I devote my time and attention to the subject, “without money and without price,” feeling it to be my duty. Mr. Chandler paid nothing for the privilege of insulting me and those present; and hence, may have felt indignant at this *unorthodox* proceeding, as I learn he *is*, or has been a clergyman. Besides, ill-feeling — harsh, dogmatic feeling — always engenders discord, and interrupts communication; hence my request that Mr. Chandler vacate his seat to some one else — a seat, held by favor and courtesy, and not by right. The “circular pieces of wood” he speaks of are for the purpose of preventing the table from sliding, but the legs of the table are removed from these “pieces of wood,” if requested by the investigator. As to my tipping the table with my hands, all sincere gentlemen and ladies are earnestly requested to call and examine for themselves — *no matter how skeptical they may be*. It will cost them nothing but their time; and the advice of the Spirits to them is — “*prove all things and hold fast that which is good.*”]

J. B. CONKLIN

[P. S. — It may not be amiss to note that since the opening of my rooms, in April last, they have been visited, on an average, by fifty or sixty persons daily; and that Mr. Chandler is the first and last individual with whom I have had any difficulty.

J. B. C.]

This, Mr. Editor, is verbatim what I sent to the Tribune, with the exception of the postscript, which I give from memory — but its substance and meaning are not in the least varied. I will not further crowd upon your space and impose upon your generosity, but close with the suggestion which has come to me, that, as the *Tribune* so perverted *my* communication to the purpose of falsehood, it may have done the same by Mr. Chandler’s.

Yours, respectfully, J. B. CONKLIN.²⁴

Conklin’s suspicion about the *Tribune*’s motives for editing out what amounted to his self-advertisement seems prickly and overly sensitive. But in any event, we should note that the procedure here in the sitting room, in which active participation in the inner circle at the table is denied to those who give evidence of not being sympathetic to the medium, effectively provides a way for the medium to select those with whom he could most successfully show some results.

At least in the first couple of years of his operations in New York, Conklin also became known for being able to open combination locks — or, more precisely, for being able to summon spirits who would dictate through his automatic writing the correct combinations for opening locks. He describes

²⁴ “Mr. Conklin and the Tribune,” *Christian Spiritualist*, July 28, 1855; Conklin’s letter was printed in the *Tribune* (“Spirits in the Flesh”) on July 19.

some of this in *The Life of a Medium*, but spiritualist David Bruce, reminiscing years afterwards, described more of it:

I chanced one day in the year 1852 to be in a friend's store in this city, and was shown a small brass permutation combination lock, known as the "Brahmah" lock. I shall not attempt a further description of it than say that when the four rings are properly set this lock had 397,856 changes upon it, or in other words, that when it was set to a word or set of numerals there was 397,856 chances that by guessing or by turning the four lettered rings against its being opened but by going over all its different changes.

After the lock was explained to me I was instantly impressed with its novelty, and conceived it would be a powerful test of spirit intelligence and ability could they give any combination of letters it might be set to, and I immediately determined to get a trial of it. Accordingly I got my friend the storekeeper to secretly close the clock to some combination and hand it to me, and keep a copy, which he did. I was acquainted with several mediums of distinction, some of them public. On my way up town I called upon my friend Prof. S. B. Brittan, then editor of the *Spiritual Telegraph*, showed him the lock, and told him my intended trial with the spirits and expressed my doubts. He smiled and said they could and probably would do it. I must say I had strong misgivings. With the lock I called at Mr. John B. Conklin's. Around his table I found a company of five gentlemen, who, with the exception of Mr. Conklin, were all strangers to me. During a pause in their inquiries I laid the small cylindrical lock on the medium's table and said, "There, Mr. Conklin, is a test for your spirits; let them open that lock." He smilingly took up the lock and said, "Well, where is the key?" I had to explain to him that I required no key; that it was set to some short word of combination of letters of which I was unacquainted; and if the spirits could not in some way give the word it could be opened only by the person who set it, and even not by him if he had forgotten the combination. After these few remarks the lock was laid upon the table, and through the involuntary action of the medium's hand the following was written out:

"You, my dear friend D — , must not let those that seek tests of this character, for the mere gratification of an idle curiosity, permit you to make such trials. You will be sustained when it can be put to a practical benefit. The letters forming the combination are U. F. O. D. — *Captain Carr.*"

I should mention, the Captain was an old acquaintance of mine. We were all astonished when putting these letters in position the lock immediately came apart. Each gentleman in turn retired to some corner of the room and set the lock to his own combination, which was readily tipped out at the table.

Before separating, the assembled gentlemen thought the test so remarkable that they voluntarily gave the following testimonial certificate:

"This will certify that we the undersigned were present at the rooms of J. B. Conklin (31 Howard street) and witnessed the opening of the lock by the medium, who wrote the letters U. F. O. D. through the influence of spiritual power. [Signed] A. A. Miller, 415 6th avenue; W. A. Hunt, Albany, N.Y.; J. Andrews, 68 Fulton street; Thomas J. Harris, Sen., 179 Broadway; John F. Whitney, 68 Fulton street; John B. Conklin, 31 Howard street."

The successful opening of this lock was widely published in the

papers of that day, and induced several trials (which were successful) from several quarters, and through other mediums, and Mr. Conklin was overrun with *closed* locks from various portions of the United States and Canada — many inclosed in sealed envelopes, until this species of test became an annoyance and Mr. Conklin declined to receive any more locks.

I chanced one day to be in the rooms of Mr. Conklin, when a gentleman — a stranger to us both — entered. He showed us a closed lock of superior make and finish, containing six rings. He remarked: “Here is a lock, Mr. Conklin, which has been closed five years by my brother, who for that length of time has been dead. Now, if the spirits or some invisible power cannot give the combination, it must forever remain closed and useless, for, by computation, there are thirty-three millions three hundred thousand six hundred and fifty-six chances of our guessing the combination.” To the surprise of myself and the owner of the lock, Mr. Conklin’s hand almost instantly wrote the letters M. O. H. A. W. K., to which letters the rings readily came apart.²⁵

Another similar episode was described years later:

A letter lock of eight letters, which had been purposely deranged, was opened by Mr. Conklin. The person who, after deranging the lock, wrote what he conceived to be the opening word, enclosed it in a sealed envelope, but which proved to be wrong in one letter. The lock was given to Mr. Conklin, the envelope delivered to persons who were appointed as judges. The solution given by Mr. Conklin was the correct word, and the lock was opened; the word written in the envelope failed to effect its purpose. The whole transaction was so arranged that it was impossible that there could be any tampering either with the envelope or lock.²⁶

When he was not seeing inside the metal casings of locks, Conklin was seeing behind the veil separating this life and the afterlife. Ex-New York Senator and Wisconsin Governor Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, who was a well-known spiritualist, described a visit he made with a friend to Conklin’s office:

I called with a gentleman at Mr. Conklin’s rooms, in New York, and received a communication purporting to come from Stephen Allen, former Mayor of New York, and associated with me formerly in the Senate of New York. The gentleman with me asked many questions, and amongst others inquired the manner of his death. He answered “No” to every mode suggested. “Well,” said the gentleman, “I know of no mode of dying other than what I have inquired about.” It was then rapped out, “I left the earth between two elements.” This

²⁵ David Bruce, “Spiritualism from a Common-Sense Standpoint,” *Truthseeker*, February 7, 1880. Emma Hardinge wrote about this and yet another occasion of Conklin’s lock-opening in “Modern Spiritualism in America,” *Western Star* (October 1872): 268.

²⁶ Review of “Relations between Spiritualism and Science: Mr. A. R. Wallace and R. M. N.,” *Journal of Science*, August-September, 1885,” *Light* 5.245 (September 12, 1885): 435-437.

the gentleman could not comprehend, till I told him that Mr. Allen was on board the steamboat *Henry Clay*, and was driven by the fire into the water and drowned.²⁷

But there was a weird repetition or repurposing of the elements of this incident elsewhere:

On another occasion, while sitting with Mr. Conklin, A. J. D. was spelled; he could recollect no friend with these initials, and therefore commenced testing, with a view of ascertaining who it was, and asked, "What was the cause of your death?" Conklin immediately wrote, "*retaw erif*." After awhile, Phoenix perceived that these words, spelled backward, gave fire-water, and remembered that his friend, A. J. Downing, Esq., the celebrated writer on horticulture, was on board the *Henry Clay*—a steamboat burned on the Hudson—and that Mr. Downing was drowned, after having swam twice to the shore, sustaining females, while endeavoring to save a third.²⁸

Conklin, as he says in *The Life of a Medium*, was often called a "test medium" — which is to say, a medium who could be expected to provide some kind of evidence to an inquirer, such as a personal message containing information that the medium could not have known, that would convince the investigator of the truth of spirit communication. This "test," he said, was the main point of his work. Whatever he did (and, we might say, however he did it), was directed, he claimed, to changing people's beliefs, to convincing them of the truth of immortality. The specific content of whatever messages might be conveyed or the specific details of what went on the séance were, in this light, of much less importance.²⁹ Nevertheless, in order to be truly convincing, the content of the results — contrary to what skeptics might think — would have had to have been more than just pleasing flattery:

It appears that a gentleman and lady of one of the first families in the city where he [Conklin] was stopping, came to his rooms for the purpose of testing Spiritualism, or of getting communications from their spirit-friends, when *two children, with spirit pet names, announced themselves as their children*, and wished to be recognized by them as such. The parties did not recognize them as their own children, but upon explanation they were presumed to be children ushered into the spirit-world some time during the fourth or fifth month of foetal development, and the particulars of those circumstances were so positively and precisely communicated to those

²⁷ "Editorial Correspondence," *Spiritual Telegraph*, December 6, 1856. The *Henry Clay* burned and sank on the Hudson River, July 28, 1852.

²⁸ "An Old Spiritualist — No. 7," *Banner of Light*, April 23, 1859.

²⁹ Conklin and Pascal Beverly Randolph paired up to deliver a series of messages to Stevens Sanborn Jones from his deceased brother Caleb. This message was instrumental in converting Jones to spiritualism. He would subsequently become the editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*; "Suicide," *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, August 14, 1875.

parties, by these children, through Mr. Conklin, although he was a stranger to them all, that they were forced to acknowledge the children as their own, even to *their own shame and confusion!*³⁰

The main point of sittings, conceived as “tests,” was — to use the religious language of millennial tidings — to bring about the participants’ conviction in the reality of the afterlife, to spread the gospel of spiritualism, to proclaim a New Era, to announce the overcoming of dead materialism, to free the soul from enslavement to the domination of old creeds, and to awaken it to the resurrection of the living spirit. “These are the days of the unveiling, the seals are all broken, the veil of mystery is rent in twain, the foundations of the religion of Nature are being laid,” as one true believer told a sympathetic Emma Hardinge.³¹ For some such believers, confident of the truth, much coarse and under the table chicanery might be forgiven of a missionary of that truth, as being a mere expedient to remove the blinders of skeptics and unbelievers.³² Test mediums were taking the weapons of materialistic science and turning them against materialists, exploding their belief from within, confounding their empirical methods, and at the same time adopting the millennial fervor associated with the notions of Progress and Democracy that the explicitly anti-religious Enlightenment had earlier taken from religion itself. Thus, spiritualism could be “tested” by anyone and the results of that test could place the tester into existential and religious doubt. Spirit “tests” were a way to bring materialists to the worry bench.

From a less uplifted and more earthly perspective, however, inviting the public at large for free to demonstrations of “tests” that had metaphysical implications would produce, at the end of the tests, a smaller group that had crossed over into being convinced believers and were ready to pursue those beliefs by paying for private consultations, séances, subscriptions to journals, and support for the missionaries and prophets of the new dispensation. To be cynical for a moment — it was a very effective method for gathering in and shearing the sheepfold. In fact, the model for such free public “scientific” tests followed by the offering of paid services for those convinced was not new to spiritualist test mediums. Orson Fowler, the American apostle of Phrenology,

³⁰ “Infanticide and Its Penalty. From a (Scientific) Standpoint. By an Old M.D. and Spiritualist,” *Banner of Light*, December 7, 1867.

³¹ Emma Hardinge Britten, “Extracts from ‘Ghostland,’ Vol. II,” 1.4 *Unseen Universe* (July 1892): 175.

³² For a séance record of one of Conklin’s spirits’ forays into answering theological questions, see William R. Gordon, *A Three-fold Test of Modern Spiritualism* (New York: Scribner, 1856), 104, 111, 113. Conklin’s spirits also briefly ventured into describing life on other planets: Francis Gerry Fairfield, *Ten Years with Spiritual Mediums: an inquiry concerning the etiology of certain phenomena called spiritual* (New York: Appleton, 1875), 128.

for example, used this method to proselytize in New York City years before the Fox sisters began rapping.

Another variety of “physical mediumship” eventually appeared in Conklin’s séances (after he had seen the effect done at the Koons’ spirit rooms), and offered as part of his “test mediumship.” With the lights in the room turned very low, the sitters would see and hear musical instruments floating around the room, while feeling gentle touches on their bodies. This was proof of spirits’ actions upon material objects, as one sympathetic attendee implied when writing about it to Robert Hallock, editor of *The Spiritual Age*:

A man must come to honor every Law; even as God has honored it in ordaining it. One man refuses Spiritualism on the ground that all mediums are deceivers. In this he applies a rule to others that he will not apply to himself.

At Conklin’s dark circle the other night, there was a certain skeptic. All had hold of hands, while the tin horns and guitar were moving about, and all were being touched on various parts of their persons both above and below the tables. —

Nevertheless, at the close, the skeptic seemed disposed to think Mr. Conklin had done it all himself.

“Would you have done it?” enquired the speaker of him. “Oh, no.” “Then why accuse Mr. C. of doing that which you would not do yourself, especially as there is no evidence to sustain the supposition, and all the evidence we have is against it?”³³

Conklin also offered to the public the “test” of his being able to give answers from the spirits to questions that had been written on paper before visitors came to his rooms, and then sealed by them in an envelope or, if that was not challenge enough, placed inside a soldered lead packet, or buried in a bar of soap, or placed inside a series of cardboard envelopes sealed with cords and wax, or placed in a glass vial enclosed in wood.³⁴

He often gave the answers to such questions through automatic writing by pencil on paper of messages from the spirits of famous people or recently deceased relatives and friends of the sitters. And the spirits’ answer would most often be written backwards: “With Mr. Conklin,” wrote an observer, “the

³³ *Spiritual Age* 1.1 new series (3 September, 1859): 5. A very detailed description of one of Conklin’s dark séances in 1858 or 1859 and the various physical manifestations that appeared in it was reported in “Manifestations in a Dark Circle,” *Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher*, February 18, 1860. This account suggests that Conklin met with distinct groups that patronized him on a regular, scheduled basis.

³⁴ Allen Putnam, “A Mourner’s Resource,” *Spiritual Age* 1.38 (September 18, 1858), reproduces a letter from Amasa Holcomb, Southwick, Illinois, about a visit to Conklin’s in New York, dropping off a sealed letter to his deceased daughter Amanda and receiving an answering one in return.

writing is always from right to left ... with him, the sentence is commenced at the right, that is, the beginning of the sentence is at the upper right-hand corner of the paper, and the paper must be reversed, and held towards the light so that the writing will show through, in order to read it readily, or from the left to right, as usual.”³⁵

He was also quite adept at the “ballot test” (also known as the “billet test,” or even as the “pellet test” when the inquirers were directed, after they had written information on slips of paper, to crush the slips into small pellets and throw them on the table randomly). He was so skillful at it that fellow spiritualist Albert Whiting called him “the Great Ballot Test Medium.” Whiting described Conklin’s usual method:

His manner of giving tests is as follows: The investigator writes upon slips of paper the names of several of his spirit friends, folds them up separate, without showing them to Mr. C., then lifts them up one at a time, asking, ‘Is this one here?’ When the right one is taken, the table tips, or Mr. C.’s hand writes the answer. Other questions are answered in the same way.³⁶

Conklin used more than one variation on this.³⁷ And he was not the only medium, even in New York City, to incorporate this “test” into his séances. Ada Coan (who would become better known as Ada Hoyt Foye) also regularly conducted séances through ballot tests, and it was often used by Charles H. Foster and Charles J. Colchester.³⁸ Whatever variation is used, however, the basic idea is that the sitter writes information on small slips of paper that the medium (or professional mentalist) supposedly cannot see because it is folded, rolled up, or crushed into a little ball. Indeed, the medium seems never to even touch the billets, much less examine what has been written on them. Washington Irving Bishop, who was a former stage manager of Anna Eva Fay and was also the son of medium Eleanor Bishop detailed different methods for a performing mentalist to accomplish this.³⁹

The method sometimes involved the medium’s palming the folded or crumpled billets, replacing them with blank ones, and opening up the real

³⁵ M. J. Williamson, *The Invisibles: an explanation of phenomena commonly called spiritual* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1867), 307-308.

³⁶ R. Augusta Whiting, *Golden Memories of an Earnest Life* (Boston: William White, 1872), 55.

³⁷ One of these variations was described in detail by Conklin’s skeptical séance participant in Glasgow in his pamphlet, *Spirit-Rapping in Glasgow in 1864*.

³⁸ For a magician’s unmasking of how Ada Foye did the ballot test, see Thomas Upright, “Among the Mediums,” *San Francisco News Letter* (21 September 1878): 18.

³⁹ Washington Irving Bishop, *Second Sight Explained: a complete exposition of clairvoyance or second sight* (New York, 1880), 22-23; see also David P. Abbott, *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1908), 5-14.

ones on his lap under the table, so that he could read them. Another method involved switching them in sequence, so that the mentalist or medium could then set one aside, as if it were one he had already answered (but had not in fact done so), read the question written on it, and answer it while touching or holding one to his forehead that he had not yet inspected. Combined with hints gained from pre-séance conversations and observations by the medium and his assistant, and information gained from looking at questions previously submitted by repeat sitters at earlier séances, and astute guessing, and with simply refusing intractable, belligerent, or hard to read investigators, the medium could make some seemingly miraculous hits. And these would typically be the ones blazoned in the press and bruited about as evidence of his power. The answers that were either wrong or vague — and thus entirely open to doubt and interpretation, according to the desire of the sitters — would be ignored. When irrefutably wrong answers were given, the excuse might be that the *spirits* were wrong, or that the disposition of the sitter (malice, unbelief, or skepticism) introduced conditions that were unfavorable to the operations of the spirits or that introduced a kind of psychic static over the spiritual telegraph line. A fraudulent medium depended for his reputation on being able to avoid being cornered into a discovery of his fraud and on the fact that his successful hits — at least as perceived by his sitter — would be brought forward to the public as evidence of his true power.

A danger for the medium in using one of these methods in conducting ballot tests — the method in which the medium contrives to be reading one ballot ahead of the one that his audience is led to suppose he has touched to his forehead — is that if he is not careful his answers will be “correct” ones, but to the wrong questions. With that in mind, consider the following, from an 1857 issue of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*:

A Spiritual entertainment was given at the Athenaeum last night, at which about one hundred persons attended. Professor Brittan delivered a lecture ... A writing medium, Mr. Conklin, was then introduced, and a committee from the audience appointed to test his capacity. After the medium appeared to have placed himself in a communication with some departed relative of each of the committee, questions were asked of the spirits and the medium wrote out the answer. One question and answer will suffice. A gentleman asked (by writing on a slip of paper) if his grandfather, whose spirit had been called up, had fought at a certain engagement in the Revolutionary war. The answer was something like this — “I do; it was your daughter who was with me in Boston.” It is surprising that a gentleman, with the intellectual cultivation

and ability of Mr. Brittan should attempt to bolster up such a stupid humbug. He ought to turn his talents to better account.⁴⁰

Other things could go wrong with the ballot test, as P. T. Barnum explained in a little story about Conklin and one of his clients:

An old gentleman, apparently from the country, one day entered the room of this medium and expressed a desire for a “sperit communication.”

He was told to take a seat at the table, and to write the names of his deceased relatives. The medium, like many others, incorrectly pronounced the term “deceased,” the same as “diseased” — sounding the s like z.

The old gentleman carefully adjusted his “specs” and did what was required of him. A name and relationship having been selected from those written, the investigator was desired to examine and state if they referred to one party.

“Wal, I declare they do!” said he. “But I say Mister, what has them papers to do with a sperit communication?”

“You will see, directly,” replied the medium.

Whereupon the latter spasmodically wrote a “communication,” which read somewhat as follow:

“MY DEAR HUSBAND: — I am very glad to be able to address you through this channel. Keep on investigating, and you will soon be convinced of the great fact of spirit-intercourse. I am happy in my spirit-home; patiently awaiting the time when you will join me here, etc. Your loving wife,
BETSEY.”

“Good gracious! But my old woman can’t be dead,” said the investigator, “for I left her tu hum!”

“Not dead!” exclaimed the medium. “Did I not tell you to write the names of deceased relatives?”

“Diseased!” returned the old man; “Wal, she ain’t anything else, for she’s had the rumatiz orfully for six months!”

Saying which, he took his hat and left, concluding that it was not worth while to “Keep on investigating” any longer at that time.⁴¹

Conklin was also classed by his contemporaries as a powerful “physical medium,” which meant that he could produce uncanny physical phenomena associated with his claims that spirits were present. Disembodied rappings were common at his séances, as well as table-tipping, in the daylight or with the lights turned down. Like D. D. Home, he claimed that at least once he had

⁴⁰ “The Spirits,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 9, 1857.

⁴¹ P. T. Barnum, *The Humbugs of the World: An account of humbugs, delusions, impositions, quackeries, deceits and deceivers generally, in all ages* (New York: Carleton, 1866), 90-91. Barnum goes into considerable detail about Conklin’s method for reading ballots.

been levitated and carried for a distance by spirits before they set him down again.⁴²

He also conducted dark séances in which the sitters either found themselves the recipients of material objects “apported” onto the séance table, or were touched by seemingly disembodied beings. The séance that he gave to Baltimore artist William M. Laning (soon to be his publishing partner in *The Principle*) and his wife at their home in August 1856, around the time that Laning became Conklin’s publishing partner, consisted of four people (the Lanings, Conklin, and a young Baltimore woman) sitting around a table, holding hands, with the lights turned down. Rappings began, which spelled out a message from the Lanings’ deceased son Willie, then the table lifted and descended. After a few moments, what felt to the sitters like large hands began banging, stroking, and caressing their legs and thighs under the table. One of the ladies then felt a strong tug on her dress and was pulled almost under the table, so that only her head remained above it. After another few moments, the raps began again, spelling out good-bye.⁴³

In September 1856, a committee made up of scientifically minded philosophers and spiritualists did put Conklin’s mediumistic powers to the test, but under less than ideal conditions for a carefully controlled assessment of the phenomena, and, not surprisingly, the results were mixed and inconclusive.⁴⁴

Conklin attributed some of his powers, that of clairvoyance in particular, to the spirits having opened up a spiritual telegraph between our world and theirs. It was a telegraph that a delicate human instrument like him could tap. His metaphor was one that spiritualists’ often used to describe their new revelation:

Mr. Conklin also related a well-attested instance of spirit-telegraphing in his own experience, which occurred several years ago [in 1855], and has been published, but will bear repeating. What made its relation at this time particularly interesting, was the fact, that parties who were at both ends of the line, were present. Mr. Conklin was at Washington. One of his children was taken ill, and was attended by Dr. Gray, who considered the case critical,

⁴² *Spirit-Rapping in Glasgow in 1864*.

⁴³ “Manifestations Physiques,” *Le Spiritualiste* (New Orleans) Supplement (May 1857), 254-256, translating an article originally printed in *The Spiritual Telegraph* and *The Spiritual Age*. D. D. Home was said to have accomplished this sort of under the table touching and tugging in the dark by slipping off his shoes and using his feet, the toes of which were free to work because he wore socks with the ends cut off.

⁴⁴ A long description of the test is in Clinton Roosevelt, “Spiritualism and Philosophy,” *Emerson’s United States Magazine* 5.38 (August 1857): 176-186. The Conklin test was reported in the *Spiritual Telegraph* (December 13, 1856), and was conducted at Partridge’s Institute in New York City, September 8-9, 1856.

and advised that they telegraph Mr. Conklin.⁴⁵ Instead of going to the magnetic telegraph office, the party charged with this mission stepped in to 553 Broadway — the old office of the Christian Spiritualist — where a public circle was in session. Mr. John F. Coles was one of the persons at the table at the time, and stated that the question was at once asked, if there was any spirit there who would take the message to Mr. Conklin; and that Black Hawk announced himself, and said that he would do it. Meanwhile, Mr. Conklin was in his room at Washington, fatigued with the labors of the forenoon — it being now between 12 and 1 P.M. — and reposing on a sofa; when he felt himself suddenly impelled to get up and go to the table. Immediately there was written, through his hand, the following message: “Go right home. Your little boy, Sammy, is very sick. — Black Hawk.” Mr. Conklin at once telegraphed home, and received a confirmation of the message, when he followed, himself, in person.⁴⁶

The spiritualist press also gave him credit for sometimes being more successful in running what might be called a psychic lost and found service than he had been on the early occasion when the spirits failed him in finding lost treasure. At least once, perhaps aided, one might speculate, by his enlistment of an informal corps of Bowery Street Irregulars (to bowdlerize a term from the Sherlockian canon), he and his spirits were reported to have uncovered the whereabouts of a lost child:

In the month of November last [1856], Mr. J. B. Conklin received at his rooms, 477 Broadway, the visit of an Irish woman who was in much distress at having lost her little boy, who had strayed away in the street and could not be found. The Spirits, through Mr. Conklin, requested her to describe the child to the medium, accurately, mentioning where she had last seen him, and they promised to endeavor to trace him and give her an answer on a subsequent day. At the time appointed the woman again came, but the Spirits were not yet able to report, and requested her to come at a certain hour on the next day. At the hour specified the woman arrived, and the Spirits wrote by Mr. C.’s hand, instructing her to go quickly to the foot of a certain street on the North River, and search aboard a certain vessel, promising that she should there find her child. The woman hastily departed, and shortly returned with her boy, whom she had found precisely as the Spirits had

⁴⁵ John Franklin Gray, New York City physician who adopted the heterodox theories of homeopathy into his medical practice in 1828 and eventually became its leading proponent. He was a regular attendee at Partridge and Brittan’s New York Conferences and at séances around the city, especially Conklin’s.

⁴⁶ *Banner of Light*, January 8, 1859; also referred to in Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 266-267. The story also appeared as “Spirit Telegraphing,” *Spiritual Age* 1.24 (12 June 1858), but in this version, Conklin “while he was sitting in his room at Washington, a spirit, purporting to be *George Fox*, came to him and said, that the Indian Chief Black Hawk had just informed him that his (Conklin’s) child was dangerously ill,” which caused the writer of the article to note that the spirits could telegraph their messages in relay.

indicated, she having arrived just in time to receive him before the vessel, on which he had taken refuge, sailed from the wharf.⁴⁷

He also reported an incident in which he “located” a dead body, that of the brother of Tammany Hall thug and enforcement boss, Isaiah Rynders:

After receiving news of his brother’s physical dissolution in California, Capt. Rynders, in company with Col. Hall, paid a visit to Mr. Conklin’s rooms, for the purpose of getting a communication from his brother’s spirit.

Many questions were asked by the Captain, and were satisfactorily answered. Finally asks the Captain:

“Where is your body now?”

“In this city!” was the reply.

“That’s a damned lie!” rejoined the Captain with emphasis; but the spirit insisted upon its truthfulness. On their way from the rooms, the Captain says to the Colonel:

“It beats the Devil that such an answer should be given to that question. All the rest were answered right, but that one. Pshaw! — it’s all a damned humbug!”

Thus the matter ended. But the next day, as the Captain was walking down Broadway, he was met by an acquaintance who accosted him with — “Captain, why don’t you go down to the vessel and get your brother’s body?”

“Why, it hasn’t arrived — has it?”

“Yes,” was the answer; “it has been waiting for you these two days!”

Sure enough, the vessel had arrived with the body much in advance of the time it was expected, and the Captain had to acknowledge the truthfulness of an intelligence in opposition to his own positive conviction at the time of receiving the communication.⁴⁸

The secular press, however, also reported his failures in clairvoyance and prediction. Conklin, perhaps understanding that his failures would largely be ignored, but that scoring a single hit in a public way would never be forgotten, would sometimes write out messages, ostensibly from the spirits, about current and future events and send them to the newspapers for notice. He published this in his newspaper, *The Principle*, for example, in August 1858, about the nautical expedition to lay the Atlantic telegraph cable:

On the 27th of June, the spirits said the telegraph fleet had begun paying out the cable, but that communication had ceased — they thought on the 25th, but were not positive as to date. One daily, at least, refused to

⁴⁷ “Child Found by Spirit Direction,” *Banner of Light*, May 21, 1857, reprinting an article from *The Spiritual Age*. For a description of how Conklin took in a waif who pleaded poverty, see “How Spirits Regard the Erring,” *Spiritual Telegraph*, October 25, 1856.

⁴⁸ “Capt. Rynders and the Spirits — A Test,” *The Principle* 2.9 (August 1858): 72.

publish. On the evening of the 16th, the spirits insisted that news would be received the next morning. See papers of that date. There are witnesses.⁴⁹

After the scheduled date for the John Heenan — Tom Sayers prize fight in England on April 17, 1860, but before the results had been able to reach America by steamer, Conklin sent a “test message” about the details of the outcome to the *New-York Tribune*. In fact, the fight lasted two and a half hours and 42 rounds, but had no final winner declared because a riot broke out around the ring among Sayers’ supporters when it looked like he might lose. As a side note in reporting the results of the fight to its readers, the *Tribune* ridiculed the predictions that various spirit mediums had sent to its editors about the fight:

But the most dazzling success was made by Mr. J. B. Conklin of No. 486 Broadway. In transmitting to us his valuable communication, under date of April 19, he used the following form of speech: “With view to test the reliability of spirit communion with regard to temporal matters, I take the liberty,” &c. And then goes on to say:

“The purport of my communication is, that the fight has been concluded, that Heenan is defeated, and that his recovery from the injuries received is considered very doubtful.”

The reliability of spirit communion with regard to temporal matters has been rather severely tested in this instance, and unless the infatuation of the spiritually inclined runs into downright fatuity, the premises at No. 486 Broadway, now occupied by Mr. J. B. Conklin, Medium, will soon be open for eligible tenants.⁵⁰

The editor of the Troy, New York, *Daily Times*, reproduced the *Tribune* article and then added his own comment:

We remember that this same J. B. Conklin once invited us to test him in Harmony Hall, and after we had written a number of names on slips of paper, he gave us a rhapsodical communication written backward, from the spirit of a friend who at the moment was sitting by our side alive and hearty — weight, one hundred and eighty-six pounds! After this, who will deny the perfect truth of all the dogmas of modern spiritualism?⁵¹

This did not stop Conklin, however, from continuing to make clairvoyant predictions, as one editor reported:

⁴⁹ “Another Test,” *The Principle* 2.9 (August 1858): 72.

⁵⁰ *New-York Daily Tribune*, May 2, 1860.

⁵¹ *Troy Daily Times*, May 3, 1860.

SPIRITUALISM — We put the following on record. If Napoleon survives it, we'll have nothing further to do with spirits:

The following letter was received at the *Philadelphia Press* office on Monday evening:

To the Editor of the *Press* — Sir: The following communication (which I give you *verbatim*) was received at a private circle on Sunday evening, at half-past 9 P.M.:

"France is without an Emperor! You will get the news in ten days (10) days. This is for a test."

Through the mediumship of J. B. Conklin, 413 north Sixth street. Philadelphia, February 4, 1866.⁵²

This prediction, of course, did not work out. Napoleon III would rule until September 1870, at the end of the Franco-Prussian War.

Another one was mentioned by one of the editors of the *New-York Tribune*, in March 1865:

We were apprised, on the 6th of last month [February], by a written statement, that the spirit of Henry Clay had communicated through a "medium" in this city his assurance that our Civil War would be terminated on or before the 4th of March, by a Peace which would restore the Union and abolish Slavery. We have mislaid the paper; but, as our recollection serves, the spirit of George Fox (the founder of Quakerism) substantially confirmed or concurred in the assurance. This being the 3d of March, and peace not yet in sight, we give "the spirits" fair notice that we expect them to come to. Three days' grace is the utmost we can consent to allow. Mr. J. B. Conklin (we believe that is the name of the "medium") will please hurry them up.⁵³

General Lee would surrender his forces to Grant on April 9th, however, just over a month from when Conklin's spirit had predicted an end to the war, so it seems that spiritualists, after the fact, would likely have counted this prediction as a hit.

It must have emboldened him, for we find him not long thereafter in the public eye, again in the role of clairvoyant discoverer of lost things and people.

In August 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed former Congressman and Senator Preston King, who had served Johnson as an informal White House chief of staff in the earliest days of his administration, to the post of Collector of the Port of New York. King took rooms at the Astor Hotel and began his work, but on November 13th, depressed by the corrupt

⁵² *Norfolk (Virginia) Post*, February 10, 1866; see also *Cleveland Daily Leader*, February 14, 1866. John Weiss Forney was the editor of the *Philadelphia Press*; he was highly interested in spiritualism and his wife was a medium.

⁵³ *New-York Daily Tribune*, March 3, 1865.

political turmoil of New York City into which he had been placed, he committed suicide by boarding the Hoboken ferryboat *Paterson* and then jumping off into the Hudson River, having first tied a twenty-five-pound bag of lead shot to his chest.

A five-hundred-dollar reward — which then grew to a thousand-dollar sum — was offered for the recovery of King's body, and the police began to send out boats with teams of men armed with grappling hooks to search for it, but were unable to come up with anything.



Preston King
Library of Congress

At that point, a reporter for the *New York World*, who had been sent to the waterfront to cover the progress of the search, found John Conklin there instead:

Some curious particulars are furnished by a New York paper, relative to the search in North River for the body of Preston King, by the "Mediums." Mr. J. B. Conklin, according to the *World*, was seated in a parlor in West Hudson street, with a lady who has frequently been waited upon by busy embodiments from the realms of the incorporals.

Just as the winged troupe entered the room, the lady was in the electrical task of magnetizing Mr. Conklin's head, and had so far succeeded in her kindly labor, that the subject of her manipulations was deliciously *en rapport* with everything that is beautiful and glorious. For a few moments, it appears, the visitors seated themselves and watched the proceedings going on in their presence. Subsequent revelations proved that they were only awaiting the coming of another spirit to make one of the most astounding

revelations that was ever dropped into moral [sic] ear. In a short time this spirit came. It moved with a heavy step, notwithstanding the fact of its being a mere 'airy nothing.'

All at once this colossal representative of invisibility approached the table at which Mr. Conklin was sitting, and pacing its impalpable lips to that enraptured gentleman's ear, said: "Take a pencil and write."

"Certainly," said the enlightened medium.

A pencil was then brought to Mr. Conklin by the lady before referred to, some paper was procured, and everything put in readiness to receive any communication that might be made. No sooner was that done than the pencil began to move, and these words were written upon a slip of paper:

"I will direct you to where my body is lying, if you will come and grapple for it. It is lying in *such a place*, and you will find it."

PRESTON KING.

Mr. Conklin was in a trance state when the revelation was made, and it was not until nearly an hour had elapsed when he was shown the communication. Having read the paper, he, accompanied by a friend, immediately started for the Christopher street ferry, and took passage for Hoboken in one of the ferry boats. Arriving in the middle of the river, and desiring to ascertain the exact location of the body, Mr. Conklin took out his pencil, and, placing a piece of paper upon the palm of his hand, another communication was received. This communication stated that the body was lying two hundred feet north of the bow of the steamer North Star, and a few yards east of the middle of the steamer.

So far so good, thought the indefatigable Mr. Conklin and his enthusiastic friend, and the confident couple determined to grapple for the body on Sunday.

Procuring a row-boat and small dredge, the two men, yesterday, shortly after noon, rowed out into the river, and commenced their work in the most enthusiastic manner. They rowed and rowed, and dredged and dredged, until the sun went down beyond the barren hills of Hoboken, and the shadows of night stole on apace. But where was the body? Could they have been misled [sic] by a lying spirit? Had they been humbugged? No, it was a sacrilege to think so. But why had they not found the body? They knew it was there — right down there — in the very spot designated by their informant from the spirit world. They knew that it could be nowhere else, but the tide and wind were against them, and they could not fasten their "grapplers" on the precise spot where the remains were lying. It was unfortunate, but it could not be helped. They worked hard until five o'clock, when, tired, but not disheartened, they left the scene of their labors and went home.

But they don't intend to "give it up so."

"Why," said Mr. Conklin to our reporter, "the body is there, just as sure as you're alive, and I'm willing to stake my professional reputation upon the statement."

Reporter — Where did you say the body lies?

Mr. Conklin — Off Pier No. 47, and two hundred feet north of the steamship North Star, that is anchored in that stream.

Reporter — Then your [sic] are confident that the body is there?

Mr. C. — Perfectly, sir. I don't think we would have gone to the expense of getting apparatus to dredge for it unless we believe what we are told by the spirit of Mr. King. I knew Mr. King well; and there can be no mistake about it, when the body is found it will be found there and nowhere else.

And thus stands the matter at present. It is proposed by Mr. Conklin and his friends to give the matter another trial to-day, when they feel sure that they will find the body and reap the reward which has been offered for its recovery.⁵⁴

But neither Conklin nor anyone else found King's body then. It was not until the following May 22nd that the newspapers, with somewhat ill-chosen phrasing, could announce that "Like bread cast upon the waters, it has returned after many days." It was on that day that "Officer Kenny, of the Atlantic dock (Brooklyn) police discovered the body of a man floating into the gap from Buttermilk channel," which turned out to be that of Preston King, the rope that he had used to tie the weight to his body finally having parted and sent his corpse to the surface to float away on the tide.⁵⁵

4 The Miracle Circle

Emma Hardinge, who became perhaps the most famous spiritualist lecturer and writer of the 1850s and beyond, wrote that when she came to New York from England, she gained some work as an actress at the Broadway Theatre. Among the troupe there was William Augustus Fenno, "who, like many other members of the theatrical profession, was a warm Spiritualist and an excellent trance and writing medium."⁵⁶ Fenno, said one of his friends,

⁵⁴ "A Spiritualistic Search — The Late Suicide," *New Albany Daily Commercial*, November 27, 1865.

⁵⁵ Buttermilk Channel separates Governor's Island from Brooklyn south of Manhattan Island and so is far from where Conklin had been searching. As a little bonus for Lincoln assassination conspiracy theorists, I note Conklin's assertion here that he knew Preston King well. If true, that would suggest that King had been consulting Conklin for messages from departed spirits. According to an account that historians do not contest, conman Charles Dunham was guided by Congressman James Ashley from Ohio to fabricate testimony that would implicate Andrew Johnson in a plot that eventuated in the assassination of Lincoln. One of Ashley's ideas, according to Dunham, was to involve the just-deceased Preston King into it because, as Dunham reported Ashley to have said, "he was in Johnson's confidence and connived at the assassination and was haunted with remorse and Lincoln's ghost." The idea was that they would try to show that King had insisted that he saw Lincoln's ghost in his room at the Astor and was terrified of it — Carman Cumming, *Devil's Game: The Civil War Intrigues of Charles A. Dunham* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 220-221. Yet, if King *had* been seeing Conklin, he may well have felt haunted by Lincoln's ghost.

⁵⁶ Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 135-136, 250.

“had but one weakness. He would talk Spiritualism to the exclusion of all other subjects, if one would permit it.”⁵⁷

Hardinge had come to New York, she said, in order to gather some sensational material for periodicals back in England, something about the follies of Americans, and she had in mind that the foremost of those follies was “spirit-rapping.” So she set about collecting material, doing practical research among the mediums of New York, with Fenno giving her recommendations about which ones to visit and sometimes accompanying her to the séances.

From what Hardinge says (although she was not entirely consistent about this in her writings), it appears that she attended her first séance in 1855, at the spirit room of John Conklin in the upper floor of “a shabby looking house” on Canal Street. She found it to be a raucous affair, so much so that she fled the place when the supposed spirit controlling Conklin (perhaps Thomas Paine) ventured into what she heard as coarse blasphemy:

- Under such a stimulus to search, I accompanied one of my fellow-boarders to the rooms of Mr. J. B. Conklin. A large party was assembled there, every one of whom was — in singular contrast to a similar assemblage of English people — very pale, and, as I deemed, from that circumstance, rather ghost-like.
- This was a good beginning, and suggested ideas of mystics wan and worn with midnight vigils amongst the dead. Presently I heard some of those sitting at the table talking familiarly with *nothing*, and responded to by very rude and clumsy gyrations of the table. Amused at this proceeding, which really looked as if those deluded ones were in earnest, I quietly directed my attention to the table, and, though unable at the time to discover the machinery by which it was moved, I knew it was there. ...
- All passed off well, however, until a sentence was “spelled out,” which seemed to me to comment irreverently on the Bible. This was enough. I don’t know now, even what the sentence was. I did not know then, whether the sentence was true or false. It was sufficient for me, that the “Holy Word of God” was lightly spoken of in that company of “ghouls,” and that I impiously sat by to hear it. The next moment I was in the street, and that night, with tearful petitions to Heaven for forgiveness in daring to hear — I did not know what — and solemn promises never again to listen to anything about the Bible but the book itself, I dropped to sleep, fervently resolving never again to visit so blasphemous a place as a ‘spirit circle;’ a promise I kept for the space of a whole week. And so ends the first chapter in my spiritual experience.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Joseph Tooker, the city official who instigated charges against spirit photographer William Mumler, as quoted in “Tricks of the Mediums,” *New-York Times*, February 14, 1886.

⁵⁸ *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten* (London: John Heywood, 1900), 17-18, relates the incident, and adds the detail, “... one of the party who seemed to have been engaged in writing

She would eventually be converted to a belief in spiritualism by her experiences, at this and other séances among New York mediums, and come to see her negative reaction to her first session at Conklin's as having been distorted by the religious prejudices she had carried with her at the time.

By the time Hardinge had visited Conklin's sitting room, he had already had considerable experience conducting séances for theatrical professionals in New York. He tells us in *The Life of a Medium* that in the summer of 1853 he and at least one other medium who had "developed" under his guidance ("Mr. T. G. Moulton" and perhaps "Mr. Demarest") began giving spirit tests and "wonderful manifestations" at the house of Henry Isherwood, a set designer and scene painter for various theaters in New York City.⁵⁹ Isherwood loved to play practical jokes backstage and, as one of his companions later put it, was "a fine scenic artist, with a craze for acting. Nothing could be much worse than his acting; anything better than his scene painting was rarely seen."⁶⁰

Isherwood invited other members of the theatrical profession to join in Conklin's séances, where they received messages from lately departed actors and artists. Conklin said, "These, and similar manifestations, having excited the attention of many musical, dramatic and other artists, circles have since been formed in New York composed chiefly of members of their professions, at which very extraordinary phenomena have been exhibited." By this statement, and indirectly by his connection to Henry Isherwood, he claims that his séances with theatrical folks were responsible for inspiring the creation of what came to be called the "Miracle Circle."

something, said, speaking in a clear loud tone: 'The Spirit answers, Immortality would be a mere fiction were there no other evidence of it than Bible teaching.' This was enough for me. These horrid 'ghoul' like looking infidels were pitching into the Bible!"

⁵⁹ It is unclear who T. G. Moulton and Demarest were. However, for the record, the only T. Moulton in Manhattan at the time was a lumber contractor, Theodore Moulton, who advertised his company's having remodeled part of the Stamford, Connecticut Concert Hall, which sort of work would plausibly connect him to set designer and scene painter Henry Isherwood; and a Mr. Garret B. Demarest sold pianos and sheet music from his store at 409 Broadway, not far from Wallack's Broadway Theatre, and just down the street from Conklin's rooms at the time, at 469 Broadway.

⁶⁰ Walter M. Leman, *Memories of an Old Actor* (San Francisco: A. Roman, 1886), 50. On Isherwood, see W. Joseph Stell, "Henry Isherwood: Early American Scene Painter," *Nineteenth Century Theatre Research* 12 (1984): 1-24.



Emma Hardinge
mid-1860s

His sitting rooms were close to many popular theaters that were drawing in a mixed clientele and that were offering entertainments of various degrees of seriousness and respectability. The actors, managers, and stagehands of those theaters that offered high-minded dramas and comedies shared personnel to some extent with other smaller places of entertainment (down to and including those that offered fortune-telling, spirit rooms, prize fights, and magic shows). Actors and actresses, for example, as their careers rose and fell, moved from one place and one type of place to another. And the backstage personnel could easily be employed at venues around the city. The theatrical world, taken as a whole, was transient, porous, and culturally mixed, and included staid, respectable Shakespearians as well as exciting freaks and fly-by-nights.

Mediums who gave public séances in which they voiced the spirits of the deceased or “automatically” wrote their words *personated* those characters, to use a word that they used themselves. But that word was also used when speaking of actors and actresses, who *personated* characters for the public. Nowadays we still use the word *impersonated* for when someone has effected a conscious mimicry of someone else’s persona. But what actors did when they inhabited their characters was very close to what mediums did when their characters inhabited them. In both cases, two personalities dwelt in the

same psychic space, with one or the other more dominant from moment to moment. Even stage magicians form two personalities when performing: one that is doing what the magician really is doing and one that is doing what the magician wants his audience to think he is doing. In acting and in performing magic, allowing the secondary character — the stage character — to enlarge itself results in a more convincing performance. Playing with that state of consciousness, which is living between both characters or suspending oneself in the space between them, is fun for the performer and the audience. But, if one acts out of character in front of one's audience, then the illusion is broken and the fun is ended. If one cannot simply play at it, however, nor act freely "out of character," as actors would say, but instead is sucked completely out of one's real identity, that is not fun at all. It is something else.

If one were to come to suspect that the ghostly secondary characters were acting on their own initiative — that *they* were the initiating agents, that *they* were the ones who were speaking — then one would not be far from believing that, as spiritualists put it, those living in the flesh were being inhabited by spirits who were assuming control of them. "Evening after evening," Emma Hardinge wrote, "we spent in a certain splendid room, wherein a lady, who was an enthusiastic devotee of the faith, assembled around her, celebrated actors and actresses, journalists and reporters, musicians and artistes, all of whom had some phases of phenomena to exhibit, and claims to urge of how the power of good spirit friends aided them in their several professional pursuits."⁶¹

So, it is not at all surprising that actors and mediums should feel a kinship or that they might cross the boundary between their professions. Actors from Barnum's down the street and from the Bowery Theater and from Wallack's Broadway Theatre visited Conklin's "spirit emporium," if we may call it that, especially when he was conducting sittings at 553 Broadway, and witnessed improvised character skits in which, as séance participants, they participated. And some of these actors formed their own spirit troupes in which they could stage their effects beforehand and then rely on their powers of

⁶¹ Emma Hardinge Britten, "Extracts from the Second Volume of 'Ghostland,'" *Unseen Universe* 1.4 (July 1892): 169. Spirit medium Maude Lord told a reporter from the *Chicago News* in 1882 that many actors were extremely devoted to spiritualism: "Do these actors think they are directly aided by spirit messengers in their work?" asked the reporter. "Many of them do," she replied, "and in so believing have become strongly wedded to spiritualism. I find many of them who say they do not know what they are saying or doing from the time they go on the stage until they come off. They seem impelled by some strange power to do things of which they are wholly unconscious. Some of them never take a new step without consulting a medium." "Spirits on the Stage," *Washington Post*, December 16, 1883.

characterization and improvised and inspired personations to entertain themselves and others.

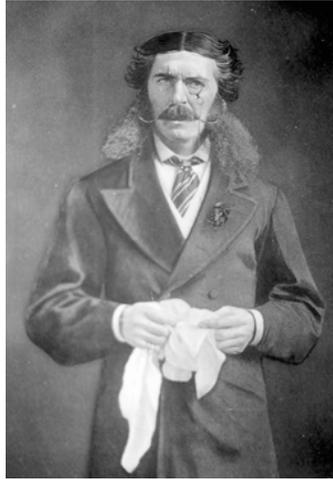
The Miracle Circle was the foremost of these. The performances that they enjoyed creating among themselves (but which they did not choose to reveal to others as being contrived, not wishing to come out of character), allowed them, one may say, to enjoy producing spirit manifestations together in the same way that jazz musicians enjoy improvising music when playing together and challenging one another in the moment. But Conklin and his fellow professional mediums were doing this as well, even if, at times, they may have had no clear consciousness of being actors as such. They lived in an exalted state of suspended disbelief. It was a state of excitement and wonder akin to that present in visitors to Barnum's American Museum down the street on Broadway, who, beginning in 1860, would file before an exhibit in the "Gallery of Wonders" entitled merely, "WHAT IS IT?" which invited those viewing what was in fact an African-American man on display, dressed up in a grass skirt with his head shaved, to see it as a prodigious spectacle, and to wonder about whether he or "it" was *really* a newly-discovered "missing link" or something else inexplicable or just an out-and-out hoax. Barnum was an impresario of wonder, and so were the many mediums down the street. Whether there was a difference between him and them was an issue that was always in contention.

Because Conklin claimed to be in at the genesis of the Miracle Circle, it may not be amiss here to look at later revelations about its workings, which did not explicitly involve him, but which certainly throw a light on the tangled motives and methods of its participants.

A letter appeared on the front page of *The New-York Times* on December 31, 1865, under the title "Spiritualism. The Miracle-Circle. Interesting Letter from Mr. Sothern."⁶² It was a letter from Edward Askew Sothern, an English actor mostly known for his comic roles, who worked and lived in Britain and America and had gained fame with his physical comedy and his humorous ad-libbing onstage. During the period of the Miracle Circle, he performed in productions at Barnum's American Theater, at Wallack's Broadway Theatre,

⁶² Sothern had sent his letter to the *Glasgow Citizen*, where it had been printed; it was then reprinted in the *London Star*, from where the *New-York Times* had reprinted it. Sothern was responding to "The Miracle Circle," *Spiritual Magazine* 6.12 (December 1865): 558-559, in which Benjamin Coleman attempted to conflate the on-again-off-again answers provided by the Davenport brothers to the question of the truth of their mediumistic manifestations to the situation with Sothern, who, as Coleman described it, exhibited many mediumistic powers both in the United States and in England, while also lately explicitly denying the truth of spiritualism. On Sothern's "spiritualism," see Sir Edward Russell, *That Reminds Me* — (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), 42-45.

and then with Laura Keene's company, with which, when in the cast of *Our American Cousin*, he took the small part of "Lord Dundreary" and, by sheer force turned his comic performances in it into a popular sensation. He was also well known for being a practical joker.



Edward A. Sothern, as Lord Dundreary
New York Public Library

In his letter Sothern claimed that he had in fact been a leading member of the Miracle Circle in New York while he was working at Wallack's, and that the supposedly miraculous and powerful spirit manifestations that accompanied their gatherings were entirely contrived and done in a rowdy spirit of play as a sort of game in which the members of the Circle considered themselves to be a troupe of improvisational magicians and pseudo-fakirs, deliberately undertaking to replicate, and so implicitly expose as fraudulent, all the effects that professional mediums typically demonstrated.

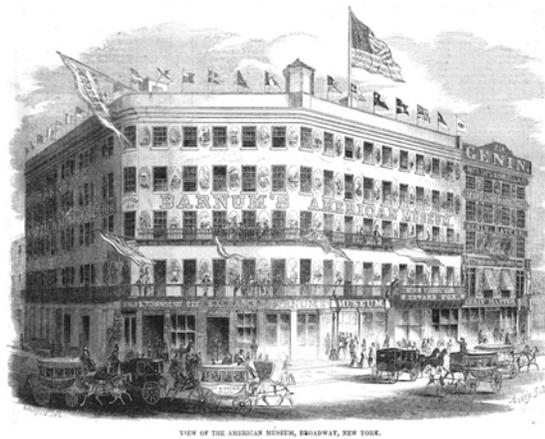
Sothern's letter wounded spiritualists in America and Britain. One reason was that it called into question the testimony and judgment of the leading spiritualist investigators and mediums in New York City (such as John Conklin, whose sittings had originally inspired the group), who had praised the Miracle Circle's displays and touted them as examples of spirit manifestations.

To counter Sothern's letter, British spiritualist Benjamin Coleman

published an article that endeavored to bring Sothern into disrepute.⁶³ For Coleman, that required that the Miracle Circle itself and its members be cut down to size, even though, ironically, this would indirectly also bring into question the judgment or even the honesty of the spiritualist leaders and mediums of New York. Nevertheless, Coleman told his readers that the Circle had been “composed chiefly of actors and actresses, and those, too, belonging to a theatre of the least repute in New York,” and then listed them, using all the orthographical bells and whistles he could muster:

JOHN BRIDGMAN, *an actor at Barnum’s Museum!*
THOMAS HADDAWAY, *an actor at Barnum’s Museum!*
DOUGLAS STUART (now E. A. Sothern), *an actor at Barnum’s Museum!*
BENJAMIN WOOLF, sen., *Leader of the Orchestra at Barnum’s Museum!*
HENRY ISHERWOOD, *Scene-painter at Wallack’s Theatre!*
Mrs. BENJAMIN WOOLF,

- Miss ORTON, a ballet girl at Barnum’s Museum! and
- BENJAMIN WOOLF, jun!



Barnum’s American Museum, 1853
Gleason’s Pictorial

- He then proceeded to an assassination of Sothern’s character and his

⁶³ *Spiritual Magazine* 1.2 new series (February 1866): 49-64, repeating in substance his article in *The Spiritual Times*, which ran in the issue of January 27, 1866. Coleman had visited New York in April and May 1861, and had met many spiritualist leaders and mediums, but he did not mention Conklin in the book he published after he returned to England, *Spiritualism in America* (London: F. Pitman, 1861).

activities in New York, and quoted a story that had supposedly run in *The New-York Times* (but which had not in fact): “He created quite a sensation by admitting the truth of an accusation brought against him, by a certain young actress, that he had grievously wronged her after placing her in a state of mesmeric influence. ... He was a good-looking, gay, vivacious, ‘fast’ young man, whose pretty wife continually won the sympathy of those who were witnesses to her husband’s licentiousness. “ For these statements Sothorn brought Coleman and his publisher Robert Cooper to court on the charge of libel, which was eventually sustained.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the revelations and charges about the Miracle Circle hardly placed it in a good light. It was a light that Conklin shared with the Circle by his association with the group.

In *The Life of a Medium*, Conklin provides the details of many examples of séances that consisted essentially in his conveying messages from the spirits to inquirers. But he provides very few details about the séances he conducted that did not convey information but rather confronted the participants with a display of wonders, in which spirits intruded and acted upon the material world.

This was a very significant part of Conklin’s repertoire, however, and this was why he was so well known as a “physical medium.” In his séances *things* — not just messages — materialized from the spirit world.

The New York Conference of spiritualists that met weekly under the guidance of — among others — Conklin’s patrons Drs. Robert Hallock and Franklin Gray, often heard from Conklin who reported on happenings in his séances or heard from others who had attended them:

Dr. Gray made a call for facts.

Dr. Hallock responded: The impression has become general that physical manifestations are passing away, but he had recently attended one or two circles — what are called dark circles — at Mr. Conklin’s, where the phenomena had been revived. Several persons were present, enough to completely fill the small table. On the table were placed a guitar and two dinner horns, and all took hold of hands. Soon these articles commenced moving. His nose was for some time manipulated by one of the horns as delicately as though it had been a feather. The guitar was thumbed, and then disappeared from the table, and re-appeared under the table, though it seemed quite impossible for it to get there, so closely were the party seated. The instrument was then thumbed under the table. Attempts were also made to speak through the horns, but with no intelligible success — During

⁶⁴ “Mr. Sothorn and Spiritualism,” *London Standard*, February 15, 1866; “Mr. Sothorn and Spiritualism. Charge of Libel,” *London Express*, February 15, 1866; “Alleged Libel on Mr. Sothorn the Actor,” *London Morning Post*, February 15, 1866; “Mr. Sothorn and the Spiritualists,” *London Magnet*, February 26, 1866.

these experiments he had hold of one of Mr. Conklin's hands, and another gentleman the other, and all declared that they had nothing to do with the production of the phenomena. On another occasion, the manifestations were similar, with the addition of touches by an apparently human hand. He was touched repeatedly, and another gentleman of the circle at the same time. The touches were simultaneous. This occurred when all had hold of hands. In his case, the hand that was touched was lying on the table, with one of Conklin's across it. The guitar poised itself on one of his fingers, and remained there with a pretty hard pressure. Between the instrument and Conklin's hand, was a space of several inches, and in this space his hand was several times grasped by a thumb and two fingers. It was no glove, but a veritable hand. The feel was soft, and of a higher temperature than his own hand.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, not everyone who spoke at the Conference meetings was a believer in Conklin's powers:

Mr. [Dr. William L. F.] Von Vleck: One condition necessary, in his opinion, to the reception of spirit-communications, was a good share of credulity. He did not deny that such communications were received, but believed the cases rare. He had had a wide acquaintance with mediums. He was acquainted with Mr. Conklin, Dr. Redman and Mr. Foster. He had seen a good deal of Mr. Conklin's mediumship. Mr. C. sits with his hand on the edge of the table, with nails driven on the other side to keep it from slipping. One hundred pounds can thus be raised by the hand without apparent effort. In giving tests, the sitter writes several names on little slips of paper, which are rolled up into balls, and the names are then reproduced by Mr. Conklin. But the speaker knew by actual experiment that a name could be read by the motion of the top of the pencil.⁶⁶

An overarching narrative was developed in the spiritualist press in which the new advent in which the spirits opened up a line of communication with the mundane material world was only the imperfect beginning of an evolving and ever more perfect influx of spirit into matter. It was to be expected — or at least fervently hoped — that the initial manifestations of this, such as moving tables, cryptic messages, and floating coins, would progressively strengthen and allow the spirits more spectacular displays, with the end point envisioned to be their fully-functioning intercourse with the material world, their incarnation in their full forms, completely clothed like the mortals among whom they would appear. There was, as a result,

⁶⁵ "Conference at the Lyceum, Clinton Hall, Astor Place, Tuesday evening, June 12th," *Spiritual Age* 2.27 (July 2, 1859); for another example, see "Conference at the Lyceum, Clinton Hall, Astor Place, Friday evening, Dec. 24th," *Spiritual Age* 2.1 (January 1, 1859).

⁶⁶ "Conference at the Lyceum, Clinton Hall, Astor Place, Friday evening, Oct. 22nd," *Spiritual Age* 1.44 (October 30, 1858).

some definite striving felt in the spiritualist community, which became clearer during the 1860s, toward realizing the goal of “full-form materialization” of the spirits. The spirits, at that point (which would soon occur during séances, starting about 1870), would have achieved in full, what they had only achieved before in a tentative, indirect, and piecemeal way.

We therefore find in the spiritualist press during the time when such full-form manifestations were being hoped for, but had not yet occurred or at least had not been generally accepted as having occurred, a debate about whether the spirits could actually manage such a wholesale invasion of the material world. In 1860, one spiritualist wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* to testify that it was indeed reasonable to think that spirits would soon be able to appear fully materialized, and to shore up his conviction, he provided a detailed description of some of John Conklin’s séances that demonstrated just how mundane the spirits already had become:

Mr. Partridge: I believe Spiritualism is going to be one of the greatest engines of progress and revolution, the world has ever seen; for if Spirits have the power to create physical forms, and to move dead matter, in circles, what may they not do under other circumstances?

As you ask for facts, I will give some which occurred in a dark circle held at Mr. Conklin’s in Broadway a year or two ago. I belonged to the circle which met every week for over a year (privately) to see what we could get; we generally sat with joined hands, and sometimes there was light enough in the room to see each other, and to see objects moved about the room by Spirits. The circle consisted of seven or eight persons. We had two tin horns, a guitar, an accordion and bell. At one of these circles a clock was taken off the shelf by the Spirits and stopped, then set upon the table, and set a going for a moment, and then set back again to its place on the shelf, and set a going. One evening I laid a flute on the table to see if they would play on it; this they did not do, but they took it to pieces, and put some parts of it in the pockets of some of the members of the circle. One of the circle had some hazel nuts in his pocket, which were taken out by the Spirits, and thrown on the table. One night a chair was brought from a back part of the room by a Spirit, and put on the table, and the heavy table was often lifted clear from the floor, and made to answer questions by stamping its legs all at once on the floor. The accordion was often played on by the Spirits while moving through the air, and it was taken off the table, and put under it, and then played upon. The bell was often taken up by the Spirits, and run, and thrown on the floor.

I believe that Spirits have far more power for developing mediums in the dark than in the light, and that soft, sympathetic music is a very great [...] I believe that the most wonderful things done in circles by Spirits have never yet been given to the world. I believe that Spirits have the power, through some mediums, of creating whole human physical forms and clothing them; and why not, on the same principle as the creating of a physical hand? One night at this circle my chair was pulled back from the table a foot or two, and then shoved up again, and two of the circle were taken hold of by the Spirits, and pulled over, chair and all, upon the floor

backward, and then set back again to the table. One evening my shoe and stocking were taken off by the spirits under the table; in getting off the shoe they did not stop to untie the string, but pulled and twisted it until the string broke, and then grabbed stocking and all. While this operation was going on, I distinctly felt two hands at work at the foot, one at the toe and heel. I put down my hand to see if I could catch hold of the hands, but they were too quick for me; I felt the fingers, but could not get hold of the hands.

At another time my India rubber shoe was taken off by Spirits, and there were two hands at work at this as before, one at the heel, and one at the toe. In getting it off, they tore the upper part before they could disengage it from the foot. This time I felt two hands at work, and tried to get hold of them, but did not succeed. Another member of the circle had his boots and stockings taken off at the same time. These hands have been felt of, and shook, as any natural hand may be, many times by different persons in the circle. Some times there appeared to be infant hands in the circle, and hands belonging to different Spirits of different ages and sizes. To me they all felt as warm and natural as any hand in the form.

One night I asked the Spirits to touch me on the head; immediately a hand and arm as far as the elbow, with a sleeve on, came across my head and face with such force and power as to remove all desire forever being touched in that way again. This arm and sleeve were quite common in this circle at this time. I have often heard in this circle what appeared to be a whole human form moving about, and slightly rubbing against the back of the chairs; others heard the same, and I am of the opinion that there was a figure or Spirit-form, with a projected physical body for the time being, to perform these things.

At one sitting a terrible voice appeared to come from a door which led into another room. This was a voice of tremulous horror and despair, such as to frighten some of us. It appeared to be a person in utter despair and agonizing torment. We had no more manifestations that evening. The voice evidently came through one of the trumpets, as we often had all kinds of strange noises through these horns from the Spirits. Sometimes they would bid us good evening in an audible voice, and answer questions, and speak sentences through them, as well as thump us over the head and different parts of the body with them. I have often seen these horns going about the room without any visible moving power. The guitar was often played on while moving through the atmosphere over head. A cat was one night picked up from the floor, and laid very gently on the table by a Spirit. An empty bottle was put on the table one night. A picture was taken out of the room by a Spirit, and carried up to the next block, and into the house, and hung on the door of a room, and many other manifestations of Spirit-presence and power occurred at these circles, which go to prove the immortality of the soul beyond all doubt.

G. T. M.

New York, February 1, 1860.⁶⁷

To this we can only say — along with P. T. Barnum — “WHAT IS IT?”
None of the group, it seems, were tempted to ascribe these wonders to a

⁶⁷ “Manifestations in a Dark Circle,” *Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher*, February 18, 1860.

possible Conklin accomplice, presumably clothed in black clothes, mask, and gloves and “India rubber shoes,” silently scurrying about the darkened room. But as Barnum, and presumably Conklin, understood, if you lead people into a place where you have told them to expect something wondrous, many of them will in fact see wonders in the most insistently mundane and material phenomena, and, moreover, may even use the very mundaneness of the appearance as a proof of the spiritual world’s completed conquest of the material world.

5 A Trip to Memnonia

Conklin tells us in *The Life of a Medium* that he was an acquaintance of Thomas and Mary Gove Nichols. They had long and interesting careers, but for our purposes here it is enough to say that they were both practicing hydropathic (or “water-cure”) physicians, that they were both intent on spreading information about sexuality and reproduction, and that they had made themselves notorious when they married after Mary had fled an abusive husband.



Mary S. Gove Nichols

They were also among the leaders of what came to be called the “free love” movement, especially in New York City, where they associated with

Stephen Pearl Andrews and his “Free Love League.” Love — however that might have been construed — should regulate sexual relations, they believed, rather than a marriage contract. As Conklin put it, *The Life of a Medium*, the Nichols had “taken the high ground of the freedom of the affections, as the necessary condition of true relations, spiritual and material.” As far as sexual relations went, however, the debate over “free love” appeared to be confusing to both many of its advocates and many of its opponents, whose ideas about “free love” in the abstract might mask very different underlying assumptions about what it meant in practice. Often the question was not whether “the freedom of the affections” were “the necessary conditions of true relations, spiritual and material,” but whether they were also the *sufficient* conditions for spiritual and material relations — meaning sexual relations. Plainly speaking, what was being debated was whether sexual intercourse should be confined to those who were legally married to each other, one man and one woman, bound to each other for life.

Conklin met the Nichols around the beginning of 1853, when he was plying his trade in New York City.⁶⁸ The Nichols at that time had moved their home and their water-cure institute, which had been in the city, to a more commodious place a little ways out into the country, at Port Chester, New York, although they were still keeping an office in Manhattan. Their hydropathic institute in Port Chester included a school where students who were training to be water-cure practitioners boarded and lived a common life together. The institute was a first step for the Nichols in their effort to set up a community guided by pure and healthful living.

They were also making their own investigation of the truth of spiritualism then and they invited Conklin to their home to conduct a séance. Thomas later wrote an account of it:

I invited him to come to my house, where a small party assembled, expressly to test his powers, or gifts, or whatever the mediumship may be called. He seemed to be a simple, earnest, illiterate man, neither ambitious nor mercenary. He had been a sailor, and, in his religious belief, a Methodist. Assuredly he was the last person I should have selected either for an impostor or a magician. In our company were two distinguished lawyers; one

⁶⁸ In her biography of Mary Gove Nichols, Jean Silver-Isenstadt mentions Conklin, but gives his name as “James B. Conklin” and says, contrary to Mary’s own statement in the introduction she published to *The Life of a Medium*, that the Nichols had known him for five years (not two and a half years) at the time he made his visit to Yellow Springs, Jean L. Silver-Isenstadt, *Shameless: The Visionary Life of Mary Gove Nichols* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 195-196, 205-206. As for “James” Conklin — there is evidence from a séance record that John Conklin was informally called “Jack,” so that may be confusing: Emma Hardinge Britten, “Modern Spiritualism in America,” *Western Star* 1.4 (October 1872): 266.

of them a brother of Major Anderson, "the hero of Fort Sumter;" the other, a gentleman from Michigan, and one of the sharpest and ablest lawyers practising in the Supreme Court of the United States. I brought into the drawing-room a heavy walnut table, and placed it in the centre of the room. The medium sat down on one side of it, and the sharp Michigan lawyer, who was a stranger to us and the medium, on the other. The medium placed his fingers lightly upon the table. It tilted up under them; the two legs nearest him rising several inches. The lawyer examined the table, and tried to give it a similar movement, but without success. There was a force and a consequent movement he could not account for. There was no other person near the table — there was no perceptible muscular movement, and no way in which it could be applied to produce the effect.

When there was no more doubt on this point, the lawyer, at the suggestion of the medium, wrote on five small bits of paper — rolling each up like a pea as he wrote, and concealing his hand with care — the names of five deceased persons whom he had known. Then he rolled them about until he could not tell one from the other. Then, pointing to them successively, the tipping table selected one, which the gentleman, without opening, put in his vest pocket. Of course, neither he nor any other person could have known, in any ordinary way, which one it was. It was one chance in five for the man who had written them to guess the name upon the selected paper — not one in five millions for a stranger.

The next step was to write the ages of these five persons at their death, on as many bits of paper, which were folded with the same care. One of these was selected, and again, without being opened, deposited in the lawyer's pocket, which now contained a name and a number indicating age. What was the chance of guesswork now?

With the same precautions the lawyer then wrote the places where these persons died, the diseases of which they died, and the dates of their decease. He had then in his pocket five little balls of paper, each selected by a movement of the table, for which no one could account. Did they correspond to each other, and were they altogether true?

At this moment the hand of the medium seized a pencil, and with singular rapidity dashed off a few lines, addressed to the lawyer as from a near relative, and signed with a name, which the medium very certainly had never heard of.

The lawyer, very much startled, took from his pocket the five paper balls, and unrolled them. Then he spread them before him on the table, and read the same name as the one in the written message, with his proper age, place and time of death, and the disease of which he had died. They all corresponded with each other, and with the message. No person had approached the table, and neither lawyer nor medium had moved. It was in my own house, under a full gas-light, and so far as I could see, or can see now, no deception was possible.

The written communication, which purported to come from a deceased relative of the gentleman, only expressed, in affectionate terms, happiness at being able to give him this evidence of immortality.

Now I flatter myself that I am as shrewd as my neighbours, and as learned as most of them; and I frankly confess, that, absurd as it seems to a nineteenth century philosopher, I can offer no reasonable explanation of the facts I have stated. I cannot tell what made the heavy thumps or percussions

in the case of the Fox lady, and I can no more tell what moved the table in the case of Conklin. In each case there was force, and volition, and physical manifestation — atmospheric vibrations. There was also an intelligence accompanying these manifestations, of a very remarkable character. One might safely challenge all England, or the world, to do what I have described with the bits of paper. Yet it was done, in connexion with this Conklin, ten thousand times perhaps; and also with hundreds of other so-called mediums. I ought to say of Conklin that he received no pay on this occasion, and that his rooms in New York were open free to all comers for months, perhaps years.⁶⁹

In the autumn of 1854, Mary also developed into a spirit medium, after having been a sort of probationer or somewhat reserved investigator of spirit contact. But having been most favorably impressed by Conklin, she opened herself up to the spirits:

During the past month I have had a very interesting experience in Spiritual manifestations; having become rapidly developed as a Medium, for seeing, speaking, and writing. Lest the uninitiated may not understand me, I will explain what I mean by these terms.

About two weeks since, a young friend of mine, who I supposed was living in a distant city, appeared to me, I think about 9 o'clock A.M. and told me he was dead. I conversed with him, though I did not believe him dead. The next day we received a letter saying that he died five hours before I saw him. Since then I have conversed with him by raps, and the alphabet, by seeing and talking with him, writing for him, by impression, and also mechanically, he controlling my hand.

When I see a spirit, it is as if I saw the person in a mirror, and when they speak, there is no audible voice. The words come at times as if shot through my spirit, by a thrilling and delicious electricity.

The last month's manifestations have taken away all skepticism from me. I am no longer a believer and unbeliever, by turns, but the Spiritual world, and my friends there, are as much a reality as this world, and my friends here. I believe in myself as a Medium, as much as I do in my existence, and I am as ready to devote myself to the promulgation of this faith in Spiritualism as I have been to do good in other reforms.

I believe I have much to do as a Medium (Two years ago I would about as willingly have been called a *sheep-thief* as a *Medium*).

I do not see yet the manner of my future usefulness, but I believe I have a holy and beautiful work to do, which will be shown me from time to time — and in all honesty and humility I shall do what my hands find to do, knowing that my angels fold me in a sphere of wisdom, goodness and consequent power — that living or dying I belong to the heaven of Freedom, Purity, and Love.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Thomas L. Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life* (London: John Maxwell, 1864) volume 2, 56-59.

⁷⁰ Mary S. Gove Nichols, "A Letter from Mrs. Gove Nichols to Her Friends," *Nichols' Monthly* (November 1854): 67. In that issue of the journal, Thomas Nichols also wrote of his spiritualist belief. The influence of Conklin is suggested by Thomas Nichols' defense of Thomas Paine — Conklin's familiar spirit — as a "spiritualist," something that Paine himself would surely have

Shortly thereafter, the Nichols changed the name of the journal they had been publishing as *Nichols' Journal of Health, Water-Cure, and Human Progress*, to simply *Nichols' Monthly*. In it, over the next two years, they published, among other things, Conklin's *The Life of a Medium*, in installments:

THE LIFE OF A MEDIUM is a new, and will be, we think, an interesting feature of this series. We have known Mr. CONKLIN for some time past, as a *test medium*, of remarkable uses. He is a man of the most entirely honest, simple, unpretending character, who does what he believes to be his duty, uninfluenced by any worldly motives. By the advice of the spirits, he has taken a house in a central location, No. 134 Canal street, New York, which is open several hours every day, for free circles, where all inquirers are invited to come, without money or price, and test the reality of spirit communications. He is supported in this expensive, and as his friends thought hazardous undertaking, by voluntary contributions, by the sale of a monthly paper, THE PUBLIC CIRCLE, published at six cents a copy, and by private circles, at such hours as are not occupied with the public ministrations. It is our belief that this humble medium is in this way, the instrument of more spiritual good, than all the clergy of New York. We have not known any person to go to his rooms, in any proper spirit of candid inquiry, without being satisfied of the honesty of the medium, and the reality of the manifestations.⁷¹

In addition, besides news about reform movements, and editorial comments, *Nichols' Monthly* published some longer fiction, also in installments, in particular Thomas Nichols' utopian, free-love infused work, *Esperanza*. And the journal documented the developments in the Nichols' evolving effort to establish a utopia for real, which they would call "Memnonia," a "Harmonic Home," the center of a larger "Progressive Union." It was to be named the Memnonia Institute "in remembrance of the unique phenomenon of the enormous ancient Egyptian statue of Memnon which produced musical sounds when the first rays of the rising sun touched it."⁷² So they would 'salute with our Social Harmony, the dawn of a New Era for Humanity," as explained by a circular and prospectus that they issued.⁷³

been surprised to hear, at least during his years on earth. Conklin explained that Mary was also drawn into a belief in her psychic powers by her ability to self-diagnose her lung ailment, as verified by her homeopathic physician Benjamin Ehrmann.

⁷¹ *Nichols' Monthly* (June 1856), 1-2.

⁷² The original Memnonia in Egypt, at least for part of its existence, had been or had been turned into a necropolis, and so was a place where one could go to commune with the spirits of the dead. However, I have yet to uncover any evidence that the Nichols had that in mind when they named their establishment.

⁷³ Janet Hubly Noever, *Passionate Rebel: The Life of Mary Gove Nichols, 1810-1884*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1983, 240.

The Progressive Union is a society of men and women; Progressive, as fixing no arbitrary limits to the development, freedom, and aspirations of the Human Soul; a Union of congenial nature, working together for the highest good and greatest happiness of man; and demanding the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" liberty from all ownership, bondage, restraint or burthen, all fraud or force; all despotisms of custom, law, or institutions, creeds, opinions, or forms of social or religious dogmatism.⁷⁴

Mary's own homeopathic physician, Benjamin Ehrmann in Cincinnati, offered to lease them property in Yellow Springs, Ohio, so in the fall of 1855, the Nichols moved from New York to Cincinnati to plan out the place and wait for the lease of the idle water-cure establishment to be turned over to them.



Thomas Low Nichols

Despite their preparations, however, they were blocked for months from taking possession of the property by the opposition of Horace Mann, who was then the president of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, and who was horrified to discover that the notorious spiritualists and free-love advocates, the Nichols, were about to set up shop on the college's doorstep. He called Memnonia "a superfoetation of diabolism upon polygamy," organized public opposition to the Nichols' planned utopia and threatened to quit as president of the college if it were allowed to go ahead as planned.

Amid this public circus of opposition, the Nichols invited and paid for John Conklin to come to Yellow Springs. He did, stopping first in Cincinnati — as he explains in *The Life of a Medium* — and conducting many séances for the inquiring citizens there. He then traveled to Yellow Springs, and also presided over many sittings there, but also mingled with the residents of the town,

⁷⁴ Notice from the publishers, Watkin & Nicholson, Cincinnati, *Nichols' Monthly* (December 1856), 340.

including the faculty and students of Antioch, and, all in all, made a very good impression on them, convincing some of the truth of spiritualism, and at least abating the fears of others who had opposed the establishment of Memnonia. Afterwards, we find reported in *Nichols Monthly* their provisional victory:

The Life of a Medium approaches its completion. The recent chapters have given much satisfaction to our spiritual readers, and the coming ones are full of instructive interest. This also will be done up for the press this fall, and will be published, neatly done up in cloth, at seventy-five cents. ... We hope to be able to say something definitely of Memnonia in our next number. When the opposition was excited against us at Yellow Springs, our spirit friends promised us that the battle should be fought, and the victory won for us, and almost without our striking a blow. This seems to have been accomplished. Mr. Conklin, the medium, has been there, and most of our opponents have been converted to spiritualism; and, of course, have no longer any fanatical prejudices against us. One of the charges urged against us by Horace Mann was, that we were spiritualists; and he treated our belief in immortality with ridicule and contempt. Now, a large number of the most respectable citizens of Yellow Springs, and many of the professors and students of Antioch College, are believers, and even Mr. Mann thinks the subject worthy of serious investigation. It is therefore probable that we shall be allowed to take and hold peaceable possession of our property, and no longer be defrauded of our legal rights by a fanatical and ruffianly opposition. So we hope and believe. The world moves.⁷⁵

By August, Conklin had returned to New York and resumed his work there, and in the autumn of 1856, the Nichols were able to take possession of the water-cure establishment, due largely to his ameliorating work among the residents of Yellow Springs. They reported:

But the great change has been wrought by spiritualism. It had been doing its work silently, until Mr. Conklin came here, in June, when the public manifestations converted and disarmed the most violent of our opponents. It may not be that every spiritualist here is ready to embrace our doctrines; but it is true that he is less prejudiced, less intolerant, and more inclined to justice and peace.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, even though the new Memnonia enrolled about a dozen men and women into its fall class, the issues of *Nichols' Monthly* became irregular, and it was rumored that not all the residents of the community were entirely pleased with the regimen at the community, which had become stricter and stricter.

⁷⁵ *Nichols' Monthly* (July 1856), 5.

⁷⁶ *Nichols' Monthly* (August 1856), 78.

Then, in the following spring of 1857, a bombshell burst in the press, as it became clear that Memnonia had closed, that *Nichols' Monthly* would cease publication, and that a radical change had taken place in the Nichols' thinking:

FREE LOVERS CONVERTED TO CATHOLICISM — We learn from *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate* of the 4th inst., that Dr. T.L. Nichols and Mary Gove Nichols, of Free-Love notoriety, were baptised on last Sunday afternoon, in St. Xavier Church, Sycamore street, Cincinnati, by the Rev. Father Oakley, Rector of the College, having been duly converted to the Catholic faith. With them were also baptized a daughter of Mrs. Nichols by a former husband, and a Miss Hopkins, of the Yellow Springs institution.

From the following paragraph in *The Telegraph*, it appears that the spirits were the instruments that effected these wonderful conversions:

"It is not a little remarkable that on either side of the Atlantic, at the same time, the spirits have advised their mediums, Mr. Hume [Daniel Dunglas Home], at Paris, and Dr. Nichols and family here, to seek salvation through the Church. If they are good spirits, we can easily see the motives of this advice; if bad ones, they are like those who went out of the possessed, as we read in the Gospel, confessing Jesus Christ."

Dr. Nichols, in the name of himself and his wife, has written a retraction of his Free-Love and Infidel teachings, in a letter to Archbishop Purcell, which is printed. The pith of the document is in the paragraph following:

"In the infinite mercy of Almighty God, we have been led, by what has seemed to us the direct and miraculous interposition of the Holy Spirit and by the blessed teachings of St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Francis Xavier, to the renunciation of infidelity, and to the humble acceptance of the faith and guidance of the Church. In deep humility and contrition, we submit ourselves to her divine order; we accept what she teaches, and we repudiate and condemn what she condemns. Whatever, in our writings and teachings, and in our lives, has been contrary to the doctrines, morality, and discipline of the Holy Catholic Church, we wish to retract and repudiate, and were it possible, to atone for."⁷⁷

To say that this was a shock to the general community of spiritualists and social radicals would be an understatement.⁷⁸ The dominant understanding of spiritualism, roughly speaking, was that it was phase two of

⁷⁷ *New-York Tribune*, April 7, 1857. In fact, it was not Mary's older daughter who came into the Church with them, but her younger daughter, by Thomas. A few other residents of Memnonia had already formally come into the Church several weeks prior to this.

⁷⁸ See *New England Spiritualist*, April 27, 1857, which took the occasion of the Nichols' conversion to issue a warning to the spiritualist community to resolve its internal differences; otherwise, it feared, that community might be absorbed by the Catholic Church.

the Protestant Reformation — or phase three, if the Enlightenment (rationalist or Hermetic) was counted as phase one. The Nichols were leading members of the avant-garde of reform, revolutionists in the realm of social theory and practice, standard bearers for free love.

So how did the conversion happen? In the Nichols' original letter, quoted only in part in the *New-York Tribune*, they explained that, late the previous year, they had been visited by the spirits of Jesuits — Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier — who had urged them to study the doctrines of the Catholic Church, something they had never done.⁷⁹ And, to put it briefly, one thing quickly led to another.

But that is not much of an explanation. What was the context of the Jesuits' visitation to the Nichols? The secular press would soon note that Thomas (and Mary, of course) had "attempted to harmonize some of the tenets of his former, with those of his present creed."⁸⁰

Well, yes. After all, Catholicism teaches such a thing as the Communion of Saints. The Catholic Church, in some sense — and as Thomas Nichols, years later, would declare it to be — was the world's oldest and largest spiritualist organization.⁸¹ It was their previous understanding of free love that the Nichols had rejected, not the communion of the dead with the living, of heaven with earth.

And, practically speaking, life at the short-lived Memnonia, contrary to what outsiders may have thought, was ordered as what they called, "provisionally — a benevolent despotism," rather, we may say, like a Cistercian monastery, complete with rules for fasting and abstinence, the establishment of an extended period of probation for those who wished to enter the life, and regular expectations of confession of infractions.⁸² By the

⁷⁹ "Letter to Our Friends and Co-Workers" from T. L. Nichols and Mary Gove Nichols, dated April 20, 1857. It appeared first in the Catholic newspaper, *The Boston Pilot*, and then was reprinted in *The (Cincinnati) Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, May 4, 1857. Details of the ecclesiastical correspondence (now archived at the University of Notre Dame) within the Catholic hierarchy when the bishops were mulling over whether and how to accept these particular converts into the Church are in Janet Hubly Noever, *Passionate Rebel: the Life of Mary Gove Nichols, 1810-1884*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1983, 249-253.

⁸⁰ "From Free Love to Confession — From Spirit Rapping to the Worship of Saints," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, September 28, 1858.

⁸¹ As he made clear in the midst of his heated cannonade of letters with William Howitt in which Nichols' Catholic spiritualism is opposed by Howitt's angry Protestant version — William Howitt, "Roman Catholic Spiritualism — The Appearances of the Holy Virgin in France and Alsace in 1872-3," *Spiritual Magazine* 3.1 (January 1875): 11-28; T. L. Nichols, "Roman Catholic Spiritualism — An 'Expostulation,'" *Spiritual Magazine* 3.1 (March 1875): 143-144; and William Howitt, "The Almighty Mary and Her French Displays," *Spiritual Magazine* 3.1 (April 1875): 152-162.

⁸² Moncure Daniel Conway, *The Dial: volume I* (Cincinnati, 1860), reprint (New York: AMS Press,

time it had opened, the Nichols had already adjusted the proposed rule of life there under what they called the law of Progression in Harmony, “which declares that there shall be no material union of the sexes, unless the best wisdom of those who love demands a child,” which is to say that, even between married couples, “the sensual license” was to be restricted under the demand of the “purer chastity of a higher law,” which required a severe abstinence. This was, as the Nichols admitted, something different than what they had advocated before, but, as Mary put it, “Suppose it is. What then? Are we never to grow wiser, because we have stated our best wisdom at a given time or times?”⁸³

In some respects, then, the conversion of the Nichols to Catholicism was not a bolt out of the blue, but an evolution from what had come before. And we might conjecture even more about how it came to be that Jesuit saints appeared to the Nichols, although this admittedly involves some cautious guesswork.

In the November 1856 issue of *Nichols' Monthly*, Thomas Nichols wrote:

We are reminded here, of a tribute due to another distinguished pioneer in social science, the French socialist, Cabet. A friend from Illinois recently brought us a brief sketch of his life, the constitution of the Icarian Community at Nauvoo, Ill., and other documents. We read these with interest, and then did what we had long contemplated doing — wrote to Mr. Cabet to send us a copy of his principal work, and the one which has converted thousands in France and Germany to the principles of communistic democracy. We received a polite and friendly note from Mr. Cabet, and a copy of his “*Voyage en Icarie*,” a volume of six hundred pages, which has not been translated into English. ...

The *Travels in Icaria*, have a curious resemblance, in some respects, to *Esperanza*; and if we had seen them, previous to the publication of fifteen chapters of the latter, we should have been compelled to alter it, to save us from a very probable charge of plagiarism. ... We regret to learn, as we do from some documents sent us, that the prosperity of Mr. Cabet’s community is threatened by serious, and apparently, irreconcilable dissensions; contrary, it seems to us, to the whole spirit of communistic principles and organization.⁸⁴

Étienne Cabet died in St. Louis, Missouri, on November 9th, 1856, in exile

1965), 236; Berthe-Monica Stearns, “Memnonia: The Launching of Utopia,” *The New England Quarterly* 15.2 (June 1942): 280-295; and Philip Gleason, “From Free-Love to Catholicism: Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Nichols at Yellow Springs,” *Ohio Historical Quarterly* 70 (October 1961): 283-307.

⁸³ “Correspondence,” *Nichols Monthly* (May 1856): 376.

⁸⁴ *Nichols' Monthly* (November 1856), 284-285.

from France and in exile from his own battered Icarian community in Nauvoo, Illinois. His death occurred practically at the same moment that the Nichols were reading his material, corresponding with him, and recognizing the remarkable similarity not only between his and their utopian novels, but also between his and their utopian experiments, including, we may suppose, the details of their practical implementation and the near certainty of their impending failures.

Cabet had been one of the age's greatest opponents of the Jesuits, who he regarded as constituting the most dangerous and powerful organization in Europe that blocked the spread of republican and revolutionary principles. For him, they were the endpoint of the corrupt betrayal of the communitarian ideals and practical life of what he believed was primitive Christianity. For Cabet, we might say, there was a specter haunting the face of Europe, and that specter was not Communism — with which he was wholly aligned — but Jesuitism. Yet his experiments in the New World in establishing a community based on his vision of primitive Christianity and revolutionary progress had failed. And he had just died, tasting that failure.

The Nichols make no mention of Cabet in their letter announcing their conversion, but simply take up the narrative with the wholly unexpected arrival of Jesuit spirits, but that does not mean there was not an intermediate step. In a letter written afterwards to the *Spiritual Telegraph*, Thomas Nichols provided more details about the appearances of the Jesuit spirits. He explained that after the first appearance, he read a "Protestant history" of the Order — presumably one of the volumes that Cabet had sent him. But then, six months later, "a venerable shade appeared, in circle, to Mrs. Nichols, wearing a dress resembling that worn by the Order, which she had not then seen, and having also a rope girdle about his waist, the knotted ends of which were stained with blood. He rebuked her earnestly for not having examined Jesuitism, and exclaimed, "*Justice! justice to the Society of Jesus!*" and said his name was Gonzales, and we heard afterward that he was one of the early Jesuit Fathers — a missionary and a martyr."⁸⁵

The Nichols then wrote to the Archbishop of Cincinnati, asking what books they should read, and he referred them to the Rector of St. Xavier's College. Interestingly, when the spirit of St. Ignatius Loyola then appeared to Mary Nichols, he gave her "a method of reduction," which Thomas described as an "order of life, that we believe to be Divinely inspired, and which we

⁸⁵ Charles Partridge, "The Nichols and Catholicism," *Spiritual Telegraph*, June 6, 1857. "Gonzales" was presumably St. Roque González de Santa Cruz (1576-1628), Jesuit missionary to South America and a martyr.

hope, by the grace of God, communicated through His Church, to live to in a holy obedience.” This “reduction” was undoubtedly a description of the Jesuit-run settlements — or “reductions” — in South America, which, we can presume, the Nichols would have seen as a kind of Jesuit and Catholic counterpart to the ordered settlement they had been attempting to establish at Memnonia.⁸⁶

Regardless of how it all happened, there definitely was a conversion, and it was not a superficial one — it involved turning away from what they had written and thought about “free love” and about the relationship between sexual intercourse and marriage. And when the conversion came, it had a consequence for their publishing activities. As a kind of male companion-piece to Mary’s semi-autobiographical free-love novel *Mary Lyndon*, which she had published to much notoriety in the summer of 1855, Thomas was in the midst of writing his own novel, *Esperanza*. Its protagonist was an earnest seeker, who finds his female affinity on a train travelling West, and who eventually accompanies her in bliss to a free-love utopia where sexual intercourse has been disentangled from marriage, and marriage from child-rearing. *Esperanza* was Thomas Nichols’ novelistic vision of what he had hoped Memnonia to be. Mary and Thomas had been serializing *Esperanza* in *Nichols’ Monthly*. Some of the instalments appeared in the issues of *Nichols’ Monthly* that carried those of Conklin’s *The Life of a Medium*.

But Thomas Nichols, newly baptized Catholic, was no longer interested in carrying through the publication of *Esperanza*, even though he had essentially finished it. So he handed over the whole project — his finished chapters, already stereotyped, and notes and drafts for the rest — to his spiritualist friend and publisher Valentine Nicholson in Cincinnati. Although he was no “free-lover” himself, Nicholson decided to publish it. When he did, however, he wrote an introduction that included his reservations about the work:

After twenty chapters of this book had been stereotyped, the opinions and faith of the author were in some respects so changed, that he engaged in a

⁸⁶ The Nichols, even after their conversion, never gave up their spiritualism. Mary continued to act as a medium for the rest of her life — see, for example, T. L. Nichols, “Spirits Materialising in the Open Air with the Medium in Sight,” *The Spiritualist* 12.26 (28 June 1878): 308. Thomas, especially after they had moved to England, continued to associate himself closely with the investigators and proponents of spiritualism, editing, for example, *Supramundane Facts in the Life of Rev. Jesse Babcock Ferguson, A.M., LL.D.; including twenty years’ observation of preternatural phenomena* (London: F. Pitman, 1865) and *Biography of the Brothers Davenport: with some account of the physical and psychical phenomena which have occurred in their presence* (London: Saunders, Otley, and Company, 1865). He was a regular contributor to *The Spiritualist Magazine* and to *Light*, and a very active member of the Marylebone Progressive Institute and Spiritual Evidence Society.

different field of labor.

The stereotype plates, together with manuscript for additional chapters to complete the volume, were then placed in the hands of the writer of this notice, with privilege to revise, change or abridge the manuscript, and publish or dispose of all at discretion.

The picture of the "School of Life," at Esperanza, is painted skillfully and in beautiful colors.

Human life, in purity, peace and love, is compared and placed in contrast with life in lust, discord and jealousy.

The thoughts of the writer are stated with remarkable clearness, and oftentimes in language very beautiful.

There is manifested a candor and an earnestness of purpose, proving the author to be one willing "to do, and to dare," for whatever he believed to be the cause of truth. On one subject treated upon, there are opinions advanced, which, to my mind, appear erroneous. I frankly acknowledge the permitting of those sentiments to go before the world, is to me a two-fold cause of regret; first and most, because of the deceptive and poisonous nature of all error, and its tendency to propagate itself wherever the seeds are sown; and also, because the mind of the author has changed since writing the same.

The only alternative was to suppress many vital truths, or permit a few errors to appear in connection with them. Remembering the expression of Jefferson, "Error of opinion may be tolerated, when reason is left free to combat it;" believing also, that truth has nothing to fear from the expression of mistaken opinions, or from the "freedom of thought, freedom of speech, or freedom of the press:" after meditating deliberately, my decision was to "let the tares grow with the wheat until harvest." That to which I have alluded as being objectionable, will be found on the pages where the writer was treating upon the question of love, and the true relation which the sexes should bear to each other.

Members of the society who are living in such great harmony and happiness at "Esperanza," are some of them represented as having intimate relations of love, and sharing the responsibility of offspring with more than one of the opposite sex. It is my own religious opinion, that upon a correct solution of this one great question, rests the entire subject of redemption and salvation from sin, sorrow and all human suffering. Original salvation must square the account made by "original sin," before the millennial day can dawn on the earth. I believe it, in accordance with the divine law, that no man or woman can ever find entire peace or tranquil rest of spirit, until the affections rest upon one love, with a positive assurance and faith that this one, in a conjugal sense, is entirely and exclusively their own, whose loving sympathy satisfies all the deep askings of the soul, hushing into silence all inclination of the spirit to wander abroad for other conjugal connection; every one thus truly mated with their own, will feel pained at the thought of having their partner in offspring mingle the finer spheres of life and love in sexual union with any other; and that no other unions, except such as are thus wholly one with each other, are worthy of the sacred name of marriage, or can give the right to parties of becoming partners in offspring.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Nicholson in Thomas Low Nichols, *Esperanza: My Journey Thither and What I Found There* (Cincinnati: Valentine Nicholson, 1860), iv-v.

Understanding the Nichols' new outlook, we can see why they abandoned the struggling Memnonia and moved back to Cincinnati, and why they radically revised their publishing priorities, ending publication of *Nichols' Monthly*. We can also understand why Conklin's *The Life of a Medium* most probably came to its abrupt halt, giving it, as it stands now, its unfinished form (the installments were never collected together, as Mary had intended, to be printed as a single volume), and concluded suddenly with an unconnected paean to free love — to be understood in its “highest” and pure sense — and written by ... well, it seems impossible to say. As Mary Nichols had written in her introduction to the work, she was helping to edit it. But perhaps *The Life of a Medium's* final instalment was Conklin's protest against the opposition to “free love” that he encountered on his visit to Yellow Springs or was simply his effort to wave a banner for it and explain how he understood it. It had become abundantly clear that even “free lovers” themselves (and even more so the broad public) might debate whether “free love” was good or bad, but that the term itself might easily hide a practical multitude of either virtues or vices or combine “high thinking” with “low living.” Conklin would write, in his newspaper, *The Principle*, about sexual and marriage relations. His article, like all “free lovers,” began by defining marriage and love as a spiritual thing. But, unlike other “free lovers,” he then abruptly descended into more practical matters and reached a conclusion that was unusual, at least for the group in which we was moving:

All external unions, therefore, that can be perpetuated on the external, untarnished, *should be* — for monogamy is the direct road to heaven. The external bodies may united without a conjunction of the spirit, and there be no fruit but the “apples of discord.” But we say that every prolific marriage, has the divine sanction; and though externally inharmonious, it should be maintained by the resolute will of both parties to harmonize in spite of the separating influence of the Adversary. The peace thus conquered will be permanent; but if a retreat is sorted to, it is so much loss of ground, which must be regained by hard fought battles in the future — for the Old Serpent must and will be subdued, and what is lost in one form must be gained in another.⁸⁸

6 Conklin Frees the Slaves

John Conklin was no stranger to Washington, D.C. In the spring of 1854, for example, he and Judd Pardee, accompanied by New York City spiritualists Samuel B. Brittan and ex-Senator Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, presided over a

⁸⁸ “The Eternal Conjugal Relation,” *The Principle* 2.9 (August 1858): 71.

raucous public séance there in which the spirit of Daniel Webster (through Pardee) and the spirit of Henry Clay (through Conklin) debated about the Nebraska Compromise.⁸⁹

In 1855, he again made a sojourn to Washington, D.C. and rented rooms at a boardinghouse (“Mrs. Robinson’s”) on Pennsylvania Avenue, advertised for customers, and enjoyed a brisk business there, being called back to New York only upon receiving word that his young son Samuel was ill. And to his New York rooms visitors to the city from all over the country came, including visitors from Washington. He knew people in the Capital, in other words.

In March 1861, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* ran an article about him that was picked up by other papers around the country and that connected him to President-elect Abraham Lincoln:

It so happened that Conklin, the celebrated test Medium, was in town the day that President Lincoln arrived, on his way to Washington. Being a Republican himself and not wishing to run an opposition to the distinguished visitant, he broke up his own Levees at the “Johnson” to attend that of the “Weddell.” The moment he set eyes on the Lion of the occasion he recognized in him a very peculiar individual he had formerly met at his rooms in New York, but at the time did not know his name. He used to come alone, sit silently, ask questions mentally, and depart quietly. On one occasion he got an extraordinary test which was thus chronicled in “The Spiritualist,” published in New York at the time:

A Good Test.

A gentleman called upon Mr. Conklin on the evening of March 21st, for the purpose of communicating with his spirit friends; and after asking some twenty mental questions, all of which were correctly answered, he wrote the following question:

“Can you inform me of Mr. K’s condition?”

It was answered “Yes, he is present now.”

Q. “When did he die?”

A. “Yesterday morning; he is happy, but cannot communicate yet.”

The gentleman stated that Mr. K. was a friend of his, and that he had left him three days previously, in Wisconsin, twelve hundred miles distant — said by his physician to be fast recovering from a long and severe illness.

The gentleman called again the next morning and stated that a brother-in-law of Mr. K’s had just received a telegraphic despatch, informing him of the death of Mr. K., on the morning mentioned by the spirit.

Here was intelligence received twelve hours in advance of the despatch of an event which had occurred twelve hundred miles distant. (Savans, please explain?)

Mr. Conklin says that Mr. Lincoln is the identical ‘gentleman’ referred to in the above extract, that he remembers him from the peculiarities of person,

⁸⁹ “Spirit Rappings,” (*Washington*) *Evening Star*, March 24, 1854. The Washington residents who joined in the séance included spiritualists Cranstoun Laurie, a Post Office bureaucrat, and his daughter Belle, and Henry Clay Preuss, who was also a government clerk, in the War Department.

his frequent calls, and as the recipient of this particular test. So with this link of connection established between the spheres, spiritual association with the patriots of the past, thus availing himself of the wisdom of the two worlds; the President elect ought to have his political pathway so enlightened as to give the country assurances of perpetual union and peace.⁹⁰

The claim was generally ignored by the public, however, and discounted by the newspapers that noticed it, especially by those eager to present the new president in ways most acceptable to the nation. In any event, there was no confirmation of Conklin's claim or further investigation of it, or at least nothing the results of which appeared in the secular press. Emma Hardinge, however, reported something else. She wrote that after the *Plain Dealer* article linked Lincoln and Conklin, the article was submitted to Lincoln for his comment. The President-elect "quietly glanced over it and in answer to the earnest request that he would furnish a contradiction to the papers, replied: "The only falsehood in the statement is that the half of it has not been told. This article does not begin to tell the wonderful things I have witnessed.""⁹¹

Most people would have been filled with dread if they thought it were true that spirit mediums were guiding the President. Most spiritualists, however, would have been filled with hope.

Spirit mediums had not been shy about passing along portentous messages from famous leaders of the past, who had supposedly enlisted themselves in spirit form, in a mission to communicate predictions about matters great and small. Conklin, as we have seen, sometimes took to the newspapers to make such predictions. But he and his fellow mediums' earlier spirit predictions and pronouncements about the impending political crisis in the state of the nation's affairs were brought to spiritualists' minds at the beginning of the War. Conklin had made his 1856 tour accompanied by his fellow trance medium Levi Judd Pardee to cities in upstate New York — Syracuse, Albany, and Buffalo — and then on into Ohio, to Cleveland and Cincinnati. While they were in Buffalo, they met with a gathering of

⁹⁰ "The President Elect a Spiritualist — He Calls on Conklin the Medium and Gets a Good Test — The Country Safe," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 18, 1861. *The Banner of Light*, March 23, 1861, copied the *Plain Dealer* story about Conklin recognizing Lincoln, but ran it on a back page in an inconspicuous place and prefaced the article "The President a Spiritualist," with these words: "The Cleveland Plain Dealer is responsible for the following:" and no other comment. The article here from the *Plain Dealer* says it is quoting *The Spiritualist* from New York, but there was no such paper. More than likely, the quote is from Conklin's own newspaper, *The Principle*.

⁹¹ Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 301. This she published in 1870. I do not see that anyone has been able to carry this obviously important account (if true) of Hardinge's, made nearly a decade after it was supposed to have happened, back to an original source roughly contemporaneous with the event. Nor have I been able to do so. As a result I have to withhold judgment on its veracity.

spiritualists, and then were accompanied back to their lodgings by Stephen Albro, the editor of Buffalo's spiritualist newspaper, the *Age of Progress*. An article in the *Spiritual Magazine* in 1862, entitled "The Civil War in America Predicted," reminded its readers of what happened then, as published at the time by Albro:

On Sunday evening last, at the close of the meeting at the Hall, we accompanied Mr. Pardee and Mr. Conklin to the room occupied by the latter gentleman. Whilst sitting and conversing by the stove, the right hand of Mr. P. was extended to us. We clasped it, and looking up into his face perceived that he was entranced, and that we were shaking hands with a spirit. The friendly visitant spoke to us most acceptably, and as an old acquaintance. At the close we desired the spirit to convey the name which it bore when in the physical form. Just as we made the request the medium's hand grasped ours most fully: his form was straightened up, his countenance began to change, his voice underwent a change of tone, and he spoke as follows: 'Another would speak to you. I was known by the name of Andrew Jackson when a resident of your sphere; and I come to-night, my venerable friend to bear witness before the Eternal, that this, thy beloved country, is to feel the fire and sword. Let it go forth, through thy journal to my people — mine because I love them. Tell them — though I would fain weep in proclaiming it — that they are to pass through more than revolutionary agonies. I know this if I know anything. The voice of the times speaks it in my ears clearly and distinctly. I would that this people knew where they stand, and that their rulers could feel the issues of a few years to come. Then would they forsake their fleshpots and eat of the pure meat of righteousness and justice. They are, as it were, pitching pennies, whilst the nation's heart throbs convulsively under the heavy load that threatens to stop and still its motion.

"If you could, my friend, see mighty minds, as I see them, engaged in the work of maturing events, then would you know to a certainty, that the foundations of your States are to be shaken to their lowest depths. What! While the ship of State is irresistibly driving towards the breakers, your statesmen are deeply immersed in the business of aggrandizement!

"The false watchers on the tower may cry, "ALL IS WELL" — but I say, ALL IS WRONG — that is, in the government. To me, the White House looks like a black mass; it is fair without, but it is full of corruption and dead men's bones. Here and there, like a stray white sheep, is found in the national councils a pure man. The end of all this cannot be escaped.

"Your country's worthies, who have gone before, with one united solemn voice, proclaim to your people the horrors of CIVIL WAR! Nothing short of that can serve as a stepping-stone to a better and more righteous condition. Causes will rush out into effects; and those who fought in the past to give you independence and a country, by divine wisdom unto them given, are engaged in the work which shall pass you through the fire, so that, purified, the nation may come out redeemed by the influence from the higher life, depending upon Heaven, not upon politicians, and sustained by the influence from the higher life.

“You will live to see this; but fear not. God by his spirits will guide and protect those who stand fast by truth and justice. I have done.”⁹²

The Republican victory and the beginning of the War brought to the Capital a wave of political operatives, government workers, and military officers who were dedicated to the cause of general reform, making Washington suddenly a very fruitful field for spiritualists — and for intriguers and schemers. The political atmosphere in Washington was thick with rumors about Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln’s possible attendance at séances.⁹³ And the rumors, fears, and hopes sometimes rose to the surface:

Mr. Lincoln, with his aiders and abettors, has assumed great responsibilities in thus revolutionizing the government; but unlike our old fashioned presidents, who were compelled to consult the constitution, he has, in a secret hole of the White House, a rapping table, which discourses sweeter music than ever issued from Hamlet’s pipe. It is law, constitution and gospel; and the great magical power which gathers armies, presages events, equalizes whites and negroes, and converts paper into gold. Washington, Jefferson and Jackson, Caesar, Hannibal, Napoleon, Wellington, and all the other great men of history, wake from their slumbers and protrude their counsels through it; direct the plans of battles, the windings of anacondas, the policy of proclamations, and the movements of armies; so that a new dispensation looms up around the present power, while laws and constitutions flee before the mystical light, as ragged relics of the vulgar past. Delphos had her oracles, Olympus her enchantments; but all now sink to insignificance before the superior powers of this wonderful table. We may satirize executive imposture and delusion, but no irony can equal realities. The nation is virtually on fire, its property melting in the general conflagration, and the blood of its children flowing from its mountains to its oceans; while executive councils gather in dark rooms, and direct armies and a great nation’s policy, as they themselves are directed by spirit rappings.⁹⁴

⁹² *Spiritual Magazine* 3.9 (September 1862): 425; for the same remembrance, see *Banner of Light*, July 6, 1861, and for an earlier reprinting of the *Age of Progress* story, see “How to Try the Prophets,” *Spiritual Telegraph*, July 5, 1856. Chicago industrialist and eccentric spiritualist Thomas Richmond claimed after the War that he had received a message before the War from the spirit of John Quincy Adams by way of spirit medium John Murray Spear that predicted it — Thomas Richmond, *God Dealing with Slavery: God’s instrumentalities in emancipating the African slave in America: spirit messages from Franklin, Lincoln, Adams, Jackson, Webster, Penn, and others; to the author, Thomas Richmond* (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1870), 72-74. Other Spear followers, notably Simon C. Hewitt, predicted political — if not cosmic — cataclysm, and a breaking up of the Union in the years immediately before the war.

⁹³ For a fuller discussion of this, see John B. Buescher, “Across the Dead Line: Lincoln and the Spirits during the War and Reconstruction Era Washington,” http://spirithistory.iapsop.com/jb_buescher_across_the_dead_line.pdf

⁹⁴ A Citizen of Ohio [David Quinn], *Interior Causes of the War; the Nation Demonized and Its President a Spirit-Rapper* (New York: M. Doolady, 1863) 94-95. An article — surely a newspaper reporter’s deliberate hoax — that supposedly detailed a long séance at the White House attended

Another variation on this fearful vision would come to see Lincoln as a mere figurehead, controlled by a secret cabal of radical conspirators whose aim was to destroy the country and establish a sort of spiritualist utopia.⁹⁵

The stories of séances at the White House rested on a substratum of truth. Mrs. Lincoln, in particular — whose dressmaker and confidante, Elizabeth Keckley was a devoted spiritualist — doted on a few mediums, Charles H. Foster, Charles J. Colchester, Nettie Colburn, and the Laurie family among others — did more than merely dabble in it, and White House staff and administration officials on at least one occasion had to intervene in order to prevent them from gaining an advantage over her. There were men in Congress, however, such as Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson, Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade, Ohio Congressman Joshua Giddings, and ex-Congressman Daniel Somes from Maine, and men in the Lincoln administration, who were ardent and more or less public believers in spiritualism.

The entire city was awash in an atmosphere inhabited by the spectral presence of dead soldiers, the laments of the founding spirits of the country, electrified rumors and alarms of battles fought elsewhere, prophecies of the future, and the undercurrents of political intrigues and conspiracies. Many people, in government and out of it, sat in spiritualist circles — even if they chose not to make it a matter of public knowledge — and sought clarity,

by Lincoln and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles (Welles' wife was in fact a spiritualist) was copied nationwide, often without reservation: Prior Melton, "A Readable Sketch. Spiritualism at the White House," *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*, dated Washington, April 23, 1863 (The medium was "Charles E. Shockle.") Reprinted, for example, as "Spiritualism at the White House," *Cleveland Morning Leader*, June 4, 1863 — "The following correspondence of the Boston Gazette gives an account of an evening's 'spiritual' entertainment at the Presidential mansion"; the spiritualist papers were more skeptical; see *Herald of Progress*, May 1863, 8; Lincoln's political opponents in the run-up to the 1864 election did not hesitate to use it as an unquestioned fact, however, as in *Old Abe's Jokes, fresh from Abraham's bosom, contain all his issues, excepting the "greenbacks," to call in some of which, this work is issued* (New York: T. R. Dawley, 1864), 35-40.⁹⁵ For example, see (spiritualist, but vigorously anti-war) Fayette Hall, *The Secret and Political History of the War of the Rebellion, the causes leading thereto, and the effects showing how Abraham Lincoln came to be president of the United States, exposing the secret working and conspiring of those in power, and the motive and purpose of prolonging the war for four years!* (New Haven: F. Hall, 1890), 21-27, and his later book, *The Copperhead; or, The Secret Political History of Our Civil War Unveiled. Showing the Falsity of New England, Partizan History, How Abraham Lincoln Came to be President. The secret working and conspiring of those in power. Motive and purpose of prolonging the war for four years* (New Haven: 1902). Hall was in fact an acquaintance of Lincoln during the War years and made himself familiar with others most often implicated in the wildest stories about Lincoln and séances, such as John Conklin, Nettie Colburn, the Laurie family, and — as Hall thought, the prime mover and orchestrator of the Laurie séances — Augustus Wattles. Hall thought that Conklin must not have been a useful part of Wattles' cabal, because of Conklin's dissolute habits—he was a liar, a cheat, and a drunkard, according to Hall.

illumination, and comfort there. One visitor wrote, "At Washington, I found more private mediums amongst bold, daring, thinking men, and fair cultured women, than in any one other great centre of America. Drawn together as we deemed, under high official though very reserved patronage, and in circles where Spiritism was rather the fashion than the subject of scorn or abuse, we had the pleasure of witnessing all manner of astounding evidences of force, exercised in such modes as baffled every attempt at explanation except that which the force gave of itself, namely, as the work of ministering spirits."⁹⁶

The rumors about the Lincolns' interest in spiritualism and in their having invited mediums to the White House continued through the War. Retired New York Supreme Court Justice John Edmonds, a leading light in spiritualist circles, responding to those rumors, therefore wrote to the President:

I have heard & read in various ways, without surprise that you, Sir, are so far interested in the subject [of spiritualism], as to have entered upon its investigation.

I express to you my congratulations on the event. You will find your compensation as you "march along" & surely no man more justly deserves the consolation it can bring, for no man was ever placed in a more trying & responsible position than that in which you have been placed.⁹⁷

So to begin our investigation into whether John Conklin was consulted by Lincoln, let me state that a reasonable reading of the evidence yields the conclusion that séances were indeed conducted in the Lincoln White House, although in looking at the claims and counterclaims about who was involved, how often they occurred, and what importance they had for the participants (especially the President), the same reasonable reading of the evidence yields the conclusion that it is extraordinarily difficult to see what exactly that can reveal about Lincoln's mind and his course of action. Considering the case of John Conklin demonstrates this. Other mediums, spiritualists, and contemporary non-believers named him as one of the mediums who conducted séances for Lincoln, but the evidence is confused and unclear

⁹⁶ As reported in "Extracts from 'Ghostland' Vol. II," *Unseen Universe* 1.14 (July 1892): 171, by Emma Hardinge Britten, who may or may not have been accompanying this spiritualist visitor to Washington.

⁹⁷ Judge John W. Edmonds to Abraham Lincoln, June 1, 1863. Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. This letter Lincoln certainly did read, for he had his secretary thank Edmonds for books he had sent along with the letter, one of which was probably *Further Communications from the World of Spirits, on subjects highly important to the human family by Joshua, Solomon, and Others, including the Rights of Man, by George Fox, given through a lady*, 2nd edition (New York: Published for the Proprietor, 1862), which showed up in Lincoln's personal library.

about the extent of his contact with him, and so we will have to look at that evidence in some detail.

From the time that Lincoln arrived in Washington, his staff maintained a sort of cordon around the President to protect him from being overwhelmed by the rush of office-seekers, opportunists, ideologues, connivers, ill-wishers, and just plain unmanageable folks who not only descended upon Washington and camped out in hotels and boarding houses, but also rained down a storm of letters on the White House, asking for favors, giving advice, issuing warnings, declaring prophecies, and the like. One of Lincoln's correspondence secretaries, William Osborn Stoddard, who read the bags of letters that came to the President, wrote:

The spiritualists favored him constantly, and I still have in my possession urgent epistles signed with the *fac simile* signatures of half the dead worthies in our history, not to speak of sundry communications from the Apostles and the Angel Gabriel, of the correctness of whose signatures I am not so certain. As a general thing, during the war, we believed that so soon as a man went clean crazy his first absolutely insane act was to open a correspondence, on his side, with the President.⁹⁸

The great mass of these letters Stoddard and others on the staff would toss into the trash. A few of them, however, were not discarded and eventually found their way into the Lincoln Papers, now at the Library of Congress. One of them, for example, dated October 4, 1862, was from spirit medium Lydia Smith, and it consisted of a trance message delivered through her from "your Heavenly Father and the God of all Nations" declaring the purpose of Providence in breaking up the kingdom, overthrowing the old world, ushering in the era of rightness, and on and on breathlessly for several pages. She ended her missive this way:

Now Abram Lincoln I want you to call together 6 of your best men in the Army on the first day possible certainly as soon as Saturday and if impossible that day be sure and do so Monday next at 10 forenoon I want you to have this Medium present and I will tell you & the 6 beside yourself just what to do that will speedily terminate this Devilish war now existing in your midst Now do as I tell you or if not you will have to suffer the consequences of not Hearing to me ... given through Lydia Smith the Medium for Jesus Christ and the Father God

⁹⁸ William Osborn Stoddard, *Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln's Secretary*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 200; orig. ed. 1880), 157.

Hearken to me all ye ends of the earth That I may give all you the immortal birth That you may reap a rich future reward By serving me the sovereign Lord

And then the "Sovereign Lord" proceeded, most helpfully one might say, to add: "Lydia Smith Medium which I give through to all that will hear can be found at Mrs Fitzgeralds boarding house 476 Pennsylvania Avenue." She was, it seems, waiting in a boardinghouse down the street hoping to be summoned to the White House.

SPIRITUALISM.
THE KEY TO UNLOCK THE SCRIPTURES.

J. B. CONKLIN, the great Test Medium, of New York, is now in Washington City, by spirit directions, and will give sittings to those who desire to hear from their departed friends.

The skeptic, the scoffer, as well as those who believe in the immortality of the soul, and wish to know the truth, are invited to witness and bear testimony that this man is a medium through which spirits telegraph to their friends on earth, and make known to them past, present, and future facts.

Mr. C. is directed to say that he fears not the most rigid investigation of the powers which control him.

His private rooms are at No. 411 Thirteenth street, near G, back of Willards' Hotel.

Feb 5-1 * J. B. CONKLIN.

(Washington, DC) National Republican, February 5, 1862

Another example is a letter sent by New York City professional medium Rebecca Beck, dated November 30, 1864. She was "forwarding" a letter dictated to her by the spirit of Col. Edward Dickinson Baker, a Senator and friend of Lincoln's who had been killed while ineptly commanding a Union force at the Battle of Ball's Bluff in October 1861. The letter congratulates Lincoln on his reelection, encourages him in his resolve to achieve victory in the War, and wishes him well. The letter from Lincoln's departed friend then ends this way:

And now my dear friend I have a request to make of you — It is this — I want you to do us justice — by answering this and and [sic] the receipt of the communication dated as follows March 23d 1862 November 14th 1862 November 29th 1864 — I find the medium is honest and I want she should have the proof of the truthfulness of the spirits who have communicated through her to you — She being at the time in an uncontentious [sic] state — I

hope you will favor me by complying with this request — I know you will
you are so kind

Making clear that “Baker” — via the “uncontious” Mrs. Beck — had been
sending letters to Lincoln for quite a while without the favor of the
President’s reply.

So we may suppose that there was a sort of army of mediums, not
just scattered in far parts of the nation but even crowded into boardinghouses
close to the White House trying to get through the President’s defenses in
order to provide him with messages of vital and historic importance from the
spirits. Or something like that

An ad in the Washington newspaper, the *Daily National Intelligencer*,
makes it clear that John Conklin, at least by the beginning of 1862, was one of
these mediums who had come to Washington, who was living in a
boardinghouse, and who was awaiting his chance:

Spiritualism — Mr. J. B. Conklin, the Spiritual Medium, can be seen for a few
days at 558 Pennsylvania avenue. Hours from 10 AM to 10 PM.⁹⁹

But most importantly, the Lincoln Papers contain the original of a letter,
dated December 28, 1861, consisting of several pages. The cover page has
this:

My friend will be please have this conveyed to his excellency the President.

Next, there is a page with this:

I have been sent from the city of New York by spiritual influence to the
interest of the nation. I can’t return until I see you. Appoint the time.
Yours, etc.

Signed. J. B. Conkling.

Then this:

The enclosed communication was given through the medium J. B. Conklin
599 Broadway N.Y. this P.M. with a request that it be forwarded to his
excellency A. Lincoln. New York Dec 23, 1861.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 27, 1862. During January, other ads Conklin placed in the
paper announced him as being at “411 Thirteenth Street, between G and H ... back of Willards’
Hotel.”

¹⁰⁰ Note the date — just two months after Baker died at Ball’s Bluff. The letter is accessible via the
Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress website as *I[sic] B. Conklin to Abraham
Lincoln, Saturday, December 28, 1861 (Spiritual communication with Edward D. Baker)*. The

And then finally the “enclosed communication,” which is in fact five pages of a missive written backwards in Conklin’s inimitable style for receiving dictation from a spirit. The text, when reversed, reads:

My esteemed and best earthly friend.

You will no doubt be surprised to receive this from me, but, I like millions of other disembodied spirits feel a desire to convey expressions of gratitude and hope to earthly friends. I am not dead. I still live, a conscious individual with hope, aspirations and interest for the Union still alive.

I experienced a happy reality, a glorious change, by the process termed ‘death.’

I would communicate with you personally; if not now, after the close of your official term.

I will be with you in spirit and with many others impress and strengthen you.

Man lives on earth, to live elsewhere, and that elsewhere is ever present. Heaven and Hell are conditions, not localities. E. Baker.

Which was “translated” into normal writing, helpfully, on yet another sheet that was enclosed with the letter.

How did Conklin succeed in getting this letter past Lincoln’s staff so that it still resides today in the Lincoln Papers, having only turned up when Robert Lincoln handed over his father’s White House papers and correspondence to the Library of Congress at the turn of the twentieth century? Was it sheer luck? Not at all, according to testimony that grew and grew over the years, extending the story of John Conklin and Abraham Lincoln and providing the most extraordinary comfort to spiritualists around the country and even the rest of the world, by seeming to demonstrate to them the truth that spirits were guiding the affairs of the nation during a critical moment in its history. A letter was delivered directly to the President, it was explained, and when Lincoln received it, he decided to have Conklin come to the White House and commence a series of séances there.

In early 1864, Conklin bragged to one of the people attending his séances in Glasgow. The person was unsympathetic, so we should take that into account when assessing his description of what Conklin said, but it still must have represented something like what he did in fact say. Among other things, Conklin claimed “that recently in Washington, whilst senators and soldiers, secretaries and under secretaries were waiting, dozens deep, for

originals are reproduced at the back of this volume.

audience with Abe Lincoln, no sooner did that great man hear the name of the still greater C — kl — n, than at once, &c., &c.”¹⁰¹

By 1868, we hear of Conklin telling his story of conducting sittings with the President to many people. He gave a lecture at Dodworth Hall on Broadway in New York City in May of that year, for example, advertised as “President Lincoln and Queen Victoria,” in which, according to a report of the lecture, he described his séances with Lincoln. After repeating his 1861 claim that he had recognized Lincoln after the election as being the same gentleman who had attended his sittings in New York City, he went on, as reported by his friend, spiritualist and writer Thomas R. Hazard:

After Mr. Lincoln’s inauguration Mr. Conklin visited Washington several times and held frequent séances, (some thirty in all) by request of the President at the White House. Some of these invitations were written, and the simplicity and straightforwardness of the writer was indicated by the style of the address, being franked by “A. Lincoln” to “J. B. Conklin, spirit medium.” I have inspected one of these written invitations. It is signed “A. Lincoln” and requests Mr. Conklin to come to him at 7 o’clock on an evening named.

Among the communications made to Mr. Lincoln were some that purported to come from the spirit of Col. Baker, in which the President was warned to be on his guard against assassination. Mr. C. remarked that he believed that Lincoln would have been President at this time had he properly heeded the warning thus given him. This may perhaps in part at least, account for the apprehension of sudden death, that it is known Mr. Lincoln was in the habit of giving expression to for some months before he was murdered. Mr. Conklin stated incidentally the purport of many séances he had held with prominent public characters, including Joshua R. Giddings, Millard Fillmore and Benjamin F. Wade, all of whom manifested much interest in the subject.¹⁰²

The *New-York Times* reporter covering the lecture gave a briefer summary of Conklin’s remarks and was obviously less impressed — “At none of these [séances], however, did anything more astounding happen than the receipt of a couple of spirit messages from Col. Baker, bidding Mr. Lincoln to take care of his life, and suggesting something in regard to the Emancipation Proclamation.”¹⁰³ So Conklin had given him a warning or a caution about the threat of assassination, just as many others — and most of them professing no special powers of prophecy — had done and continued to do throughout the War. After Lincoln’s death, these could seem prescient or even literally

¹⁰¹ *Spirit-Rapping in Glasgow in 1864*, 10.

¹⁰² “J. B. Conklin at the ‘White House,’” *Newport (Rhode Island) Mercury*, May 16, 1868.

¹⁰³ “Spiritualism,” *New-York Times*, May 4, 1868.

inspired. But note that last remark in the *Times* — “suggesting something in regard to the Emancipation Proclamation.”

Very soon thereafter we find evidence that Conklin was making a far greater claim than that. Emma Hardinge wrote that Conklin had alleged to her “that the Spirits not only urged the subject of the emancipation proclamation, but that they, in the name of the Independence Fathers, spelled out, *letter by letter*, the preliminary draft of that famous document. The result of these interviews was the President’s proposition to his Cabinet to issue such a proclamation, and the final success of the stupendous work, as recorded in the national archives of the country.”¹⁰⁴

And even grander yet. Writing at an earlier time, Hardinge, describing an unnamed someone who was almost certainly Conklin, said:

A gentleman lately resident in Washington and only known by his most intimate friends as a strong physical medium, became familiarly acquainted with the contents of many an eventful state paper before it ever saw official light — aye, even whilst it was being issued from the spiritual press over the telegraphic wires which run between the mortal and immortal worlds. Doubtless the human “wire-pullers,” who surround the seats of office and plant their batteries of influence so as to make the nation’s welfare bear primarily on their own, imagine they have exerted an immense power in the great ultimates of national destiny but they little deem that there are also invisible machinists at work enclosing themselves no less than the country in a network of hidden causes, whose woof is spun by the hands of mightier statesmen than earth, and rulers whose viewless batteries of power galvanize even the very stones beneath men’s feet into preachers of their resistless purposes.¹⁰⁵

Hardinge strongly hinted that the secret center of these wheels within wheels, the true central earth-station through which the spirits were communicating their intents and broadcasting their efforts was in New York City, at 553 Broadway, the headquarters of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, funded by Charles Partridge and Horace Day. The headquarters building had rooms where mediums offered sittings. And Conklin had a room there. Hardinge, in referring to this spiritual wire-pulling, which, she hinted, began early enough to have influenced the 1856 Presidential election of James Buchanan, would later write [*italics in the original*]:

¹⁰⁴ Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth-Century Miracles, or, Spirits and their work in every country of the earth: a complete historical compendium of the great movement known as “modern spiritualism”* (New York: William Britten, 1884), 485.

¹⁰⁵ Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 301-302.

Many and many are those who know how for long months prior to their public issue, *State documents and Congressional ordinances existed in the secret archives of an unconsidered spirit circle*. Many are the eyes that will glance over these pages, that will have seen the wires of the national machinery pulled by invisible hands, and some few there are who know that a mightier Congress than that which sits at Washington has helped to lay the foundations of the New World's destiny in the spirit-circle rooms of 553 Broadway.¹⁰⁶

That is certainly the sort of claim that touched on what some people had been afraid of and that others had hoped for.

As an important aside, we can also note that Conklin was said by other spiritualist lecturers and mediums — fairly reliable diarists like Warren Chase, for example — to have conducted some sittings in the White House during Lincoln's time there, and some of them apparently described other séances he had conducted — presumably outside the White House — in which Lincoln was in attendance, but in disguise. Giving testimony to the committee of the London Dialectical Society that was investigating spiritualism in 1870, Emma Hardinge made this claim:

Any strong emotion, Mrs. Hardinge considered, was also detrimental to the exercise of spiritual power. Mr. Conklin, of whom she had previously spoken, was invited to attend a number of séances at Washington with some five or six gentlemen, who were evidently desirous not to be known. The manifestations were very marked and decisive, until Mr. Conklin discovered that one of the gentlemen present was no other than President Lincoln; when his anxiety and surprise became so great as entirely to stop the manifestations, which were not again renewed till a mutual explanation had restored him to his normal state of mind. Thus, it would seem, that any very strong emotion had also the effect of rendering the magnetism positive, and neutralising the action of the spirits.¹⁰⁷

And over the years Hardinge would remain certain of Conklin's influence on the President, for she declared to an audience in Ulverston in 1882 that "she was prepared to prove that the emancipation of the slaves in America was due to the rapping out, through Mr. J. B. Conklin, of a spirit message."¹⁰⁸

So John Conklin definitely had the reputation among spiritualists — and among others who cared — that he had conducted a number of séances for President Lincoln and that, among other things, the spirits had conveyed

¹⁰⁶ Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 141.

¹⁰⁷ *Report on spiritualism of the committee of the London Dialectical Society, together with the evidence, oral and written, and a selection from the correspondence* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1871), 112.

¹⁰⁸ *Light* (15 April 1882): 180.

something about the Emancipation Proclamation to him, perhaps just the need to issue it, or perhaps even the entire first draft of it, letter by letter.

But how did Conklin get into the White House to make his first contact with the President? Let us remember the Conklin-Baker letter in the Lincoln Papers. According to a New York state attorney, Cyrus Oliver Poole (who had been nominated by Lincoln and confirmed as consul to Mexico during the Civil War), Conklin had stayed at his house for weeks at a time and that on one of those occasions he had told Poole that,

In the year previous he had breakfasted and dined with President Lincoln in the White House at Washington; that in reply to the question, "How that happened?" Conklin said, in substance, that he was imperatively ordered by his spirit guide, to, at once, go over to Washington, and on his arrival notify the President of the fact; that he immediately went there and sent a note to Mr. Lincoln; that in reply, a note was sent back making an appointment when the President would see him; that he stayed in that city a week or two and gave the President during that time four spiritual séances in his private room; that on seeing Mr. Lincoln he then recognized him as having been at his rooms on Broadway, New York, before he was elected President."¹⁰⁹

We observe that, according to Conklin's account as remembered by Poole, Lincoln would have already known who Conklin was when he presented himself as requesting a meeting, because the President had already visited Conklin's sitting rooms in New York. So the letter in the Lincoln Papers would have been Conklin's request for a meeting, with a spirit message attached. And Lincoln would not have been unfamiliar with who was asking for the meeting, although Conklin, by this account, would not yet have known that.

By 1871 or 1872 at least, railroad magnate and devout and sketchy spiritualist Simon Peter Kase from Philadelphia (and earlier from Danville, Pennsylvania) was claiming that *he* had been the instrument — guided by spirits of course — for delivering the letter to Lincoln.

Before we look at the claim, however, consider the source of this information: Simon Kase, "known among his acquaintances as the railroad king, or the man who can build a railroad without money."¹¹⁰ He did this by materializing them out of other people's money. He ran an iron foundry early in his life, but turned to speculations in railroad construction, by which he made most of his wealth. To be more precise, he found investors in railway projects and used his position with these projects, as president or "financial

¹⁰⁹ Cyrus O. Poole, "The Religious Convictions of Abraham Lincoln. A Study," *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, November 28, 1885.

¹¹⁰ "Simon Peter Kase, the Man Who Looks Like General Washington," *Williamsport Daily Gazette and Bulletin*, July 9, 1880, reprinting a portion of an article in the *Philadelphia Press*.

agent” for them, to control the expenditure of the investors’ money. Sometimes the projects were completed and sometimes they ran into financial trouble, which Kase spent considerable effort in trying to dampen before it came crashing down on him. In an almost worshipful biographical essay about him (which Kase would include as the introduction to his explanation of his role in the Lincoln-Conklin meeting), he is portrayed as one of the Age’s true visionaries and projectors, an entrepreneur who did not shy away from risky ventures, but who had run into difficulties from being too trusting of business associates. This should give some flavor of how the article treated Kase:

He is one of those rare specimens of the great *genus homo* that are not met at the corner of every street. Once in a while they dash across the common track in their seemingly eccentric course, understood no more by the masses than the origin and mission of a comet.¹¹¹

The question about whether Kase was just an enthusiastic risk-taker who was always in danger of being taken advantage of by his associates or whether he was fully conscious of the frauds and connivances that constantly orbited around him extended beyond his business activities. After he became a true believer in spiritualism, he patronized a raft of mediums. After his first wife died and he remarried a woman who was as much a spirit enthusiast as he was, he moved to Philadelphia and the couple’s house there became the epicenter of the most egregiously fraudulent and extravagant mediumistic manifestations in the city, often involving the mediums’ scamming hundreds and thousands of dollars from the wealthy and curious citizens of Philadelphia and New York.¹¹²

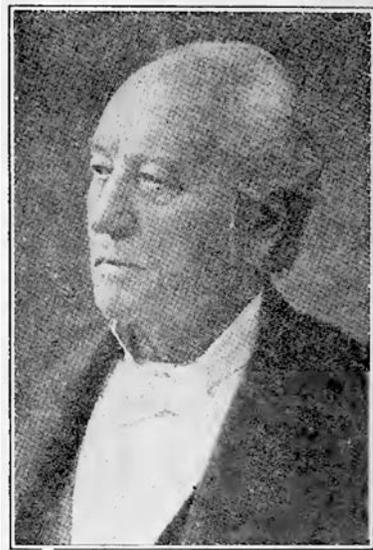
Simon Kase’s friends wondered whether he actually believed all that the wildest mediums were showing and telling him. Spiritualist writer Emma Hardinge alluded to this when she prefaced her presentation of his account of the Conklin-Lincoln letter with this assessment of Kase:

¹¹¹ D. H. B. Brower, *Danville, Montour County, Pennsylvania: A collection of historical and biographical sketches* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Lane S. Hart, 1881), 166-170.

¹¹² Louis N. Megaree, *Seen and Heard* (Philadelphia) 4.168 (23 March 1904): 3732-3741. Besides elaborate full-form cabinet materializations (sometimes including ballet troupes of “spirit” dancers) and the rigging of mechanical devices in the Kases’ home to simulate the action of the spirits, the mediums who the Kases hosted produced paintings “precipitated” on blank canvasses, and it was while the Kases were promoting these that they met and became the backers of the rather loathsome spiritualist frauds Henry J. Foulkes and Ann Odelia Diss Debar, in support of whom Simon Kase testified at Diss Debar’s trial for fraud in New York.

It should be stated, that Colonel Kase is a noble-hearted, philanthropic gentleman, whose warmest efforts have ever been given to the advancement of Spiritualism, and whose residence in Philadelphia is open to all comers who plead "Spiritualism" as their claim for hospitality. It cannot be expected but that this munificent spirit is often abused by the unworthy. Colonel Kase, however, as well as his amiable wife, evidently deems that it is "better to be the wronged, than the wronger."¹¹³

Perhaps that was evident to his friends, but perhaps it was not. Was he simply a genial naïf dedicated to the spiritualist cause but often in danger of being wronged or was he something of a "wronger" himself who found it useful to project a persona of innocence?



Simon Peter Kase
Reason Magazine, 1927

The question is not an idle one. In September 1883, a judgment was handed down against him in a protracted and well-publicized case in which he was pitted against the former investors of the Danville, Hazeleton and Wilkesbarre Railroad. Kase was at times its president, its superintendent, and its financial agent. He had found investors, issued bonds, and built a few miles of the line, but the railroad had gone bankrupt because, as detailed in court, Kase had siphoned off more than half a million dollars of the investors'

¹¹³ Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth-Century Miracles*, 483-487.

money. Before the judgment was issued, Kase gave testimony that he had worked out his differences with one the litigants, who had died not long before, by way of a conversation he had had with his spirit via a medium at a spiritualist summer camp. The judgment against him was futile, in a way, because it became clear that the money had vanished into thin air.¹¹⁴

So this is the Simon Peter Kase with whose account of the Conklin-Lincoln letter we have to contend. The specific problem with Kase's statements about his delivering Conklin's letter, however, is that his description of how that came about changed over the years, with some details shifting dramatically. The first account was one that spiritualist James Fitzgerrell said Kase had given him after a séance in Boston which they had both attended around 1871:

You remember with the opening of the Rebellion, that Washington was threatened by the Confederate troops when the 7th Mass. Volunteer Infantry, under Col. Benjamin F. Butler, was ordered to Washington to protect the Capitol. Arriving there none too soon, in passing through Baltimore, Md., they were assailed by the Confederates and fought their way through that City, with the loss of several killed and wounded.

At that time I was connected with one of the leading Banks in the City of New York. A meeting of the leading Bankers was called and it was decided an effort should be made to build a rail road connecting with the Capitol without having to pass through Baltimore. I was appointed a committee of one to go to Washington and see President Lincoln, and see what could be done to carry out the plan with Government aid.

Arriving at Washington on the early morning train, I walked from the depot to the Willard Hotel. In passing along the street I became conscious that I was passing the house in which I formerly lived when I was a student in one of the Washington Colleges. The House stood back from the street a few feet. I noted the front door was open, and looking to the second story, to the room I had formerly occupied, I saw the window was open. The thought came to me: go and see your old room again. With this thought I turned into the walk, through the open door, up the stairs, at the head of the stairs I saw the room door open, so I entered. Just as I entered the room, I saw a gentleman arising from a writing table. Sealing a letter and advancing toward me, he said: "Take this letter to President Lincoln, it is of the utmost importance that he should receive it at once." I replied, I do not know the President. You can take it to him just as well as I. He replied; "You are going to see the President at once, and can hand it to him. It will receive attention at once, don't fail to do this, it is important to the Nation that Mr. Lincoln should receive this and act on its statements."

With these statements, and the strange condition I found myself in I took the letter, put it in my pocket.

¹¹⁴ "A Half Million Decree. A Legal Decision Against an Ex-Railroad Man Who Has No Money," *Philadelphia Times*, September 11, 1883.

After breakfast I went to the office of Judge Soames and laid the object of my visit before him. After consultation, as the Judge was busy on some important business, it was decided I should go at once to the White House and see the President.

On presenting my card to the door keeper, and asking for an immediate interview, telling the door keeper my name was Kase, he disappeared, returning in a few minutes with the President following closely, who on entering the room, seeing a stranger seemed confused. As I advanced toward him I gave my name, S. P. Kase, from New York, and desired to talk to him on important business. At that the President said; "I expected to see Secretary of State S. P. Chase, I understood from the door keeper, that Mr. Chase wanted to see me at once." ... I noted a curious expression on the President's face. I stated to him that I came as the representative of the Banking interest of New York, to take up with him the matter of building a rail road from New York to Washington avoiding Baltimore. At this he seemed very much interested and invited me to sit down and discuss the matter at some length. On separating it was understood that Judge Soames and I should return during the afternoon and discuss the subject further.

On leaving the President I drew the letter I had received in the early morning from my pocket and gave it to him, with a statement of how I came to receive it. The President opened and read it, then asked me if I knew of its contents. I told him I did not.

Judge Soames and I filled the appointment made with the President during the afternoon; after discussing the rail road matter, in which the President gave hearty support, and as we were leaving the room, the President called up the matter of the letter received in the morning, stating that it was an invitation that he should visit the home of a Mr. Laurie in Georgetown, (suburb of Washington,) that evening at 7 p.m., where he would hear something of vital importance to the Nation. That he had caused an investigation of the request, and decided to make the visit and asked Judge Soames and me if we would like to go along. This invitation we gladly accepted.

We reported at the White House on time, and were driven in the White House carriage with the Major in attendance on the President's staff with the President accompanied by an escort of four soldiers to the Georgetown home of Mr. Laurie.

As we were expected, we were met at the door by Mr. Laurie and his wife who gave us an earnest invitation to enter their home, and be welcome guests. Mrs. Laurie soon seated herself at the piano and began to play some favorite tune, when the piano began to move up and down in accord with the rise and fall of the music. This attracted the attention of the President who said to one of the soldiers standing near the piano; "Can not you hold that piano down?" At that the soldier attempted to do so, with his entire weight on the piano, still the piano moved up and down the same as before. At this the President stepped to the end of the piano and added his weight to that of the soldiers. Still the piano moved up and down just the same as before. At this the President resumed his seat in one of the large horse hair easy chairs of the day.

Just then there appeared a young lady of about eighteen years of age with her hair curled, the custom of the young girls of the day, that we had not seen before, entering from the bed room off from the parlor room. The

home was a five room house. She stepped directly in front of the President and commenced talking in the most earnest and impressive manner, reviewing the history of this Nation. ... This talk lasted about one hour. When through, the control left the little girl, she looked around in a confused manner and returned to the bed room from whence she came.

With her disappearance, nothing was said for some time, the President turned in his seat, threw his long right leg over the arm of his chair, buried his face in his hands fully five minutes, then, then looking around to the Judge said; "Was not this wonderful?" "Yes" said the Judge, "Who do you think did this talking?" At this remark Mr. Lincoln pointed to the full length portrait of Daniel Webster hanging on the wall of the room.

He was asked about the preparation of the Emancipation Proclamation. He said that much pressure had been made to prevent the Proclamation from being issued at this time. At this we took our leave of the host of the evening, entered the carriage and were soon at the White House. On the road home but little was said by any of the remarkable meeting we had attended.

It certainly made a wonderful impression on Mr. Lincoln's mind, as he referred to it at our next meeting in connection with the rail road matter we were discussing, that was carried to a successful conclusion. ... Col. Kase stated in carrying out the rail road plans, it was necessary to visit Washington a number of times, and confer with the President, that he and Judge Soames were often invited to be present at the White House of evenings to meet Miss Nettie Colburn, the young girl medium they met at the home of the Lauries in Georgetown.

There were present members of the Cabinet, military men, and civilians of national fame, such men as General Sickles and others.¹¹⁵

Kase makes no mention here of who the mysterious gentleman with the letter was. But the letter itself, when Lincoln opens it, turns out to be an invitation to attend a séance at the Lauries' Georgetown home. And events progress from there, with young medium Nettie Colburn, in the Lauries' parlor, giving voice to a Congress of Spirits, expostulating with the President about the

¹¹⁵ James J. Fitzgerald, *Lincoln was a Spiritualist* (Los Angeles: [B. F.] Austin Publishing Company, 1924), 15-22. I note, however, that there are peculiarities about the provenance of this account. For one thing, Fitzgerald published it only in 1924, more than half a century after the event it recounts. Second, he presented it to the reader as something that Kase had told him in a casual conversation after a séance at which they met — the wealth of details given, fifty years after the fact, certainly does not jibe with it being pulled out of Fitzgerald's aged memory. So we have to believe that it was written down at the time, either by Fitzgerald immediately afterwards, or, more likely — because of the complicated details of the narrative — by Kase himself, who either sent Fitzgerald a letter after their meeting or gave him an already prepared, possibly printed, version during their conversation. Nevertheless, I am disinclined to think that the narrative itself is something that Fitzgerald made up. There is too much detail, and, in addition, Fitzgerald writes that he had read Nettie Maynard's book, with obvious approval, yet he seems not to have noticed that the account he passes on from Kase about the Lauries and so on is vastly different from the account in Nettie's book. If Fitzgerald was simply a fabulist, we should expect him to have hewn close to her narrative.

Emancipation Proclamation. In this version, Kase has placed himself under the wing of Daniel E. Soames ["Soames"], a lawyer who had finished a term as a Republican Congressman from Maine early in 1861 and who had set up law offices in Washington. Soames was an ardent spiritualist and we may guess that he knew that Conklin was in Washington. It is with Soames that Kase discusses having been given a mysterious letter and the mission to present it to the President, which mission Soames advises him to undertake. And Soames accompanies Kase to the White House after he does in fact carry the invitation letter there. And then accompanies Kase later to the Lauries' house.

What does this have to do with the Conklin letter in the Lincoln Papers? Well, Kase would later be revealed to have told Philadelphia spiritualists many times that the mysterious gentleman who gave him a letter for the President was John Conklin. One of them wrote to the *Banner of Light* to make that clear:

The following is the story of Col. Kase (Fifteen and Oxford streets, this city), and I have heard him repeat it several times:

"I was (says the Colonel) in Washington during the war. One day while walking in the street of that city I met the medium Conkling of New York. I was surprised to see him, and inquired as to the business that brought him to Washington. Conkling replied that the spirits brought him to deliver a message to the President, but how to approach Mr. Lincoln he did not know. He requested me to assist him to an interview. I did what I could to bring the medium and the President together, and finally succeeded; and through Mr. Conkling came the urgent request that the President issue the Emancipation Proclamation as the only salvation for the Union."

I do not of course claim in this instance to report the Colonel's story *verbatim*, but give his words as memory serves me.¹¹⁶

But did this assistance have anything to do with Kase's mysterious man with the letter? Yes it did, as Kase now made "clear" in the account he wrote and published as a pamphlet in 1879, seventeen years after the events. Let us look at an extended portion of that account, and notice how profoundly different it is from the earlier ones.¹¹⁷

In the 1879 version, Kase relates that he went to Washington in the summer of 1862 on lobbying business as the designated financial agent of the

¹¹⁶ Letter from John A. Hoover, reproduced in Luther Colby, "Additional from Mrs. Nettie C. Maynard," *Banner of Light*, May 23, 1891.

¹¹⁷ The pamphlet was also printed as S. P. Kase, "Abraham Lincoln. Was He Influenced by the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism to the Great and Mighty Responsibility of Emancipating Four Millions of Slaves," *Mind and Matter* 1.19 (5 April 1879), 4; and Col. Simon P. Kase, "The Emancipation Proclamation, How and By Whom It was Given to Abraham Lincoln" (the 1879 bound pamphlet's original title), in *Reason* (Los Angeles) 24.2 (May-July 1927): 3-23.

Reading and Columbia Railroad, with a view toward convincing Congress to appropriate funds to subsidize the railroad's building an extended line all the way from Reading to Washington.¹¹⁸

I arrived about four o'clock P.M., and after getting fairly settled at the hotel I concluded to take a stroll to the Capitol grounds. Here I must digress a little. I had boarded at Mrs. Pearce's, in 1850, for about three months; the house was situated near the lower gate leading into the Capitol grounds, on Pennsylvania avenue. As I passed the house I saw the name J. B. Conklin above the door. I knew him two years previously, in New York, as a writing medium.

Just as the name attracted my attention I was startled to hear *a voice* at my right side say:

"Go to see him; he is in the same room you used to occupy."

I looked to see who had spoken, as there was no human being within a hundred yards of me. The question passed rapidly through my mind — "Who knows that I ever occupied a room in this house?" Eleven years had passed since that time. An indescribable feeling came over me; I seemed paralyzed or riveted to the spot; there was a barrier, unseen, that prevented me from moving a step forward or from the house. It was only the work of a moment; I concluded to enter the house, and on ascending the stairway to the third story, passed into the room which had been occupied by me in 1850, and here Mr. Conkling sat, just having finished a letter to President Lincoln and was enclosing the envelope as I entered.

"Here, Mr. Kase," said Mr. Conkling, "I want you to take this letter to the President; you can see him, but I can't."

"O, Sir," I replied, "I cannot take your letter; send it by mail. I have just arrived in this city and am not acquainted with the President; besides this, I am here on important business and must be formally introduced to him; therefore, I can not take your letter."

Mr. Conkling said: "You must take this letter; you are here for this purpose; if you do not take it he will never see it."

At this moment a voice again saluted me, the same as I had heard on the street:

"Go, see what will come of this."

This voice seemed just behind me. I was startled, dumbfounded; I stood fixed to the spot. Finally, I said yes.

"Give me the letter. Will you go along?"

"Yes; but I can't see him. You can," was the medium's reply.

"Well, here's an omnibus just turning; we'll get in that."

The sun was just then setting behind the distant hills. We arrived at the Presidential Mansion in the dusk of the evening. I rang the bell; a servant appeared.

Q. "Is the President in?"

A. "Yes," was the reply, "he is at tea."

Q. "Can I see him?"

¹¹⁸ Kase's role as financial agent for the Reading and Columbia Railroad was very similar to his role with the Danville, Hazelton and Wilkesbarre Railroad.

A. "What is the name?"

I gave him my name. He soon returned saying: "The President will see you after tea. Step up into the gentlemen's parlor."

Conkling and myself seated ourselves in the parlor to which the servant had directed us. Soon thereafter the servant appeared at the door, beckoning me forward, and opened a door leading to the President's room.

The President was approaching the door as I entered. He stopped, somewhat disappointed, and stepped back one or two steps as I approached, I saying to him: "My name is S. P. Kase, of Danville, Pennsylvania."

The President expected to meet S. P. Chase, then Secretary of the Treasury. His response was: "O, you are from Pennsylvania?" showing me a chair upon the opposite side of a long table. He took a seat directly opposite, and for some time drew me out respecting Pennsylvania.

I told him I lived in the town where the first anthracite pig-iron was manufactured, and where the first T-rail was made in the United States. And for a full half-hour various questions pertaining to the war and the prosperity of Pennsylvania were discussed, when I handed him the Conkling letter.

He broke it open and read it, seemed a little surprised, saying:

"What does this mean?"

My reply was, "I do not know, but I have no doubt that it means what it says."

"You do not know," responded the President, "what this letter is, and yet you think it means what it says?"

"Yes sir; I think so," I replied.

"Well," said the President, "I will read it to you."

Here is the letter:

"I have been sent from the city of New York by spiritual influence pertaining to the interest of the nation. I can't return until I see you. Appoint the time. Yours, etc., Signed, J. B. Conkling."

The President then said: "What do you know about Spiritualism?"

A. "I know very little, but what I know you are welcome to."

President: "Let me hear."

I then rehearsed my first interview in New York, in the year 1858, as hereafter stated. I was engaged at that time in building or doing the financial work of the Flint and Parmaquette Railroad, Michigan, and was stopping at the United States Hotel, Courtland Street, New York.

A Mr. Downing, merchant of Philadelphia, and myself became engaged in a discussion about the conflicting theological creeds of the different churches. I made the remark that all of them were about right in their own estimation; that much depended on early education and surroundings, and organization of the brain; I condemned Spiritualism as the veriest humbug of the day.

Kase's account at this point goes into prolonged detail about Downing's taking him the following day to visit a medium — not Conklin, but a lady — at a house near Wallack's Theatre on Broadway, where rappings occur, signaling answers to questions that Kase writes down on slips of paper, and which he says he described to Lincoln as his "first lesson in the investigation of Spiritualism." His narrative then continues:

This, dear reader, was what I told Abraham Lincoln. President Lincoln seemed very much interested and said: "Tell Mr. Conkling that I will see him on Sunday, between 9 and 10 A.M." "O, no," was my reply; "write him a letter." "O, yes, I will write him a letter," was the reply of the President. I then said I thought my mission was ended — shook hands and left; called for Conkling in the gentleman's parlor, and we returned to our respective lodgings.

Notice that Daniel Somes has completely disappeared in this account, or, rather, his place has now been filled by John Conklin, who not only gives the letter to Kase but accompanies him to the White House. And notice, too, that the letter, which had been an invitation to a séance at the Lauries has transmogrified into the spirit message from Edward Baker via Conklin.



Daniel Somes
Library of Congress

This 1879 account now continues with Kase explaining that he stayed in Washington four weeks, meeting with members of the House Committee on Roads and Canals and with representatives of other railroad companies, and ending with his testifying before the Committee about the Reading and Columbia project. Let us take up his narrative again:

The next day, then four weeks after I first carried the Conkling letter to President Lincoln, I was standing in the gallery of the House, when I saw an old lady leave her seat, and come walking around the gallery toward me; I was standing (for it must be recollected the gallery was crowded and every seat taken), and as she got opposite me she turned and handed me her card, saying: "Call when it suits you;" and immediately turned and went back to her seat.

I stood thinking it very strange that a lady I had never seen, should give me her card and tell me to call.

In looking around I saw Judge Wattels, and immediately inquired of him who that lady was that was walking away.

He replied: "That is Mrs. Laurie."

The Judge here is Augustus Wattels, another fervent spiritualist and the brother of John Otis Wattels, the utopian communitarian and coadjutor of John Brown in Kansas. In all accounts of the Lauries, he is recognized as a close associate of theirs and a party to their séances.¹¹⁹ Kase's account now has Wattels explain to him who Mrs. Laurie is, that her daughter is a medium, who levitates pianos while playing them. Kase says he would be interested in seeing that, so Wattels takes him to the Lauries that night. Kase continues:

Who should we meet there but President Lincoln and his lady.

After speaking and passing the courtesies of the day, perhaps ten minutes intervening, I saw a young girl approaching the President with a measured step, with her eyes closed, and walking up to the knees of the President, accosted him as follows:

"Sir, you have been called to the position you now occupy for a very great purpose. The world is in universal bondage; it must be physically set free, that it may mentally rise to its proper status. There is a Spiritual Congress supervising the affairs of this nation as well as a Congress at Washington. This Republic is leading the van of Republics throughout the world."

This being her text, she lectured the President for a full hour upon the importance of emancipating the slave, saying that the war could not end until slavery was abolished; that God destined all men to be free, that they may rise to their proper status. Her language was truly sublime and full of arguments grand in the extreme, asserting that from the time his proclamation of freedom was issued, there would be no reverses to our army.

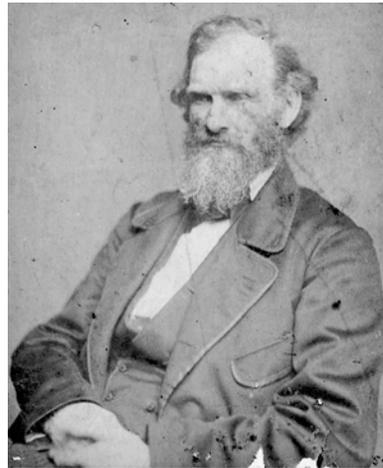
He again returns to the Lauries' two evenings later, according to his account, and again meets Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln there. Again Nettie Colburn is entranced and goes on about freeing the slaves for an entire hour, after which the Lauries' daughter plays the piano (note that this was Belle Laurie Miller, *not*

¹¹⁹ Lafayette Hall's descriptions of Wattels, the Lauries, and Nettie Colburn include his judgment that Wattels was the "Spiritual Congress" who coached young Nettie.

Mrs. Laurie, as he said in his first account), which bounces up and down in time to the music. Kase then closes his account this way [*italics are his*]:

Thus it was that President Lincoln was convinced as to the course he should pursue; the command coming from that All-seeing Spirit through the instrumentality of the angel world, was not to be overlooked. He, like a faithful servant, when convinced of his duty, feared not to do it, and to proclaim freedom by the Emancipation Proclamation of four millions of slaves. That proclamation was issued on September 22, 1862, to take effect the first day of January, 1863. In the intermediate time the back-bone of the rebellion was broken, the Union army had, in divers places, twenty-six battles, every one of them except two being a success upon the Union side. Thus the prediction of the medium was verified.

Kase has here told about the story of two prophets directing their messages to Lincoln — John Conklin and Nettie Colburn. Therefore, when he says, “Thus the prediction of the medium was verified” — that the Emancipation Proclamation would be issued and would free the slaves — it is unclear which medium he means, Conklin or Colburn or both.



Augustus Wattles

This 1879 version of his story was the one that Kase himself cast into print and thereby stabilized. As late as 1878, some of its details had not quite gelled; at least, according to yet another version given by spiritualist James M. Peebles, this extract from which begins just after Peebles has begun telling an audience in Boston about Kase:

This gentleman, visiting Washington, D.C., in the autumn of 1862, during our civil war, was walking along Pennsylvania Avenue when he happened to see the suspended sign of the medium, Mr. J. B. Conklin, and simultaneously, on seeing the sign, he heard a voice saying, "Go in and see Conklin; he is in the rooms occupied by you twelve years since." Mr. Kase stepped in and found Mr. Conklin in a half abnormal state, directing a letter, written under spirit-influence, to President Lincoln.

Mr. Conklin said, "You have come in just at the time needed. I want you to take this to the President."

"Well, replied Mr. Kase, "I have no objections if you will accompany me."

They went to the presidential mansion, and Mr. Kase, having forgot his visiting cards, sent up his name by the servant — "S. P. Kase," which the President understood as "S. P. Chase," for Salmon P. Chase was at that time a member of the presidential cabinet. "Bring him up," said the President. Reaching the drawing-room, the mistake was easily explained, by the carelessness of the servant.

"Take your seat," said President Lincoln to Mr. Kase; "I know you well, and appreciate the service that your railways are doing in transporting our troops to the South."

After some conversation about the contending armies, and the condition of the country, Mr. Kase said, "I have a letter for you, Mr. Lincoln," — handing it to him. The President reading and reading it, turned to Mr. Kase, and said, "This is very singular — this letter purports to be from spirits — the fathers of our country; do you know anything about Spiritualism?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Kase, they've called me a Spiritualist for quite a number of years; and I certainly owe my financial successes to the spirit-voice and spirit-guidance."

The spirit-intelligences, in the letter, requested some personal interviews with the President through their medium. This was arranged, and for four succeeding Sundays, Mr. Conklin was a guest at the Presidential mansion. What the exact result of these séances was, is not known, only so far that the emancipation was immediately broached in the cabinet meetings.¹²⁰

In this version, Lincoln says the letter purported to be from "the spirits — the fathers of our country." Conklin's letter, of course, did not exactly purport to be from "the fathers of our country," but from Edward D. Baker, his deceased friend. Nor did the "spirit-intelligences" in Conklin's letter exactly request personal interviews. Conklin was the one who requested an interview, through an enclosed cover sheet, although he wrote that he had been directed to come to Washington by spirits.

¹²⁰ E. Gerry Brown, "How Spiritualism Abolished Slavery in the United States," *Spiritual Scientist* 7.2 (March 1878): 37-38. Brown copied this from one of Peebles' 1878 lectures at the Parker Memorial Hall in Boston, "The Methods of Spirit Influences" — James M. Peebles, *Parker Memorial Hall Lectures on Salvation, Prayer, Methods of Spirit Influences, and the Nature of Death*, 2nd edition (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1880), 47-48. Peebles' original has 1862, but Brown's copied version confusingly changed the year — presumably it was just a typo — to 1863. So I have changed it back in the above quote.

John Conklin, as we have seen, was claiming at least as early as 1863 that the Emancipation Proclamation had come to Lincoln through him from the spirits. Did Nettie Colburn make such a claim? It appears not.



Nettie Colburn in 1863

In 1891 Nettie Colburn Maynard (she had married), living in White Plains, New York, was readying the manuscript of her autobiography.¹²¹ She was debilitated by very painful rheumatism and had taken to what would soon be her deathbed and was trying to reconstruct the events that she had earlier written about in a previous manuscript that had been lost years before. To “help” her remember the details and finish the book, a New York medium, Mary Williams, staged a complicated — and on the face of it, entirely preposterous — “full form materialization” at Nettie’s home in which twenty-four “shades of famous people were summoned” out of a dark room from a large cabinet in order to provide Nettie support and help.¹²² Among those summoned were Abraham Lincoln and Daniel Comes:

Congressman Comes of Maine, an intimate friend of Lincoln, came out, and walked up to Mrs. Maynard’s bedside to give her the precise dates of some

¹²¹ Mrs. Nettie Colburn Maynard, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist? Or, Curious Revelations from the Life of a Trance Medium* (Philadelphia: Rufus C. Hartranft, 1891).

¹²² “Mrs. Nettie Colburn Maynard,” *Banner of Light*, April 11, 1891, which included a reprint of an article from the *New York Sun* by a reporter who had attended the séance. Mrs. M. E. Williams, aka “Madame Minnie,” who was the head of the First Spiritualist Church of New York, performed many full-form materializations, but would be exposed in 1894, while visiting Europe — “Her Tricks Exposed. Mrs. Williams, the ‘Spook Priestess,’ Denounced in Paris. She was Trapped by a Duke. The ‘Materialized Spirit’ Proved to be a Doll Ingeniously Dressed. Her Career in This City. She Swindled a Rich Widow Out of a Mansion and Was Forced to Flee,” *New York Evening World*, November 8, 1894.

events recounted in the latter part of her book which she had been trying in vain for weeks past to remember. The shade of Lincoln, tall, stern, dark and sad-looking, appeared for a few moments, gave Mrs. Maynard assurances as to some details in her story, and promised to control her, and communicate more fully and particularly as to these events later.

After a previous séance, which was attended by Simon Kase (in the flesh), Mrs. Williams had obtained yet another account from him, varying yet again, although slightly, from his 1879 account, about how the spirits had conveyed the Emancipation Proclamation to Lincoln.¹²³ So at the materializing séance at Nettie Colburn Maynard's home, the "spirits" of Lincoln and Somes, who were helping Nettie remember details, had themselves already had the advantage of perusing Kase's account, according to which Nettie in trance had lectured the President at the Lauries' house about his sacred mission to emancipate the slaves.



Mary ("Minnie") E. Williams

In the publicity surrounding the impending publication of Nettie's book, the spiritualist press, influenced no doubt by Kase's earlier accounts, began reminding readers that Nettie was the human instrument by which the spirit-world had effected the Emancipation Proclamation. But Nettie, still at work in completing her manuscript, explicitly disavowed that claim, in two

¹²³ Mrs. M.E. Williams, *Abraham Lincoln, a Spiritualist* (New York: Venice Art Press, 1891).

letters to *The Banner of Light*. "The facts are, Mr. Editor, that I *did* give sittings to President Lincoln, and he was advised concerning important public matters, and he *did* follow that advice, as I have related in my forthcoming work."¹²⁴ But, she said, there was a very definite misunderstanding being spread about, as contained in the *New York Sun* article (about the materialization séance at her house), which had been reprinted in the *Banner of Light*:

For many days I have been at death's door from *La Grippe*, and it is against the advice of my physician that I make the effort to dictate this letter; but I could not let the extravagant misrepresentations contained in the recent article copied by you from the *New York Sun* longer remain uncontradicted by me.

Contrary to the statements contained in that article, I wish it distinctly understood that I was never in any way connected with the Emancipation Proclamation, for I never met Mr. Lincoln until the December after it was made public. All the summer and fall of 1862 I was lecturing in Albany, N.Y., as many living witnesses can testify.¹²⁵

I never "lived at the White House" a day in my life. When sent for to give an evening séance, I went accompanied by friends and left with them. I was never "Mr. Lincoln's chosen medium," for he as frequently held sittings with Charles H. Foster, Charles Colchester, Mrs. Lucy Hamilton, J. B. Conklin and others.

I never gave any sittings to Secretaries Stanton, Chase and Seward, as stated in that article.

Why these and other equally false statements have been published concerning myself passes my understanding.

No newspaper representative has ever interviewed me, nor has a statement of mine been published concerning my mediumistic experiences; and I am at a loss to know where the reporters get their extraordinary information.

My unpretending little book of from two to three hundred pages contains no marvelous revelations of the war period of our country, but is a simple story of some of the interesting events in my life as a medium, and which many friends wished me to preserve in this form.

By giving this a place in your columns you will be doing an act of justice, and receive the lasting gratitude of yours very truly.

NETTIE C. MAYNARD.

White Plains, N.Y., May 1st, 1891.¹²⁶

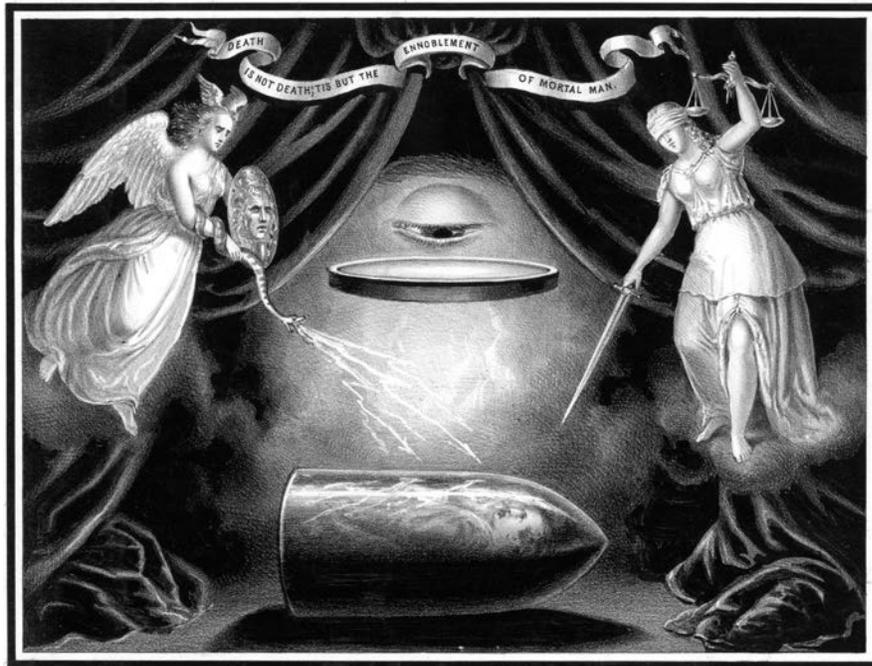
¹²⁴ Luther Colby, "Additional from Mrs. Nettie C. Maynard," *Banner of Light*, May 23, 1891.

¹²⁵ This appears to be verified by the Lincoln Papers, which contains a letter of introduction from Lincoln's long-time friend Joshua F. Speed to Abraham Lincoln, October 26, 1863, in which Speed seeks to introduce Nettie Colburn and Anna Cosby to the President.

¹²⁶ Luther Colby, "The Emancipation Proclamation — Mrs. Maynard Disavows," *Banner of Light*, May 16, 1891.

As a result of the confusion, *Banner of Light* editor Luther Colby's mind then turned to offering his readers John Conklin as the one who passed on the Emancipation Proclamation to Lincoln, a suggestion evidently based on the fact that Conklin had indeed made the claim years before. After acknowledging that Nettie must indeed have the last word about whether she was involved with the Emancipation Proclamation, Colby wrote:

Be that as it may — individuals aside — we adhere to what we said last week in this connection, *to wit*: "The fact remains that Mr. Lincoln *did* have sittings with various mediums during the war period, and *without doubt received the impulse* to bring out the great Charter of Freedom for the slave through *some one* of these sensitive instruments.



THE "BULLET" WITH WHICH OUR MARTYR PRESIDENT A. LINCOLN WAS ASSASSINATED BY J. W. BOOTH, AS SEEN UNDER A MICROSCOPE.

Lincoln's assassination investigated under a heavenly microscope
Library of Congress

Making matters even more uncertain, however: when Nettie's book was finally published later that year, it contained a section in which she seemed to claim that not only had she first met Abraham Lincoln in December 1862, but that it had been in the White House Red Parlor, where she became entranced and delivered some kind of long and momentous exhortation to the President, whose content she said she did not remember (she had been entranced) but which — because of the touching details of the President's pointing to a portrait of Daniel Webster afterwards (something which, according to Kase's account, occurred after her delivery of her speech at the Lauries' home) and of the President's being asked immediately thereafter about pressures being exerted on him to delay issuing the Proclamation — must suggest that she was in fact the medium who delivered the message to Lincoln. "Such was my first interview with Abraham Lincoln, and the memory of it *is as clear and vivid as the evening on which it occurred*," she says, without apparent irony, in the book.¹²⁷

It is not much of a stretch to imagine a host of ghostwriters hovering about her, however, as she lay on her sickbed completing her book. The chronology may not have matched up with the actual writing of the draft and the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, just as the shifting chronology in Kase's various accounts did not, but it all made for a fine story.¹²⁸

Nettie also seems to have been confused about another claim — which medium was it who had predicted Lincoln's assassination? Conklin had already claimed that he had done that — or, rather, that the spirit of Edward Baker had done it through him, during a sitting he had conducted with

¹²⁷ Mrs. Nettie Colburn Maynard, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?*, 74.

¹²⁸ For some of the chronological problems in a couple of Kase's varying accounts, see Leslie Price, "Lincoln, Spiritualism and Emancipation," *Psypioneer* 1.4 (August 2004): 25-27, and especially Paul J. Gaunt, "Dr. Walter Franklin Prince versus Simon P. Kase," *Psypioneer* 6.2 (February 2010): 29-44. I find myself, after reviewing all the evidence, agreeing essentially with the judgment of Walter Franklin Prince, a researcher who looked into Kase's and Maynard's claims and found them wanting and internally inconsistent, as he detailed in an article in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 26 (1930): 148-157. On another note, I reproduce another complication here, without comment, from E. W. Sprague: "Mr. Kase had the manuscript for a large book giving the details of many seances held in Washington in which leading government officials, including President Lincoln and his estimable wife, participated.

Sometime after Col. Kase's transition, while I was in Philadelphia, I called upon his wife, and while there I made inquiry regarding Mr. Kase's proposed book. She brought out a pamphlet and said this was the book he had printed. On examination I discovered that it contained only a small part of what he had prepared for the book, and when I told her so, she said she did not know where the rest of the manuscript was; that someone whom she named had taken charge of the household goods and perhaps he could tell about it. I concluded that it was lost, and am very sorry, as it contained much valuable data as well as corroborative testimony of the facts already published in regard to the claim that President Lincoln and his good wife were Spiritualists." Eli Wilmot Sprague, *A Future Life Demonstrated; or, Twenty-Seven Years a Public Medium* (The Author, 1908), 262.

Lincoln. As we have seen, Nettie acknowledged that Conklin had been one of several mediums who had held séances at the White House. However, she also wrote:

I do know that [Lincoln] held communication with numerous mediums, both at the White House and at other places, and among his mediumistic friends were Charles Foster, Charles Colchester, Mrs. Lucy A. Hamilton, and Charles Redmond, who warned Mr. Lincoln of the danger that faced him before he made that famous trip between Philadelphia and Washington, on which occasion he donned the Scotch cap and cape; and which warning saved him from assassination.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Maynard, 92. Charles H. Foster, Charles J. Colchester, and George A. Redman were all well known professional mediums, whose careers are documented to some extent: On Redman — George Alexander Redman, *Mystic Hours; or, Spiritual Experiences* (New York: Charles Partridge, 1850). On Foster — George C. Bartlett, *The Salem Seer; Reminiscences of Charles H. Foster* (New York: Lovell, Gestefeld and Company, 1891): “Abraham Lincoln was also a spiritualist, and was intensely interested in the subject; but Mrs. Lincoln went beyond all bounds, and seemed to think that every trifling occurrence had some wonderful spiritual significance.” (84); for Foster’s descent upon Washington society, see George A. Bacon, “Spiritualism in Washington,” *Herald of Progress*, March 12, 1864, and Augusta A. Currier, “Wonders at the Capital,” *Herald of Progress*, April 2, 1864. Colchester was a darker character; indeed, Marc Demarest has evidence that “Charles J. Colchester” was merely this charlatan’s *nom de travail*. A look at his New York City practice at the beginning of the War is “Charles J. Colchester,” *Herald of Progress*, April 13, 1861; but see also “Spiritualism,” *Herald of Progress*, December 20, 1862, and “Imposition of Mr. Colchester,” *Herald of Progress*, December 27, 1862. Through Mary Todd’s seamstress and confidante Elizabeth Keckley, who was a spiritualist, Colchester managed to wheedle his way into giving séances for Mary Todd Lincoln at the Lincolns’ cottage at the Soldiers’ Home and at the White House. Colchester produced manifestations supposed to have been from the Lincoln’s recently deceased son Willie. Meanwhile, at other séances in Washington, Colchester was making drums and banjos float about in the dark. The President was concerned enough about him to ask Joseph Henry, the head of the Smithsonian Institution, to investigate him, and Henry pronounced him a fraud. Colchester decided to skip town, but wrote a letter to Mary Todd asking her to provide him a military pass, with the implied threat of blackmail if she did not do so. Journalist Noah Brooks, a friend of the President, then cornered Colchester and threatened him if he did not leave Mary Todd alone, which he appears to have done. (Noah Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln’s Time* (New York: The Century Company, 1896), 64-66) In 1865, Colchester was brought to court in Buffalo by Federal prosecutors for his “jugglery” — and then again in Louisville, Kentucky the following year. Marc has also been able to trace the other medium that Nettie mentions here — Mrs. Lucy A. Hamilton. She was an irregular “clairvoyant physician” who formulated nostrums and ran a healing clinic in Hartford, Connecticut. She advertised her ability to diagnose a patient’s illness and prescribe medicine entirely by mail as well. She would seem to have “operated” on patients by channeling a kind of healing power from the spirits into them. An advertisement for her in the *Hartford Courant* (March 24, 1863), reproduces a testimonial from the grateful parents of one young lad who had contracted typhoid fever “which brought him down to the verge of the grave, but was rescued as it were by the spiritualistic care and attention of Mrs. L. A. Hamilton, and restored to our family circle when death seemed inevitable.” The Lincolns’ son Willie died, probably from typhoid fever, in February 1862, and so, assuming that Mrs. Hamilton was called to Washington by one or both of his distraught parents to try to treat him, this would date her White House séances to that time.

Here she gives us her list of Lincoln's mediums again, except that Conklin's name is gone and "Charles Redmond" appears. She was quite likely thinking of George A. *Redman*, a New York medium who was grouped in people's minds with Conklin because they were both regarded as strong physical mediums, and they had both had sitting rooms for séances in lower Manhattan on Canal Street. But if it was George Redman that Nettie was thinking of, he would not have had much opportunity to have been regularly offering séances at the White House: He had died in June 1861.

It is certain that Conklin and Redman knew each other — in *Digging for Captain Kydd's Treasure*, Conklin referred jokingly to an episode in Redman's mediumistic career in which he claimed that the skeleton of a deceased African-American man named Cornelius Winne, whose body he had been dissecting at his medical school in Hartford, had shaken and jangled by itself and traveled, bone by bone, under the impulse of Winne's spirit, and had materialized in pieces before the wondering eyes of sitters at a series of séances.¹³⁰ Conklin and Redman also sometimes appeared together as test mediums sponsored by the New York Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge.

I believe that Nettie simply forgot who it was who she had heard had warned Lincoln about an assassination attempt. It was not (allegedly) Redman, but (allegedly) Conklin. And I suspect that perhaps either she or the spiritualist grapevine had earlier conflated Conklin's story of an assassination warning he gave the President in 1862 (from Baker's spirit) with the well attested tale of Lincoln's warning about an assassination plot that was planned to take effect when he was traveling by train to Washington before he was installed in office, and that resulted in his switching trains and putting on a disguise of a long cloak and a soft "Scotch" hat for the final leg of his journey.¹³¹ Although mediums around the country began deluging Lincoln

¹³⁰ On the moving bones of Cornelius Winne, see Redman, *Mystic Hours*, 349-374.

¹³¹ Allan Pinkerton, *History and Evidence of the Passage of Abraham Lincoln from Harrisburg, Pa., to Washington, D.C. on the 22d and 23d of February, 1861* (New York: Pinkerton, 1892), first edition, Chicago, 1868. For those determined to pursue further the various claims of spirit intervention into Lincoln's trip to Washington — Note that Thomas Richmond also claimed that he had been warned by spirits, through a medium he did not name, that Lincoln would be assassinated, which news he said he brought to the President-elect before he left for Washington to take office. That unnamed medium just might have been George Redman, or for that matter, John Conklin — Richmond, *God Dealing with Slavery*, 72-74. Evidence exists of other clairvoyants trying to warn Lincoln upon his election of an assassination plot afoot, for example, Anonymous "G. A. A Wide Awake," letter to Abraham Lincoln, December 11, 1860, Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Such are almost surely only the remaining traces of what was likely an avalanche of worried missives to the President at the time. A hint of this is to be found in the strange letters of Richard Dawson Goodwin, "Abraham Lincoln and Spiritualism," *Mind and*

with warnings of his impending demise, even before he set out to Washington, the secret information about an assassination plot that convinced Lincoln to assume a disguise and bypass the scene of this plot did not come from a spirit medium but from the fieldwork of Allan Pinkerton's detective agents.



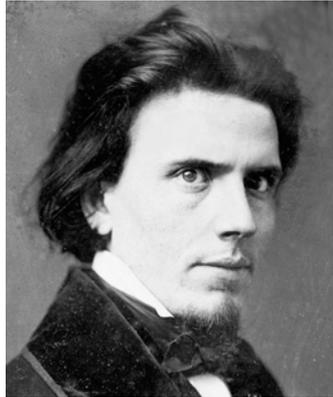
Robert Dale Owen

Conklin's visitation of emancipation minded spirits upon Lincoln urging him to issue the proclamation seems like a precursor of something that is well verified in the harsh light of earthly evidence. It must surely complicate our assessment of Conklin's and Kase's story of the letter.

Robert Dale Owen, an enthusiastic spiritualist, was in Washington throughout the War. He was a friend of Lincoln and had been given an appointment to the Ordnance Commission, so he often traveled to the Capital from New York to attend to his duties (He would later serve in the Freedman's Bureau). He wrote a long letter to Lincoln from New York on September 17, 1862, in which he strongly urged the President to issue the

Matter, April 27, 1879, and letter in the issue of June 12, in which Goodwin, a spiritualist "entrepreneur" in New York City (and "charlatan," as police reported stated), described how he had repeatedly warned Lincoln about spiritualistically-revealed assassination attempts before he took office. In truth, Goodwin did somehow convince Lincoln to form a regiment to be called "The President's Life Guard," which would serve as a sort of Praetorian Guard or secret service to protect Lincoln's life, and to commission Goodwin as its commander. The project was never actually carried through, however; the regiment, halfway formed, was incorporated into regular units of the New York Infantry.

Emancipation Proclamation and abolish slavery, despite the political pressures he must have been feeling.¹³² There was no mention in the letter of spirits. It was handed to the President by Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. Three days later, Lincoln read the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet, which moment would be memorialized in a painting, by avid spiritualist and in-house portraitist of the Lincolns, Francis Bicknell Carpenter, which still hangs in the Capitol. Owen published his letter to the public in 1863, after the Proclamation had been issued.¹³³



Francis Bicknell Carpenter

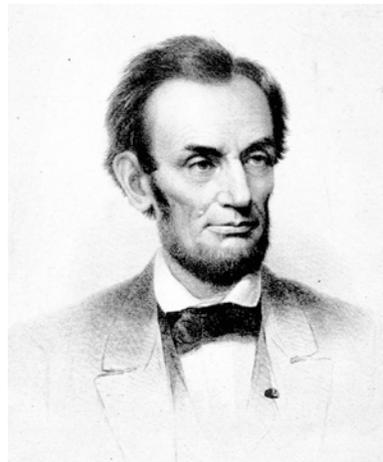
Lincoln had preliminary discussions with his cabinet about the proclamation in July 1862. He then drafted a “preliminary proclamation” and read it to Secretary of State William Seward and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles on July 13. He then presented it to the entire cabinet on July 22, after which reading Secretary of War Edwin Stanton urged him to wait for some Union military victory before issuing it. That opportunity came after the battle of Antietam, so that Lincoln formally issued it on September 22, 1862 and it took effect January 1, 1863.

The Emancipation Proclamation concludes this way: “And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgement of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

¹³² Robert Dale Owen, *The Policy of Emancipation: In Three Letters to the Secretary of War, the President of the United States, and the Secretary of the Treasury* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1863).

¹³³ Francis Bicknell Carpenter, *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln; Six Months at the White House* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1883).

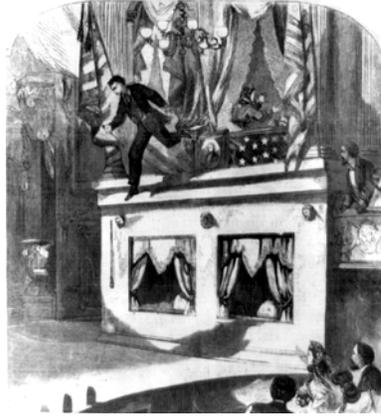
Nothing said there about an angelic cloud of witnesses. And the text of the proclamation itself is very far from being anything that one might construe as being dictated by angelic spirits. It reads essentially like a bald Executive Order issuing a set of regulations, hedged about by complicated exceptions and rules of implementation for various circumstances. In its language and phrases and surface concerns, it is hardly something that could stir the heart. To claim that Lincoln was “inspired” in some minute literal way by spirits dictating such a bureaucratic document to him seems to me ludicrous in the extreme. But let us step back from the scene for a moment and consider why Conklin’s claims of delivering to Lincoln the words of the Emancipation Proclamation — or news (or warning or prediction) that he would be assassinated — were the subject of so much fascination. Conklin was a test medium, and these claims were tests that were taken to validate what many people already believed more or less strongly: that the human actors in the events of the war were in reality only actors, that is, that they were harnessed by invisible reins to the real agents of these events.



*Abraham Lincoln, by F. B. Carpenter
From Nettie Colburn Maynard's book*

It was not just spiritualists who believed they saw mysterious forces hovering and swirling around Lincoln. That belief strengthened for many as the events of the War unfolded around them. They sensed that national events were taking place on a stage, that the human actors were playing out a mysterious drama, and that the script had been written by Providence (or, for some, by His secular brother Progress). They sensed that the real, prime

movers and controllers of that drama were celestial forces that transcended the mundane order of events, but that could be seen through them. For some, Lincoln had been selected by heaven to be its instrument. Through him, the new order of things would be ushered in and finally established. That order was one based on the principle of Union and Equality. It would be accomplished when all earthly shackles and chains were broken.¹³⁴



National Tragedy Onstage
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper

The sense that national events were reflections of an unearthly struggle that lay behind them was especially strong at the time that Lincoln was considering issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. The war on the ground was in a parlous state and many hoped that the proclamation would not only have powerful military consequences but would finally clarify for the nation what the war was really all about. And it would thereby rally the forces of heaven around the standard of emancipation.

There were many who believed they could scry the vague outlines of this unfolding struggle in the heavens as it was being played out on the earth; and there were some who believed they see could more deeply, into the tiniest wheels and pinions of its celestial mechanics. For them, it was not

¹³⁴ In passing, we should note that spirit medium Pascal Beverly Randolph was apparently a good friend of Lincoln. Randolph founded a branch of the Rosicrucians in America, and strongly suggested that Lincoln was a secret member. According to Freeman Dowd, "The Thinker and His Thoughts," reprinted in Swinburne Clymer's journal, *The Initiates*, April, 1909, "Abraham Lincoln was possibly one of the truest and best friends he [Randolph] ever had and it was through the Great Fraternity that Lincoln received his first instructions concerning the freeing of the slaves."

incredible to think that Lincoln was under the direct control of heaven and that he daily attended upon seers and prophets to give him his orders — his scripted part in a cosmic play, as it were. And that the words that he spoke or that flowed from his pen — especially such words as he delivered to the country in the Gettysburg Address, and the Second Inaugural Address — had been delivered, even dictated, to him first by the spirits of heaven. And we might add, even if he was not conscious of being under their control. It seems somewhat ungenerous to me to convict John Conklin and other spiritualists for being convinced of something in a literal sense that much of the nation also strongly held in a less literal sense.

Lincoln's assassination — the other event that Conklin was connected to as the annunciator of Providence — was, of course, literally acted out onstage, and that, too, seemed particularly apt, when considered as part of that divine drama of struggle, blocked out from behind the scenes, as it were: Actors in high spirits on stage.¹³⁵ A shot is heard from above stage left. Then a scream, and a man falls to the proscenium from the box above. He shouts to the audience: "Sic semper tyrannis" and exits, limping. End of scene. Final act: The martyred savior of the race, the suffering servant, the sacrificial victim who has atoned for the sins of the nation, surrounded at his deathbed by attendants and family, and by hosts of saints and angels, enters into his apotheosis and ascends to heaven on wings of glory. Close curtain.

Even the assassin — an actor in more than one sense — understood himself as playing his part in a divine drama, although in the script he was following, he was neither villain nor demon, but a second Daniel come to judgment, and an instrument of divine Justice against the usurper and tyrant.¹³⁶ But whichever script one was following, a very significant part of the nation was convinced that there *was* a script and that it had been authored from somewhere above. I mean to be clear on this: By saying that the nation recognized the theatrical nature of these tragedies I do not mean

¹³⁵ The play, of course, was *Our American Cousin*, the comic vehicle first animated into popular success by "Miracle Circle" magus Edward A. Sothorn, as Lord Dundreary. At Ford's Theater, Edwin A. Emerson, a friend of John Wilkes Booth (though not a party to Booth's intentions or actions), was playing the part of Lord Dundreary.

¹³⁶ Emma Hardinge, *The Great Funeral Oration on Abraham Lincoln; delivered Sunday, April 16, 1865, at Cooper Institute, New York, before upwards of three thousand persons* (New York: American News Company, 1865), 9 — "The act of a demon scarcely suffices to brand a whole humanity; and we should pause long ere we accept, as conclusive, evidence to show that a knot of inhuman serpents wearing the shape of men, or a coil of conspirators doing the deeds of demons, should represent the country of our birth and manhood." Terry Alford, *Fortune's Fool: The Life of John Wilkes Booth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 228-230, 244-245, marshals evidence that John Wilkes Booth was a spiritualist "investigator" and was open to being guided by spirits.

that they were understood to be trivial or faked or a mere sort of entertainment. I mean that people felt that the momentous and terrible events that were unfolding before them were, to an unsettling degree, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and inscrutable, and by any kind of human reckoning, irrational. These events were not ultimately issuing from (or controlled by) the human actors involved in them but rather from some hidden and divine author behind the scenes who had taken control and was effecting his providential purpose, working it out upon the earth, and had left the human actors in these events as mere players in or spectators of the cosmic drama in which they moved.



Portrait according to an engraving of 1865 by J. L. Marell in the Cornhill Magazine of the month of June, 1865, from the 'Lancet'.
SATAN TEMPTING BOOTH TO THE MURDER OF THE PRESIDENT.
J. L. MARELL, PUB. 209 WALNUT ST. PHILADELPHIA.

Booth Guided by a Malevolent Spirit
Library of Congress

And surely Lincoln himself lived and breathed this feeling that the nation's struggle was that of a Providence bringing forth an inscrutable issue

from out of the terrible conflagration.¹³⁷ In that sense, neither the North nor the South, nor even Black nor White, could claim that God was on “their” side. All were being brought together down to the threshing floor. Their sacrifice was the trampling out of the grapes by God’s wrath, purging out the sin of slavery that had been incorporated into the body politic — in both North and South — from the beginning of the Republic when its Constitution had been fixed and adopted. But Lincoln recognized that he had taken an oath to defend that Constitution. So he had no authority to simply make that sin go away.¹³⁸ In a letter he wrote in 1864, he made quite clear his conviction that the final issue of the national struggle was beyond his control or the control of any faction or army. It would be decided by an inscrutable but just Providence:

I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events controlled me. Now at the end of three years struggle, the nation’s condition is not what either party, or any man devised or expected. Whither it is tending seems plain. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and will also that we of the North as well as you of the South, shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God.¹³⁹

And Lincoln voiced the same conviction in his second inaugural address:

Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. “Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence

¹³⁷ Conklin’s spirit-medium confrere, Judd Pardee, wrote an essay for the *Liberator*, in which he described the Northern losses prior to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation as “Providential” in forcing Lincoln’s hand, and so, in that sense, fortunate — “The Coming Negro Nationality,” *Liberator*, June 12, 1863.

¹³⁸ Hardinge, *Great Funeral Oration*, 15: “He took with the oath of office the nation’s weal or woe upon his shoulders; wore it as a mantle; girdled it about his towering form with his heart-strings; and wraps it now around the lifeless ruin of his still and pulseless heart as a winding-sheet of glory.”

¹³⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Albert Hodges, April 4, 1864. Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress.

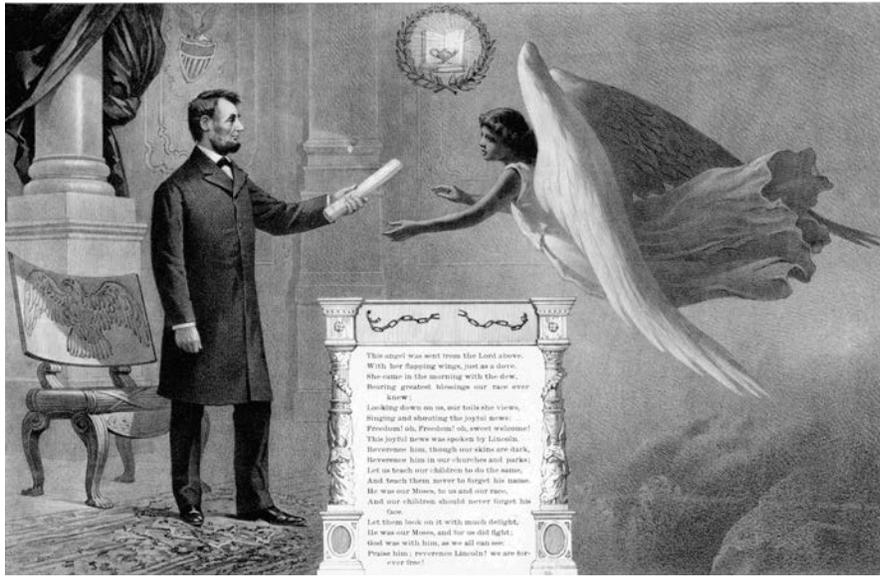
came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether"¹⁴⁰

There can be no better evidence for what his friend and earlier law partner William Herndon called Lincoln's "fatalism."¹⁴¹ But it was not a simple sort of fatalism. It was a very, very exalted sort of "fatalism," quite equal to that of the country's Puritan forebears. He did not direct the War by casting dice. He did not issue the Emancipation Proclamation from a copy dictated to him by the spirits. He did have a strong sense, however, that the ultimate issue of the War — and of his own life as well — was one that was out of his own control and, indeed, out of the control of any of the human actors involved. As a result, he was sometimes hit hard by his own terrible dreams and presentiments of coming events.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1864. Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress.

¹⁴¹ William H. Herndon, "Letter from Lincoln's Old Partner," *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, December 12, 1885.

¹⁴² Two occasions in which Lincoln detailed his presentiment dreams of his own death just before his assassination are often reported: The first was alluded to in Edwards Pierrepont's address to the jury during the prosecution of John H. Surratt on the charge of conspiracy to assassinate the President. As Pierrepont reported it, Lincoln described the dream, which he had had several times before disasters in the War this way: "He seemed to be at sea in a vessel, that was swept along by an irresistible current toward a maelstrom, from which it seemed no power could save her. Faster and faster the whirling waters swept the fated ship toward the vortex, until, looking down into the black abyss, amid the deafening roar of the waves, and with the sensation of sinking down, down, down an unfathomable depth, the terrified dreamer awoke." The second dream was described by Ward Lamon, who said that Lincoln had told him and Mary Todd Lincoln about it in a conversation several days before the assassination: "About ten days ago, I retired very late. I had been up waiting for important dispatches from the front. I could not have been long in bed when I fell into a slumber, for I was weary. I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a death-like stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible. I went from room to room; no living person was in sight, but the same mournful sounds of distress met me as I passed along. I saw light in all the rooms; every object was familiar to me; but where were all the people who were grieving as if their hearts would break? I was puzzled and alarmed. What could be the meaning of all this? Determined to find the cause of a state of things so mysterious and so shocking, I kept on until I arrived at the East Room, which I entered. There I met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully. 'Who is dead in the White House?' I demanded of one of the soldiers, 'The President,' was his answer; 'he was



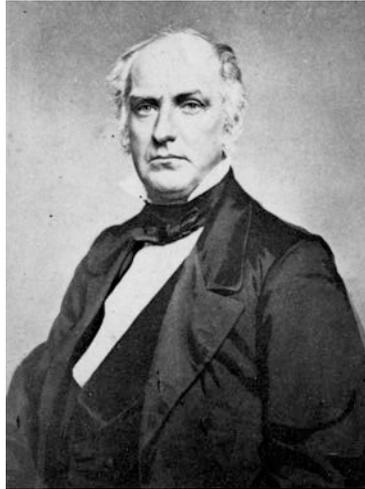
Lincoln Receives the Emancipation Proclamation from an Angel
Library of Congress

killed by an assassin.' Then came a loud burst of grief from the crowd, which woke me from my dream. I slept no more that night; and although it was only a dream, I have been strangely annoyed by it ever since." Ward Hill Lamon, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1895), 113-117. Both of these were widely noted in the spiritualist press.



Lincoln Reads the Draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to His Cabinet
Painting by Francis B. Carpenter, now in the Capitol

This brings us back to John Conklin's spirit-letter to Lincoln from Edward Baker.



Edward Dickinson Baker
Library of Congress

By the beginning of the War, Lincoln had known “Ned” Baker for twenty-five years. They had met when both of them were mustering out of the Black Hawk War. They had both been active in politics in Illinois, and Lincoln had succeeded Baker as Congressman from that state, after Baker had resigned to serve in the Mexican-American War. They were very close friends. Their relationship was almost brotherly. After the Lincolns arrived in Washington, Baker was often — too often some said — at the White House, inserting himself into the political appointment process. Lincoln was more than loyal to Baker. He had named one of his sons after him — Edward Baker Lincoln, who died in 1850.

On the day before Baker left for Leesburg — the day before he was plunged into the engagement at Ball’s Bluff at which he would be killed — he settled his affairs in Washington and visited the Lincolns to say farewell to the family. As he did, one of the ladies present there gave him a bouquet of

flowers, which he accepted, and said quietly, "Very beautiful. These flowers and my memory will wither together."¹⁴³

When Lincoln learned of Baker's death, he was so stricken with grief that he nearly collapsed. Toward the end the War, he would tell journalist Noah Brooks that "the keenest blow of all the war was at an early stage, when the disaster of Ball's Bluff and the death of his beloved Baker smote upon him like a whirlwind from a desert."¹⁴⁴

This was the Edward Dickenson Baker whose spirit message John Conklin gave to Lincoln. It would not be strange or out of character for Lincoln to have been prepared to hear more from his deceased friend.

Given all this, what are the conclusions to be drawn, as far as Conklin is concerned?

There is nothing to discount the possibility or even the probability that Lincoln did have sittings with Conklin in the White House, and let us simply accept, without evidence to the contrary, that they occurred as private sessions held on four successive Sundays. There may well have been more. Conklin, like others — spiritualist or not — likely warned Lincoln to be on his guard against attempts on his life, and most likely urged Lincoln to press on with his determination to emancipate the slaves. Conklin's friend David Bruce, who we have already seen write to the newspapers about Conklin's skill at opening combination locks, wrote to *The Truth Seeker* from Brooklyn in 1889, remembering an encounter he had had with Conklin back in the Civil War:

Meeting my old friend Mr. John B. Conklin, the noted public medium, one day in the street unexpectedly, he remarked, "I hav [sic] just returned from Washington, from Uncle Abe's, where we had at the White House several private sittings. What effect the intelligence has had upon him I don't know; but in leaving he took me by the hand and remarked, 'Mr. Conklin, any time you are this way consider yourself a welcome guest at my house.'"¹⁴⁵

And there is nothing to exclude the possibility that Simon Kase did in fact find a way to pass on to Lincoln the truly existing written message from Conklin. But any effort to defend the details of Kase's tale about how it was done or Kase's extravagant claim (which ratified Conklin's own) that Conklin dictated something very like the text of the Emancipation Proclamation to

¹⁴³ Orville J. Victor, ed. *Incidents and Anecdotes of the War* (New York: James D. Torrey, 1862), 228.

¹⁴⁴ Noah Brooks, "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 31 (July 1865): 223.

¹⁴⁵ *Truth Seeker*, January 4, 1890.

Lincoln, allegedly from the spirits, is a fool's errand. But, as far as what he *did* convey to the President as messages from the spirits, it seems clear enough that Simon Kase's narrative later shifted public attention on Nettie Colburn Maynard, especially as she was on her deathbed and afterward, when her confused story was published.¹⁴⁶

When it was published — whatever its immediate public reception — it began to leave a kind of ghostly trail through the deliberations of scholars studying Lincoln and the War. There is definitely some foundation of truth in it that points to the Lincolns' attending or even calling for séances at the White House. And Nettie was involved in some of them. But laying on top of what she initially termed a modest manuscript of some "Curious Revelations in the Life of a Medium" is a superstructure that grew as it reached its final state and passed into the hands of her publisher, who then retitled it, as a reviewer in the New York *Critic* observed at the time:

"WAS ABRAHAM LINCOLN a Spiritualist?"

After due examination of such evidence as is here given, we should say he was not. Both publisher and author have joined forces to compel, if possible, an affirmative answer to the query, and on the strength of the great man's name to advertise this rather incoherent and irrelevant miscellany of portraits, poetry, family letters, rambling talks and reminiscences. The publisher is joint author, for he writes a long preface in which he lays it down as a principle that 'no man should question' the statements of the 'medium,' whose connection with Mr. Lincoln seems to us rather parasitic.¹⁴⁷

It is entirely reasonable to question the role of Nettie's publisher, and that leads to what I see as the most plausible explanation for how it came to have its final form. Rufus C. Hartranft was a young man who had only published such works as a tourist guidebook to Philadelphia before this. He was not a spiritualist himself, Nettie explained. He really had no experience at all with mediums and suchlike. But he had met Simon Kase one day, who told him an incredible tale of White House séances, so when Nettie — presumably on Kase's recommendation — sent him her partial manuscript for consideration (she was still writing it at the time), he was completely bowled over by it. As he helpfully tells us in his long preface to her book, a New York journalist had written that "If it can be *proven* that Abraham Lincoln was in any way connected with Spiritualism, or did take counsel from any medium at a time when the nation's weal or woe hung in the balance, or was in any manner governed by such counsel, *it would be the literary event of the*

¹⁴⁶ She died at her home in White Plains in June 1892.

¹⁴⁷ *The Critic* 19.417 (26 December 1891): 368.

nineteenth century, and the most astonishing statement of modern times" (his italics). That was evidently a tempting challenge for a struggling young publisher to consider.

The *New York Sun* reported that there was a "W. E. Hartranft" at Mary Williams' cabinet materialization conducted at Nettie's home, as the manuscript was nearing completion and where Nettie received helpful advice on names and dates and other details from the shades of Lincoln and others. That Hartranft was likely a relative of the publisher sent to monitor what was said to and by Nettie. It is also clear that Simon Kase was a man who was always interested in a speculation and a deal. It would not be surprising if he had arranged for himself a finder's fee from Hartranft and even a percentage of the publisher's profits from the book. By this time John Conklin was dead and Kase could no longer have conducted a rewarding transaction, as it were, by promoting him. So the spotlight on the medium at the center of the Emancipation Proclamation claim shifted slightly and was centered over Nettie, whose testimony in the final book could be gently manipulated in various ways. Nettie: You seem like you were a sweet lady and all, and like you were dismayed near the end of your life by the way in which what was being claimed about your experiences was spinning out of your control, and that you did have some sittings (or spontaneous spirit outpourings) at the White House, but I am afraid that I have to take back your Emancipation Proclamation palm, and give it to John Conklin. That palm represents what passed between Conklin and Lincoln during sittings in the White House on Sunday mornings in the early months of 1862.

Was it a text that anticipated the Emancipation Proclamation "letter by letter"? No. However, no one doted on the precise wording of that document, except, of course, those who had to implement it. But it was never understood, by anyone, Lincoln, his cabinet, or the world at large, as merely the sum of its complicated little conditions and bureaucratic sections and subsections. Although, on its face, it was merely an administrative order, it was in fact not just the representation of something that had world-changing significance, but was the actual instrument that effected that change. And it was understood as such, even before it was issued. That is why we find that much of the imagery of the time that focused on Lincoln's issuing of the proclamation depicts it as being a heavenly inspired act, directed from far above, transmitted to Lincoln by "the angels of our better nature" and not really written — in what its full significance consisted — by Lincoln at all, but simply passed on to earth through him. There is evidence that Lincoln himself saw it this way.

In the early months of 1862, we may imagine him standing alone on a high peak far above the darkling plain below seeking a sign, looking for providential guidance.¹⁴⁸ And he was given that sign, and brought it back down to the plain. To some, it seemed that the written expression of that sign was a set of rules and regulations, but it was really the anointed visible tip of the invisible sword of the terrible hosts of heaven, the instrument of Providence, the seal of a new covenant between heaven and earth. As Emma Hardinge would phrase it in a funeral oration to Lincoln that she gave to a vast audience the day after Lincoln died: What had been criticized as the “time-serving” and compromised policies of Lincoln toward slavery actually issued forth as “the immortal proclamation of emancipation, the deed which, beyond all others of his life, crowns him with eternal honor, and will hand his name down to an immortal glory through all posterity.” And, she said, “‘He, being dead, yet speaketh.’ Let the glorious voice of Freedom, calling in trumpet-tongue from the grave of Abraham Lincoln, and ascending, in the immortal proclamation of emancipation, to the very heavens with his marching soul — let this speak for you...” By his martyrdom, then, the Emancipation Proclamation was sealed as the incarnation of his immortal spirit, which would speak through that document to the nation.¹⁴⁹ Hardinge, we know, framed her thoughts while fully convinced that Lincoln had received the essence of the Emancipation Proclamation from the spirits, through the mediumship of John Conklin. She was now placing Abraham Lincoln’s spirit into the company of the Blessed, who had earlier spoken to him, and she was declaring that the Emancipation Proclamation would now act as a kind of *planchette*, the medium for us to contact his spirit.

It was while Lincoln was standing on that high, lonely, and scouring spiritual peak at the beginning of the War that Conklin met with him, as, of course, many others met or communicated with the President then. Lincoln certainly was as smart and shrewd as his biographers have discerned, but I do not think that would have made him spurn a request for a meeting with Conklin: No matter what Lincoln’s final judgment might have been about Conklin himself, I believe the President would have been prepared to expect that he could find the wheat, if there was any, among the chaff. He found enough, apparently, to have invited him back to the White House for at least

¹⁴⁸ At this time, his sons Tad and Willie had contracted typhoid fever, from which Willie would die on February 20. So not just Moses standing on Mount Sinai, but “Father Abraham,” as Lincoln was sometimes called, standing on Mount Moriah with his son Isaac, desperately hoping for an angel to appear.

¹⁴⁹ Hardinge, *Great Funeral Oration*, 16, 26.

four sittings. Conklin, in 1868, would claim at public lecture that there had been nineteen altogether, as reported by the *New York Herald*:

He had had, he related, nineteen sittings with Mr. Lincoln, having first visited the President about the time of the Ball's Bluff disaster. His first call was made at the White House, when he sent in by a friend, whose name was S. P. Case, a letter informing Mr. Lincoln that the spirits had impelled him (Mr. Conklin) to seek him (Mr. Lincoln) for some purpose, of the purport of which he (Mr. C.) was not aware. Mr. Lincoln saw him a couple of days after, but after a full half hour's sitting not a thing came of it, and the President invited him to come to his house the next Sunday. He went, but, after a sitting of an hour and a quarter, not a thing came of it. The third time was after the battle at Ball's Bluff, and then some lines were scribbled by the responding spirit which seemed to make a deep impression on the President. The few lines constituted a communication from Colonel Baker, and warned Mr. Lincoln that his life was in danger.

The President, however, never paid him (Mr. Conklin) anything, and as he could not afford to board himself at \$15 a week and dance attendance upon Mr. Lincoln without some compensation, he left Washington. He did not mean to accuse Mr. Lincoln of dishonesty or littleness: it did not probably occur to the President that he (Mr. Conklin) needed money — though that the President should have failed to notice it reflects no great credit on his acumen.¹⁵⁰

I do not think that a historian can pretend to approach comprehending “what was really going on” between heaven and earth in these events during the War. And I am no prophet or seer. But I do think that a historian of those events must fail if he does not try to comprehend what the people immersed in them thought was really going on between heaven and earth. Otherwise, he must misunderstand even the historiographical details. The evidence will only allow us to make a reasonable conjecture about what actually passed between Lincoln and Conklin during those sittings, but I am also convinced that we may reasonably believe that Conklin's spirits — however one may understand that phrase — would have urged Lincoln, in the strongest and most explicit terms of which they were capable, to act at that moment, to submit himself to the will of Providence, and to rise above the particular events of the War and declare an end to slavery. And I am also convinced that Lincoln would not have understood such a message as a mere form of entertainment. Indeed, I think that Lincoln would have been prepared to receive a providential sign and was also prepared for such a sign to be a

¹⁵⁰ “The Spiritualists. Mr. Conklin Turns a Penny with Reminiscences,” *New York Herald*, May 4, 1868. Note the sequence of events here: There were initial sittings with the President, according to this, even before the one after the Battle of Ball's Bluff, which the “spirit” of Dickenson requested.

prophecy that announced a terrible, dark, and bloody struggle for him and for the nation as a whole, but that could be trusted in the end, “for the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

As for Conklin, how shall we understand his role in this? You now have all the information that I have about the man — including the descriptions and hints about his being “sensitive,” prickly, proud, and somewhat dissolute and licentious — so you can compare my judgment with yours. He did, of course, make his living by routinely producing what he purported were miraculous effects of spirit or mind over matter. So, on the face of it, that assumes that he had a somewhat negotiable relationship with objective truth.

He does seem to me, however, to have been genuinely intent to aid and comfort people by his work, and this was often remarked upon. I would not place him in the same category as the sheer opportunists who traveled the spiritualist circuit, like Charles Colchester, for example, who, it appears, attempted to make off, if not with the White House china, then at least with Mary Todd Lincoln’s reputation. Conklin may have anticipated being able to trade on being “the President’s medium,” and it is certain that he did make attempts to do so (even so far as to claim the “letter by letter” dictation of the Emancipation Proclamation), although these seem to have been somewhat sporadic and ineffectual, at least with the public at large. Others may well have discouraged him from making much of it. Perhaps he simply reveled in the challenge to give sittings in the White House. But, whatever else may have been among his motives, he did regard himself as a progressive, a politically radical Republican, a serious freethinker, and so an abolitionist. He was sympathetic to Lincoln’s political notions in many ways. And so I do not think it would be out of character for him to conceive of these sittings as a way that he could perform a genuine public service to the country, to do his part to strike off the chains that enslaved millions of souls, and felt inspired, even compelled, by very exalted spirits to urge the President to do so.

And if, at these sittings, only Conklin and Lincoln were present, would not the President have wished to jot down notes to remember what was said to him?¹⁵¹ And would not Conklin have later described such notes, simply

¹⁵¹ J. C. Laurie, son of the Laurie Family wrote that, “I have on several occasions seen Mr. Lincoln at a circle at my father’s house, so much influenced, apparently by spiritual forces, that he became partially entranced, and I have heard him make remarks in that condition, in which he spoke of his deceased son Willie, and said that he saw him. I have on several occasions seen Mr. Lincoln take notes of what was said by mediums,” Cyrus Oliver Poole, “The Religious Convictions of Abraham Lincoln,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, November 28, 1885.

because they were in writing, as the “first draft, letter by letter” of the Emancipation Proclamation?

7 A Visit across the Atlantic

At the beginning of November 1863, Conklin took passage to London on board the steamship *Bellona*. He accompanied wealthy Cleveland spiritualist John Montgomery Sterling and his “lady”—in fact, Sterling’s young and vivacious mistress. Sterling was a devoted follower and financial supporter of erratic spiritualist medium John Murray Spear, and he was on his way to London to visit Spear, who was temporarily living there. Sterling undoubtedly paid for Conklin’s passage.¹⁵²

Conklin spent time in London and met English spiritualists there.¹⁵³ It is likely that he visited his friends Thomas and Mary Nichols, who, at the outbreak of the American Civil War, had emigrated there. When Conklin arrived, Thomas Nichols was then writing a history of the Davenport brothers, American mediums and magicians from Buffalo, who would also arrive in England in August for a performing tour (and would receive a definitely mixed reception there).¹⁵⁴

At the beginning of Conklin’s sojourn in Britain, a visitor to London from Glasgow wrote to *The Glasgow Daily Herald* on January 20, upon returning home. He said that while he was in London, he had some time on his hands and took the opportunity to explore the claims of spiritualism, which his London hosts and their friends were excitedly discussing:

Having expressed to these friends my anxiety to test personally the manifestations of the best known “mediums” in London, they directed me to a Mr. Conklin, 25 Cecil Street, Strand, who had recently arrived from America, and who was stated to have made many spiritual revelations to Mr.

¹⁵² “Shipping News: Arrivals and Departures,” *New York Herald*, November 5, 1863.

¹⁵³ Spear definitely had contact with Conklin: Letter from J. B. Conklin to Samuel Cuppy [sic], London, January 12, 1864, Thaddeus Sheldon Papers, Darlington Library, University of Pittsburgh. “Allow me to introduce to you Mr. John M. Spear of America, the gentleman of whom I was speaking as being interested in your book.” For the dissipated peregrinations of Sterling and his friendly mistress in Europe, see “Led Away by Spirits. The Romantic and Remarkable Story of John M. Sterling,” (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 29, 1887. In at least one detail, this report is flawed, however: Josephine — and her last name was reported variously — did not die in London, and eventually made her way back to America and took up residence in Philadelphia.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Low Nichols, *A Biography of the Brothers Davenport: with some account of the physical and psychical phenomena which have occurred in their presence, in America and Europe* (London: Saunders, Otley, and Company, 1864).

Lincoln, President of the Federal States. I accordingly waited upon that gentleman, and arranged for a "séance" at my friend's house that same evening at seven o'clock. He kept his appointment precisely, and immediately on entering the drawing room, without exchanging salutations with any one, laid his hands upon the table, and invoked the appearance of the spirits. I feel that it would be trifling with the columns of your paper to detail at length the silly and contemptible attempts made by Mr. Conklin to guess the names which my friend and myself had written down, and the equally futile attempts to give true and correct answers to our questions. The only manifestation he professed to have made that evening was to move the table — a drawing room one, of the ordinary size. Certainly he did this in a very clever way by the aid of his fingers and toes, but when one of our party was appointed specially to watch his movements under the table, I assure you it suddenly became a very quiet, well-behaved table, and did not move a single inch. I may dismiss Mr. Conklin by stating that he is what is called a writing medium, and his only ingenuity appeared to consist in being able to write backwards. This may be a difficult accomplishment, but the possession of it is certainly no evidence that his hand is moved by spirits, as he alleges. While the company are writing out the names of the spirits they wish to converse with and the questions they wish answered, Mr. Conklin affects to keep his face covered with his hands; and if parties are silly enough to give him a glance at what they are writing, of course he will occasionally stumble upon a good guess.¹⁵⁵

Two days after this appeared in the newspaper, Conklin published an ad in the *London Standard*, saying that he was "obliged to request that applications for Séances be made by letter only."

The next we hear of Conklin was when Robert Cooper, the editor of *The Spiritual Times* and of *The London Investigator* ("a monthly journal of secularism"), who would also publish an extended account of traveling with the Davenport brothers, and who would soon become embroiled in court with Edward Sothorn's libel suit, invited Conklin to his home in Eastbourne, where the American medium conducted sittings that were generally well received:

Mr. Conklin, a medium from America, being on a visit to this country, I availed myself of the opportunity to give some friends evidence of spirit action through his mediumship. At my request he came to Eastbourne, and I invited about a dozen persons interested in the subject to witness the manifestations that take place in his presence. All these persons were, I believe, convinced of the reality of them. Mr. Conklin is what is known as a test medium. I also invited two Lewes gentlemen who were connected with the press, to have the evidence Mr. Conklin could give, and the following is an account of their experience as published at the time.

Mr. J. B. Conklin, the American test medium, has given us some very remarkable evidences of his mediumistic powers. He was entertained by Mr.

¹⁵⁵ T. C., "Séance with Two Spirit 'Mediums,'" *Glasgow Daily Herald*, January 25, 1864.

R. Cooper, at whose house some very conclusive illustrations of spirit presence have been given. On Saturday evening a number of gentlemen who had formerly, at a public meeting, been elected to make some investigations along with Mr. Cooper, with a view to test the reality of the alleged phenomena, were favoured with a sitting. Mr. Conklin desired them, one by one, to sit at the opposite end of the table to himself, and to take a number of pieces of paper, write on each the degree of relationship of some friend or relative deceased. This was done, and the paper rolled up into pellets and thrown into the centre of the table. The medium then picked out one of the pieces of paper and threw it towards the person giving the test. A number of other pieces of paper, with the christian names of the departed were inscribed; the papers being rolled up in the same manner, the medium picked out one as before. Afterwards the diseases — the ages — and the places of death were each written and made into pellets; and singular enough the medium picked out of each let a single pellet. When the selected pieces were opened they were generally found to correspond.

Mr. Jas. Bates and Mr. Alfred Duplock, of Lewes, two gentlemen who had been promised by Mr. Cooper when he was at Lewes, that he would give them an opportunity of witnessing some illustrations of spirit power, were next favoured with a sitting, at which some extraordinary, and confessedly to them unaccountable, phenomena took place.

Mr. Bates tried the pellets, and having used twelve pieces of paper was wonderfully astonished to find that the medium picked out three of the pellets containing the degree of relationship — christian name, and the age of one dead. He was the more staggered at this from the fact that he had written most of his pellets in shorthand. A similar process was adopted with Mr. Duplock, with nearly the same success.

At a third and last sitting a gentleman desired to have the name given of an enveloped photograph after he had failed in getting the right age of his deceased relation, but had obtained the place of death. A number of eight or nine names was written — the table signalled one "Robinson;" and the communicating spirit persisted in having it "Robinson." Mr. Cooper was requested to close his eyes and draw a black-lead pencil slowly along the paper over the written names. He did so; when the pencil reached "Robinson" the table ambled. The paper containing the names was then turned over, the blank side uppermost. Mr. Cooper closed his eyes again, drawing his pencil over the paper as before — the table knocked — Mr. Cooper stopped, and to the astonishment of most of the company his pencil was on the name "Robinson" again. Mr. Bates then took the paper containing the names — tore the names separately off, and made them into pellets. It was impossible that any one could say which pellet contained the written name Robinson; but singularly enough the table knocked out assent when the right pellet was held up. The name Robinson was signalled altogether seven times in different ways. During this sitting five of the company had unmistakable touches — taps or grips from invisible hands. We ourselves were four or five times taken hold below the knee.

Mr. Duplock felt a pressure on his knee, and put his hand down to feel the cause, when he had the satisfaction of feeling a spirit hand take hold of his. Miss. Cooper and a Miss Peel each had several grips, or pulls and Mr. Conklin was dragged from his chair partly under the table.

During these sittings two tables — one weighing about 80 lbs., and the

other about 112 lbs. — were several times raised by spirit-power above *terra firma*.

Mr. Conklin's visit to Eastbourne is very satisfactory. He appears an unassuming, earnest, intelligent man, and from the marvellous medium powers he possesses, must be regarded as a man among men."

Soon after this Mr. Conklin went to Glasgow, where he experienced very rough and unfair treatment. A pamphlet, written by a Mr. Paterson, professed to be an exposure of the whole affair, but according to the writer's own statements there are many things, connected with the answering of questions, difficult to account for. The lifting of the table was explained by suggesting that the medium had hooks concealed in his sleeves!¹⁵⁶

Cooper here refers to what Conklin did after conducting the séances at Eastbourne: He travelled to Glasgow on the invitation of a group of investigators (who paid his expenses) in order to demonstrate to them his mediumistic skill. Following that visit, John W. Paterson, one of the Glasgow attendees, published a pamphlet, *Spirit-Rapping in Glasgow in 1864*, which purported to explode Conklin's pretenses to having contact with spirits.

The publication of *Spirit-rapping in Glasgow* elicited a letter from William Howitt to James Henry Powell, editor of *The Spiritual Times*, castigating its author. Howitt's letter raveled out in a long single paragraph:

My Dear Sir — We have been away for six weeks, and I am now in a chaos of arrears of all sorts, but I must tell you, as you had Conklin down with you some time ago, he has received a terrible mauling at Glasgow. Sixteen great fellows (doctors and the like Scotch whinstones, alike impervious to heaven's faith and heaven's daylight, have inveighed the poor little man down on the pretence of wishing to learn the truth, but in reality with a foregone purpose (as their pamphlet shows), to badger and insult him. They have done it effectually. Two of them wrote to me, asking, for their private satisfaction, about Conklin, whilst all the time they were printing a pamphlet with their account of the séances. Their object, undoubtedly, was to draw approbation of Conklin from me, and so extend their charge to the Spiritualists generally, saying — "See the sort of humbugs these leading Spiritualists patronize!" But as I never have anything to do with paid mediums, and never saw Conklin in my life, I told them that it was a matter that did not concern me or Spiritualism, which now, based on the familiar knowledge of millions, does not need the evidence of any individuals, neither can imposters hurt it, any more than they can hurt any other respectable body in which they may throw themselves — that if they could detect Conklin in trickery, they ought, by all means, to expose him, for the benefit of truth and Spiritualism. At the same time, I warned them not to condemn him merely on their own prejudiced imaginations, for that I had seen plenty of people who would not believe their own eyes when a table rose into the air, yet were so suspicious

¹⁵⁶ Robert Cooper, *Spiritual Experiences; including seven months with the Brothers Davenport* (London: Heywood and Company, 1867), 95-98.

that a medium could not move hand, foot, or eye, without their crying — “a trick!” You have, no doubt, seen plenty of such wry-necked gentry, who see all on one side, in the long battles for the establishment of Mesmerism. I have seen doctors, on these occasions, before public audiences, conduct themselves in a more beastly manner than any Hottentot or most brutal save of the Cannibal Isles. The pamphlet of these Glasgowian gentry is now out, and a very base one it is. The old bullying, and insolence, and lies. A more shameful case of sixteen bully-bagors getting what they confess to be “a poor, old, grey-headed and melancholy-looking man,” a foreigner and stranger, into a room, in a place where he was without friends and acquaintances, and treating him as so many bull-dogs would a bear, I have never seen. They profess to have shown Conklin to be a regular charlatan. He may be that, but I would not believe it on such evidence, neither would any honourable man. Another thing they have most palpably shown, namely, that they are a set of ruffians and cowards. Mr. Coleman, in a letter which I expect will appear in one of the Glasgow papers, says that they may have shown Conklin to be a charlatan, but that the writer of that pamphlet has shown himself to be one quite as great. And this is quite true. The pamphlet abounds with the most notorious falsehoods. One is, that Conklin is a “particular friend of Mr. Home’s, and a powerful writer in the Spiritual journals.” That he is no friend of Home’s I am quite certain, and I believe him to be quite as little the powerful writer in the Spiritual journals they talk of. But all this is thrown in, in order to hook Spiritualism at large on to this miserable Conklin case. The rogues must have been grievously disappointed at receiving from me a good set down instead of a backer for Conklin. Had I sent the latter, my letter would, no doubt, have figured in their pamphlet! And this these simpletons imagine can affect Spiritualism, unwarned by the very opposite effect which all such disgraceful bullyisms have had on Mesmerism and Spiritualism. Both being eternal truths, have risen in the face of long years of great blackguard treatment into general acknowledgment. In America it has ended in the adhesion of five millions of believers in Spiritualism. In England and all over the Continent it is daily making the most prodigious strides, and that amongst the very highest ranks of intellect. We have lately had to record the avowals of Victor Hugo, Professor de Morgan, and Dr. Elliotson. There are numerous cases now again known, and which will soon appear publicly, of the convincement of eminent men, both in the scientific, literary, and theatrical world, which will make these Scotch pigmies stare in astonishment, and before whom the most considerable of these Glasgow gents, would appear no better than monkeys. If this pamphlet is to be taken as an example of the standard theology of Scotland, the spiritual cause in that country must be deplorable, and must need some spiritual revelation of some kind amongst them. The writer says, “we believe all souls of the departed to be holy.” The damned of course! He does not believe “souls from heaven or hell” can be permitted to visit the earth again; and he evidently does not know that in the spirit-world there are any other regions than those two. The occurrence is a proper warning to mediums not to go into strange places amongst hypocritical scoundrels, without a friend or friends with them to see them fair-play and a fair report. It is very clear that Scotland has in it men, calling themselves gentlemen, who are prepared to act the part of savages, in order to trample out advancing opinion and that, whatever Conklin may be, they are ready to treat the most honourable and genuine

mediums in the same manner; but every medium so treated should at once thrown down the money for the séance, tell the rogues that as they don't want truth, but a shindy, there is their fee, and so show them into the street.—Yours faithfully,

William Howitt.¹⁵⁷

In the following issue of *The Spiritual Times*, Powell himself took up the cudgel:

What a good thing it is that spiritualism does not owe its existence to a single medium, like Mr. Conklin, and that its truths are still truths, although sixteen Scotch bulldogs have barked and growled at it! Spiritualists, we call upon you to set apart a general fast-day, that you may formally thank God that the everlasting truths of your creed are not annihilated by these sixteen Scotch growlers.

At No. 9 West Regent Street, Glasgow, the big mastiffs collected, all hungry enough. They are called gentlemen by one of themselves—let us see how they acted, and then see whether the pseudonym is well applied. With a desire to test the so-termed spirit-rapping, with a view to prove it a humbug, these “Scotch flint-stones, that imagine,” to use a phrase of William Howitt, “they are capable of imbibing dew, failing to procure the Marshall mediums,” engaged Mr. Conklin. They got him into a private room, and then commenced a series of séances which went off generally dissatisfactorily. One of the party acts as scribe—prepares himself to appear in a pamphlet for the advantage of mankind. This pamphlet has already been referred to in the letter which appeared from Mr. Howitt in our columns last week. We find nothing throughout its pages very damaging to spiritualism—what there is that may contain a particle of truth respecting the medium's “tricking” let it have effect. If Mr. Conklin *did* trick, he deserves to be castigated; but from the knowledge we possess of skeptical attempts at trick-detection, we do not give ready credence to the charge.

Flinty philosophers are substantially too hard for a quick appreciation of this truth, as those sixteen clever skulls of Scotland show in their late onslaught on Mr. Conklin. It is not our purpose to defend their victim, only to defend spiritualism and common gentlemanly courtesy. We do not know whether Mr. Conklin *was* detected in “tricking” by these big Scotch clever dogs, but we know that on several occasions we have had the satisfaction of witnessing Mr. Conklin's medium powers, and from the most careful attention we have failed to discover anything discreditable to him either as a medium or a man. We cannot answer for others, neither ought we to pass on without being just to him by giving him the benefit of our testimony. If men will enter on a career of examination, predetermined to pick up only such facts as favour their own prejudices, the chances are that they will lose the truth, and carry with them evidences that are valueless for other purpose than to betray them into deeper depths of skepticism. From several years' experience we know how virulent and savage has been the

¹⁵⁷ “Mr. Howitt on the Opponents of Spiritualism,” *Dundee Advertiser*, June 17 1864.

opposition against mesmerism, which we venture to assert has now become an established fact all over the world. We have witnessed the most absurd tests to prove that an existing fact was in reality a “humbug.” But in spite of all, the “humbug” so called has been applied to the cure of diseases, in thousands of cases, with the most marvelous success, a fact which Dr. Elliotson and a host of others can attest. We do not wonder therefore that Spiritualism, which presents to us a glass in which we behold wonders which put the mysterious realities of mesmerism in the shade, that the forces of opposition should be set to work—we should wonder if they were allowed to rest. We, therefore, rather rejoice than otherwise that Scotland has employed herself in other things than making and eating cakes. There must be an outlet somewhere for the pent-up skepticism of the Scotch mind which has for ages wallowed in the very mire of bigotry and pseudo-piety. Why should she not be allowed to set her sixteen bull-dog philosophers to snarl and growl at “a very poor and unhappy-looking, grey-haired man,” seeing that he lived so far off as America.

Spiritualism will suffer no hurt whatever from the puny efforts of such men as those who so savagely insulted Mr. Conklin; and as for the anonymous pamphlet, why, being as it is a tissue of absurdities and a record of fiendish infamy on their own part, these sixteen pigmies have only succeeded in monumentalizing their own despicable conduct in its pages.¹⁵⁸

Spirit-rapping in Glasgow had been published anonymously, but when this vilification appeared, its author identified himself in a letter to the newspapers as John W. Paterson, and sought to mollify Howitt by an explanation of the events in question and of the motives of the investigating participants. Howitt, however, was moved very little by Paterson’s attempt at conciliation. He was fighting many battles at once:

Highgate, June 10, 1864.

Sir,— My letter to the *Spiritual Times* is the honest expression of my disgust in reading what you now avow as your pamphlet on what you please to call Spirit-rapping. And, pray, is the phrase of Spirit-rapping any more respectful towards those who call themselves Spiritualists, than any phrase in my letter on your *brochure*, or on the conduct of the sixteen persons sitting in judgment on Spiritualism? It is just as respectful, and meant to be so, as it would have been in the old Pagans to have dubbed Christians Water-dippers because they practised baptism. I do not take Conklin into the account. He may have been a cheat, or he may not. I say now, as I said before, if ho be so, let him be shewn up. But it is the manner in which this shewing up is done, which I condemn, and condemn most heartily. You avow your belief in the whole theory and practice of Spiritualism being an imposition, and endeavour to mix it up with the conduct of a charlatan. That is the point on which I take you; and I, firstly, condemn an examination commenced on such a basis, and conducted in the manner in which you represent the one at Glasgow to have been conducted. You say you take all the responsibility of

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in “Spiritualism in Scotland,” (*Edinburgh*) *Caledonian Mercury*, June 20, 1864.

the pamphlet,— that is not the question. The question is the conduct of the sixteen testers of Conklin, as related by you. Taking it for granted that Conklin is a cheat, there is still a gentlemanly and an ungentlemanly manner in which an enquiry, even into trickery, may be conducted, and, as you state it, the manner of the Glasgow enquiry was most ungentlemanly and most offensive to Spiritualism at large. I have not heard a different opinion from any one here who has yet read the pamphlet.



William Howitt

At this point in his letter, it seems, Howitt turned to his real nemesis — Calvinism, especially in its Scots Presbyterian austerity or in its stepchild, the materialism of the Scottish philosopher David Hume — echoing a kind of High Church criticism of the Protestant elimination of an “intermediate state” after death, of banishing the spiritual realm from the material one. It is especially interesting because Howitt was born and raised a Quaker, married a Quaker, and only left the Society of Friends in 1847 when he became a spiritualist. So he had been a “Protestant,” insofar as having always rejected the mediation of priests, sacraments, and the ecclesiastical authority of the Church between the individual soul and God, but had also been a Nonconformist, and so had never had any use for Calvinist theology:

You defend your assertion that “all departed spirits are holy, and, therefore, not to be meddled with.” If damned souls are holy — why are they damned? If they are holy, because they are God’s creatures, then it makes the devil holy, for he is God’s creature just as much as they are, and the idea of a

holy devil, is certainly one original enough to have figured in Burns's *Holy Fair*, in which, by-the-bye, he has well hit off the Glasgow-Conklin junto:—

“A robe of seeming truth and trust
Hid crafty observation.
And secret hung, with poisoned crust,
The dirk of defamation.”

And again, how exactly he touches off the spirit of the junto:—

“My name is Fun — your cronie dear,
The nearest friend ye hae;
And this is Superstition here,
And that's Hypocrisy.
I'm gaen to ----- Holy Fair,
To spend an hour in daffin.
Gin ye'll go there, you runkled pair,
We will get famous laughin
At them this day.’

And I must say that the studied false questions, and the demoniac fits of laughter, would have well become a corner of Alloway Kirk the night when Auld Nickie Ben was piping to the Cutty Sark.¹⁵⁹

As to the souls of the departed being meddled with — no one can meddle with them, without their own consent; no one can invoke spirits, or, at least, can compel them to come. No Spiritualist pretends to do it, or believes in it. But that souls both good, bad and indifferent, are ready to come, and communicate with those in the flesh, all history and all Scripture testify, and the facts of all ages and countries corroborate this truth.

You talk of the sacredness of those “who have seen the face of their Maker!” Who are they? Do you suppose that one in ten thousand, who has left this life of late years has seen the face of his Maker? I do not. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Yes, but not till they are pure in heart, and that will probably be, for most of us, not till we have passed many a long stage of purification in the progressive spheres. But this is what astonishes me in the Scotch: they have stuck so stedfastly to their spirit, whiskey, as the *Glasgow Herald* says, and to the “Geneva” which Knox imported, that they are absolutely ignorant of what the Jews and the first Christians fully believed—the intermediate state — the *Sheol* of the Old Testament, the *Hades* of the New. Since Luther mistranslated those terms, confounding them everywhere with Gehenna, and was followed by the other Protestant translators, to get rid of purgatory, and as some one has wittily observed, “enlarged the bounds of hell by adding all purgatory to it,” Protestants, and it now appears the Scotch pre-eminently, have totally lost sight of those vast and very necessary regions of the spirit-world, and believe in no places there but heaven and hell, and that souls go at a leap to one or the other. Oh! admirable theology! Why, the great bulk of mankind at death are fit neither for heaven nor hell, and the revelations of Swedenborg and of all the spirits since, have

¹⁵⁹ Ref. Robert Burns, “Tam O’ Shanter.”

confirmed the truths of the ancient Hebrews and Christians that *Sheol* and *Hades* exist, with all their progressive and probationary spheres as much as ever. That spirits do return, or rather, that they are existing all around us; that the spirit-world exists all around us, are facts proved by the every-day experience of millions, and that this intercourse is destroying Materialism and restoring faith in God and Christianity, is a fact of the most consoling and vital importance to the world at large. If the Scotch, contented with the vague, misty, and castrated theology of two or three centuries ago, choose to know nothing of this, let them at least refrain from sneering ignorantly at those — more in number than the whole of their nation — whose happiness and privilege it is to have found again what the Protestant Reformers so mischievously threw away. We choose, on this point, not the conventional and mutilated faith of modern sects, but the whole large faith of the Bible, and of the ancient world *in toto*, both Jew and Greek, Christian and Pagan.

And then back to personal affront:

If Conklin says he is a friend of Mr. Home's, then I am quite ready to transfer the falsehood to him. If there be any of the examiners of Conklin's pretensions, who are believers in the truth of Spiritualism, and did in reality conduct themselves as gentlemen and Christians at the *séances*, I am willing to believe it, but certainly your pamphlet gives us no evidence of it. The whole scene appears just what might have been expected — you went with a desire to trick, and it seems, you got tricks; you put false questions — substituting *hungry* for *happy* and so on, and you got false answers. The devil seems to have fooled you to the top of your bent. Whether the medium had been truthful or not with such schemes and such a spirit the result must have been the same.

When you seek for the truth of Spiritualism in a truthful and philosophical spirit, it is sure to be found: and the more so if you avoid paid mediums, and form circles amongst yourselves, as those most convinced of its truth have done, amongst whom is,

Yours faithfully,

William Howitt.

John W. Paterson, Esq.

183, Albert Terrace, Glasgow.¹⁶⁰

James Robie, the editor of Edinburgh's *Caledonian Mercury*, then felt compelled to enter the fray. He was an "ultra-radical" and his paper leaned heavily toward the interests of the Scottish Free Church and the United Presbyterians:

Glasgow has long ago achieved for herself the questionable distinction of being the stronghold of Spiritualism in Scotland. Strange though it may seem,

¹⁶⁰ Reproduced in Benjamin Coleman, "Spiritualism in Scotland," *Spiritual Magazine* 5.7 (July 1864): 322-326. The "High Church" tack that Howitt takes here seems especially interesting given his battles in the press with Catholic convert Thomas Low Nichols over the meaning of spiritualism.

it is nevertheless true that that city of great shops, manufactories, and shipping, whose population we are accustomed to regard as more practical and matter-of-fact than, perhaps, any other section of the people of Scotland, is the only place in our country where table-turning, spirit-rapping, and the other doctrines and practices of the new revelation have gained anything like a footing. Since poor Mr. J. B. appeared as the pioneer of the new faith, the Press of Glasgow has given forth various pamphlets in support of it, all serving, along with other indications, to show that Spiritualism is making progress in the metropolis of the West. Glasgow, of course, has had its influence on other districts; and we have met with not a few persons who, through Glasgow pamphlets and the gossip which never finds its way into print, have been thrown into such a state of mental confusion and nervousness that it only required a bold and decided advocate of Spiritualism to make them converts to the system. Glasgow has thus a good deal to answer for, having been a centre for the dissemination of opinions which, unhappily, are, within a certain range, scarcely less mischievous than they are ludicrous and absurd. At length, we are glad to say, it sends us an utterance that ought to go far to undo the mischief of previous manifestoes on this subject."¹⁶¹

Editor Robie also commented on Howitt in this way:

It is melancholy to think that an exposure of the paltry juggleries of Spiritualism should be required to be made in an age which boasts so loudly of its Christian civilisation. Yet so it is. The imposture has thousands of believers even in this country, and it has unsettled the opinions of thousands more. Poor and miserable as are the tricks of table-turning and spirit-rapping, they have done a world of mischief, and a plain exposure of them is an important service to truth and humanity. The author of this pamphlet deserves the thanks of a wider circle of the community than is contained within the bounds of Glasgow. He writes with earnestness as well as humour; and so far is he from any intemperateness of feeling or language that we can see he even pities the impostor who he tricks, as a specimen of those of the class he so thoroughly exposes. That his pamphlet has told we have evidence in a letter by Mr. William Howitt, published in the *Spiritual Times*. This letter contains hardly anything but the most scurrilous abuse. ...

Now, the pamphlet is simply a temperate and plain record of facts, without any strong language. Yet it sets Mr. Howitt frantic. How is this? Cannot Spiritualism be defended without the use of such filthy missiles? Mr. Howitt and the Spiritualists demand faith in their new religion before it is tested; and they become furious if a man wishes to subject it to the test to which all truth has hitherto been brought. An unbeliever in a séance prevents spiritual manifestations; we must believe, and then we shall have the desired communications with the spirit-world. No doubt of it! But the believing without proof, and in the very teeth of contradictions and absurdities, is the difficulty. When once a man reaches this point, his "faith" will readily enough

¹⁶¹ [Editorial] "Summary," (*Edinburgh*) *Caledonian Mercury*, June 20, 1864. Robie, incidentally, would write Abraham Lincoln in March 1865, expressing his sympathy for Lincoln's goals and achievements, and especially for the Emancipation Proclamation.

afford him spiritual manifestations in abundance. He will see spirit hands, hear spirit voices, and earn the secrets of the unseen world. A table of the commonest deal will become an oracle of unerring wisdom; Gravitation will be overcome; tables will hang unsupported between heaven and earth; and favoured mediums will float in the air without any fear of broken bones on their return to terra firma. It needs a strong faith to believe even in the possibility of such things, not to speak of their actual truth, and Mr. Howitt has no right to call opprobrious names if we demand proof of their reality; if we put to a rigid and uncompromising test the pretensions of men who profess to be in communication with the spirit-world, and to be able to display some of its wonders; and if, after having tried them and found them impostors, we make known the fact for the information of all whom it may concern. If there is truth in Spiritualism, it will make its way. Truth seeks the light, and is willing to submit to any test. Why should Spiritualism skulk in darkened chambers, and refuse to give plain and ample evidence to honest but skeptical inquirers? Many of its so-called manifestations are, to an ordinary observer, in the highest degree ridiculous; but let them be proved on satisfactory evidence, and we will accept them as facts, and at once set to work to seek an explanation of them. The phenomena, physical and spiritual, which have been so thoroughly shown to be an imposture at Glasgow, have not yet been proved to be true anywhere else. The burden of proof lies with the Spiritualists.¹⁶²

Conklin did not respond in the press to the pamphlet. By the time it was published, he had probably already departed for America. An ad in *The Liverpool Daily Post*, May 26, 1864, placed him as having arrived in Liverpool and prepared to give séances, which suggests that he was about to embark from there.

Like Howitt, Coleman too seemed unable to let the issue of Conklin's Glasgow séances rest, writing three more articles on it over the next few years and actually traveling to Glasgow to reassure himself in his judgment. British spiritualists like Coleman and Howitt who were disposed to defend visiting American mediums had a difficult year of it altogether: Besides the Conklin affair, the Davenport brothers performances sometimes resulted in riots, and in that year Robert Browning published his "Sludge the Medium," attacking American medium D. D. Home after Home had presided over a sitting for his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

In an article in the October 1864 issue of *The Spiritual Magazine*, Coleman assured his readers that "a resident in Glasgow, wrote to inform me that he and a party of friends were pursuing the enquiry, and had succeeded in satisfying themselves that Mr. Paterson's conclusions were erroneous, though they had not obtained as yet, manifestations of a sufficiently marked

¹⁶² [Editorial] "Summary," (*Edinburgh*) *Caledonian Mercury*, June 20, 1864.

character to place upon record.”¹⁶³

In 1866, when Coleman was able to investigate the situation himself by a visit to Glasgow, he found that a spiritualist association had formed there, despite (or, according to Coleman, *because of*) the publicity around Paterson’s pamphlet, and he again reassured his readers by writing that,

The Conklin party of sixteen, I then heard, was originated by Mr. A. Kennedy, an intelligent man of business and the head of a very respectable firm in Glasgow. Mr. Kennedy did me the favour of calling upon me, and pronounced himself a thorough convert to Spiritualism, and I am glad to say he is one of the few who is not afraid to avow it openly. He subsequently brought his friend Mr. Paterson to make my acquaintance, and with him I had an amicable discussion upon the question of spiritual evidences. He is, however, one of that class of thinkers to whom human testimony is of no value. He must see before he can believe, and having committed himself deeply by his too celebrated pamphlet he is not likely to be haste to recant his errors, though I do not think he will ever attempt to support them by the publication of another pamphlet. Of quite another type of mind is Mr. Kennedy’s. He, it appears, did see enough during Conklin’s visit to interest him and by subsequent enquiry he became satisfied and, as I have said, he is now a confirmed believer.”¹⁶⁴

Then, in November 1867, after writing about a successful soirée held by the Glasgow Association of Spiritualists, Coleman appeared to signal to his readers that a favorable epistemic closure (as we have lately come to refer to it) had been reached about Conklin’s Glasgow performances by writing, sarcastically, “I hope Mr. J. W. Paterson, who is really the founder of the Glasgow Association of Spiritualists, has at length arrived at the truth.”¹⁶⁵

DODWORTH HALL—DR. WEEKS' DIS-
courses upon *Death Spiritually Considered*, at 10½
o'clock. J. B. CONKLIN, the Celebrated Medium, re-
lates his Spiritual experience with Queen Victoria,
President Lincoln and others, at 7½ o'clock. Seats free.

New York Times, May 2, 1868

Conklin himself raised one more mysterious flag over his trip to England. In May 1868, he gave a lecture at Dodworth Hall on Broadway in

¹⁶³ Benjamin Coleman, “Spiritualism in Scotland,” *Spiritual Magazine* 5.10 (October 1864): 457-463.

¹⁶⁴ Benjamin Coleman, “Spiritualism in Scotland,” *Spiritual Magazine* 1.7 (June 1866): 263-264.

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin Coleman, “Spiritualism in Scotland,” *Spiritual Magazine* 2.8 (November 1867): 496-497.

New York. He advertised it beforehand by saying he would give his experiences conducting séances for Abraham Lincoln and Queen Victoria. The queen, it has become quite clear, in grief over the death of Prince Albert in 1861, did indeed have sittings with spirit mediums during this time, although the commonly attested list of the identities of these mediums do not include Conklin. At his lecture, unfortunately for us, he spent so much time talking about Abraham Lincoln “that he was compelled to defer giving a narrative of his experience at Buckingham palace to another opportunity,” which as far as I can tell, never materialized in the form of a public report.¹⁶⁶

8 John Conklin Meets His Ghost

In May 1868, James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald*, on its weekly page of reporting the various sermons and happenings in the churches of the city, did a hatchet job on the spiritualists’ meeting the previous day at Dodworth Hall.¹⁶⁷ Conklin was scheduled to speak about his séances with Lincoln and with the Queen, and the *Herald* reporter described the medium:

... a thin, emaciated gentleman, who looked as if the vitality had all been pumped out of him, leaving nothing but a sort of mummy in the place of what had once been a man. A cadaverous face, as if by some accident the individual’s blood had been all turned to water, or as if by long subsistence upon vegetable diet the vermilion had all been washed out of it; a shock of frowsy hair that stood up all over the head which it enveloped and stood up of its own strength, with a sort of persistent capillary obstinacy that refused to be subdued; a pair of weird, wonderful eyes, that absolutely glittered, and were the only things in the whole face that indicated that it was not a dead face; a soft, singular, half-demented, metallic sort of voice that never seemed to issue from the individual’s mouth at all, but rather from the individual’s pocket or from any other point just in his vicinity—these were among the constituent parts of one of the oddest impersonations of absurdity that ever opened its mouth, even at a meeting of Spiritualists or, for that matter, of real and well authenticated spirits, every one of them just from the other world and having the credentials in his pocket to prove it.

Having crawled stealthily upon the platform and taken his seat, it was one naturally of the odd individuality at the desk; and the absolute surprise of everybody when the individual arose, opened those weird eyes with black rings around the and spoke, could hardly have been equaled by that of Mr. Ellery Anderson had one of his pet mummies taken into his embalmed head to get up, make an Egyptian toilet in the fashion of Thebes and breakfast with his present proprietor. The individual’s eyes were the

¹⁶⁶ Letter to the editor from Thomas R. Hazard, *Newport (Rhode Island) Mercury*, May 16, 1868.

¹⁶⁷ “Sunday in the City. ... Services in the Churches,” *New York Herald*, May 11, 1868.

only things about him that did not seem to be dead — absolutely dead — and they rolled about in his head and winked after the most ordinary fashion; and when the thing at the desk stirred or was stirred it was just possible that one might fancy he detected a cadaverous sort of effluvia in the atmosphere. To have met him on the streets (with his eyes shut) one would have been likely to wonder how he got out of his coffin or out of his case, and might have insisted perhaps upon taking him up as a vagrant bit of defunct mortality which unfortunately had not been buried so deep but that it had gotten up again.¹⁶⁸

The following Sunday, Conklin was present on the platform again and had been scheduled to speak more about his séances for Queen Victoria, but he chose not to give his speech and let Dr. Robert T. Hallock take the lead and give a talk about Swedenborgianism. The *Herald* reporter there, no doubt disappointed not to have been given an opportunity to tear into Conklin's claims, again ripped the silent figure sitting on the platform, calling him "a sort of mummy with its eyes open — a desiccated individual with all the vitality evaporated out of him" and "the ossified individual with every ounce of his vitality pumped out of him except the little that belonged to a pair of strange staring eyes."

The truth is that Conklin had contracted tuberculosis and it would prove fatal. We may attribute his appearance and his lack of vitality simply to that.

In January 1869, Conklin wrote to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in Chicago, describing an encounter he had recently had with the ghost of his familiar spirit, George Fox:

I am not of the number who believe that spirits are seen as frequently as some mediums suppose; yet, I believe that mediums do, when the conditions are favorable, see the denizens of the spirit world. I know that I have on several occasions, seen a spirit and I purpose now to narrate in as simple, clear and concise a manner as possible, a case which I experienced about eighteen months ago.

During the day and evening to which I shall refer, I had been unusually exercised mediatorially, and after my regular hours for receiving visitors were over, feeling somewhat fatigued, I prepared for retiring to bed earlier than was usually my habit. I locked the door, took off my boots and arranged things generally for retiring. I then seated myself on the lounge, intending to sit a few moments passively, hoping that some of my spirit friends would remain with me a little while, and impart to me some of their magnetism, as they had often done so, on like occasions, at my request.

¹⁶⁸ "The Spiritualists. Mr. Conklin Turns a Penny with Reminiscences," *New York Herald*, May 4, 1968. At this meeting, Conklin said something about his experiences with the Queen, although the *Herald* reporter said of his remarks on that subject that, "there was nothing especially salient."

After sitting, perhaps, ten minutes in a negative state, I arose and commenced to undress. While in the act of taking off my coat, I was somewhat startled by seeing a man dressed in black, standing on the top of the table — the one I have used as my circle table since I have been a public medium — looking me directly in the face.

My first impression was, that some friend had entered the room unseen by me, and was trying to excite my fears. I hastily said, "You appear to be occupying an elevated position!" and as I spoke, I walked to the door and finding it locked, returned to the lounge and again seated myself, intending to keep cool and see what my elevated intruder wanted.

He continued to stand upon the table with his large blue eyes fixed on me, as if to penetrate my very thoughts. In person, he was about my own age and stature. I thought I could detect a family resemblance in him. I felt a consciousness that I knew him — that he was an old acquaintance, yet, I could not then, nor have I ever been able since, to tell who he was, or where I had ever seen him before. I would here state, that up to this time, I was as self-possessed as I ever was at noon day in company with friends in the body.

The reader may say, as many have stated who have heard me related this manifestation:

"You were entranced, or psychologized, and *thought* you saw a man."

Well, if any who read this come to the same conclusion, I can only answer as I have done before, viz:

"If hearing, seeing and feeling are not conclusive proofs to a person that he is in his *normal* state, then we can have no evidence that we are ever awake."

The noise of the omnibuses and other vehicles as they passed and repassed the building, was distinctly heard, two gas lights in the room, in full blaze, were seen, and the heat from them felt by me. I again addressed the man in these words,

"Who are you? Do you want anything? Can I do anything for you?"

I now fully believed that the object before me was a spirit; yet I was as calm, and as much at ease, as if no man stood there. There was no reply given to my questions, and I continued to look at him wondering how much longer he intended to remain in that position. I was not kept long in suspense, for soon his countenance began to change from that of a healthy, living person, to that of a dead body. The change was almost instantaneous. Suddenly the body fell with considerable noise upon its back on the table, and lay to all appearance perfectly dead. The table was not as long as the body, consequently both legs hung over the end. Seeing this, I deliberately left my seat, went to another part of the room, and took a small table and placed it against the end of the other on which the body lay, and then with as much composure as if the man were asleep, I took hold of the legs and laid them on the smaller table, and resumed my seat on the lounge.

Five minutes perhaps, elapsed, during which time, I was meditating what I should do with the body, for it seemed to me then, impossible that so real a lump of human flesh, could evaporate into air. While such thoughts were passing in my mind, I noticed the right hand of the man begin to move, slowly at first, then faster and faster, (the same as a medium's hand moves when exercised by a spirit to write,) until it moved with the velocity of lightning. Instantly a thought flashed across my mind, that the man wanted to

write. At this stage of the exhibition, I really thought that the body was flesh and blood, so tangible had it felt to my touch, when I placed the legs on the small table. This is a parallel case to the California manifestations, thought I. I'll get a pencil and paper, and see if he will write. I got up, went to my desk, obtained some paper and a pencil, and turned around to place them in the man's hand, when lo! there stood the man, upright again on the table. I confess that this last movement startled within me the exclamation, "Good God, what next!"

I staggered back, and fell, rather than seated myself on the lounge. In a few moments, however, my self-possession returned, and I waited with deep interest, the further movement of my spirit visitant, for I again felt impressed that it was a spirit. Presently I saw a dark vapor, envelop the table, and the lower extremities of the man. The vapor was not thick enough to conceal his legs, and I could still discern their outlines. Gradually the vapor began to rise upward, and soon reached his arm-pits, when it ceased to ascend. I could see the lower part of the body only as an object could be seen through thin smoke. The face, shoulders and arms, were clearly visible. While gazing intently upon his face, it suddenly began to decompose and piece after piece of the cheeks dropped down on the table with a dead, muffled sound, rolled off, and fell down near the feet, disappearing as soon as they reached the floor. No language can describe the disgusting appearance the face presented, nor can I describe my sensations while looking at this revolting picture. In this way, all the flesh on the face, shoulders and arms dropped off and disappeared, leaving nothing but a ghostly skeleton except the hair, which remained on the head. Just at this moment, I heard some one coming up the stairs. I supposed it a doctor who occupied the back rooms on the same floor with me. I was on the point of calling to him to come into my apartment, when I noticed the dark vapor which enshrouded the lower part of the man, beginning to disappear, and I felt strongly impressed not to speak or move. Gradually the dark vapor disappeared and a bright heavenly halo illumined the table dazzling to my eyes, and I closed them, placing my hands over them. While in this position I heard the doctor knock at his door and in answer to his wife's question, whether it was he, say:

"Yes, open the door."

I looked again, and there stood — not the disgusting figure I had last seen, but a man dressed in the plain garb of the Quakers, smiling with a heavenly countenance upon me. I instantly jumped up, exclaiming:

"Oh, it is friend Fox!" and ran to embrace him, but he had disappeared, and I was alone.

New York, Jan. 15th,

1869.¹⁶⁹

It does not seem far-fetched to read this grisly apparition as Conklin's presentiment of his own death.

Two months later, the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* printed the following, written by its editor, Stevens Sanborn Jones:

¹⁶⁹ J. B. Conklin, "Seeing Spirits," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (30 January 1869): 6.

J. B. Conklin.

The above-named gentleman is one of the oldest and best test mediums for communion with deceased friends, in the world. There is not a medium living who has been instrumental in converting more skeptics to the truth of spirit communion, than Mr. Conklin. He informs us that he will visit this city, the fore part of March. We advise all who desire to test the truthfulness of Spiritualism, from the country and city, to improve the opportunity, by visiting him while here. He is a medium that almost any spirit can control.

On Mr. Conklin's arrival, we shall mention the fact, and state where he can be found.¹⁷⁰

But Conklin seems not to have made his intended visit to Chicago, undoubtedly because of his failing health. Nevertheless, on January 3, 1870, he advertised in the *New-York Tribune*, for business as usual:

IMMORTALITY. — J. B. CONKLIN, Medium.
Circles daily, morning, afternoon, and evening, for investigation and tests. No. 67 East Tenth-st., opposite Stewart's.

However, his "usual business," as he makes plain here, was the unusual business of "IMMORTALITY."

I see nothing in the spiritualist or secular press about Conklin after this advertisement until August 3rd of that year, when the *New York Evening Telegram*, in a varied, almost random list of brief news items, ran the following: "John B. Conklin, the spiritualist, died yesterday, of consumption, at the residence of his brother, in Eighty-third street. He was fifty years of age."

And that is all I see about Conklin's death in the secular press, even in the press of New York City, where he had operated his offices for almost two decades. The *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, very strangely, ran nothing whatsoever about the death of "one of the oldest and best test mediums in the world," as its editor had described him just the year before.¹⁷¹

And this famous medium who, among other things, stirred up so much commotion over his role in national affairs of the gravest sort, and over his prediction of Lincoln's assassination, appears to have merited only the briefest of mention in the *Banner of Light*, edited by Luther Colby, which ran an obituary (really, just a notice) for him on August 20th, without details of his death or a description of his life:

Passed to Spirit-Life.

J. B. Conklin, for many years a prominent test medium in New York,

¹⁷⁰ *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, March 1869.

¹⁷¹ One other brief memorial paragraph was Hannah F. M. Brown, "Pen-o-graph of J. B. Conklin," *The Agitator (Cleveland)*, May 1, 1859.

has ceased from his labors here, and passed into that wider field where provision for the physical form does not retard the expansion and development of the spiritual nature.

Mr. Conklin spent some time in Baltimore, twelve or fourteen years ago, and some of our friends received their first evidences of the truth of Spiritualism through his instrumentality. — *The New Life, Baltimore*.

Bro. Conklin was an excellent medium, and we venture to say thousands have been convinced of the truths of Spiritualism through his instrumentality. He possessed a high sensitive nature, and consequently his life here was one of constant martyrdom. But he has been translated in spirit to a purer atmosphere, to continue the good work with more power than ever, we trust, for the amelioration of the human race from the chains of ignorance, bigotry and superstition.

It does not seem like much of an epitaph for John Benjamin Conklin, 1820-1870, but, so far as I know, it is all that remains, apart from the ghostly trace of a connection (when Colby referred to his death as his "martyrdom") to Abraham Lincoln.

THE LIFE OF A MEDIUM;
Or, the Spiritual Experiences of J. B. Conklin.

Edited, with Some Account of Her Own Experience,
By Mary S. Gove Nichols

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), June 1855}

THE LIFE OF A MEDIUM is a new, and will be, we think, an interesting feature of this series. We have known Mr. CONKLIN for some time past, as a *test medium*, of remarkable uses. He is a man of the most entirely honest, simple, unpretending character, who does what he believes to be his duty, uninfluenced by any worldly motives. By the advice of the spirits, he has taken a house in a central location, No. 134 Canal street, New York, which is open several hours every day, for free circles, where all inquirers are invited to come, without money or price, and test the reality of spirit communications. He is supported in this expensive, and as his friends thought hazardous undertaking, by voluntary contributions, by the sale of a monthly paper, THE PUBLIC CIRCLE, published at six cents a copy, and by private circles, at such hours as are not occupied with the public ministrations. It is our belief that this humble medium is in this way, the instrument of more spiritual good, than all the clergy of New York. We have not known any person to go to his rooms, in any proper spirit of candid inquiry, without being satisfied of the honesty of the medium, and the reality of the manifestations. The portrait is engraved from a photograph on wood.
[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), June 1855]

THE LIFE OF A MEDIUM.

INTRODUCTION.

The subject of Spiritualism is arresting many minds at the present time; and to have reliable Information respecting it seems to be one of the most desirable gifts for our day.

Individuals are representatives of classes. There is the man of intellectual perception, with no warmth of feeling, to make him a partisan, who represents the fair legal mind of our age. This man may have little direct connexion, or communion with the spiritual world. He may be merely a dead moon held in his place and balanced by living planets, and reflecting the light from the sun, which corresponds to the love life of the angels. For the use of this class of persons, who see evidence clearly, and reflect it upon other minds, we want facts, which are spiritual phenomena. I have consented to edit the Life of J. B. Conklin, in order to give indisputable facts to the world, for the

high use of demonstrating to man his Immortality; and I also shall add my own experience in Spiritualism, from my childhood to the present, so far as it seems best to me to give it.

It is not alone for the use of the class of persons above designated, that facts are needed, though perhaps most for them; — for in the simple, loving heart the Truth is born, and lives, though it may not be intellectually perceived. Still, humanity wants all things — loving Faith, and intellectual demonstration. All the elements that are to make Harmony in the external world, live in the achievements of civilization, pampering the few, and oppressing the masses. Their correspondences in the affectional and intellectual nature of man, are alike developed, and in a like state of congestion, of stagnant and dying life — of spiritual tyranny and oppression.

I am not of the class of intellectual persons who accept evidence when they have calmly and dispassionately examined it. I am not “a reasonable being,” fortunately, or unfortunately. I cannot accept known facts, of supernal importance, upon the testimony of others, be it ever so credible. Truths must have their birth in my Love-nature, my interior consciousness, as a part of my being, and of the God-life to which I belong. If any one asks me if I believe in Spiritualism, I can now answer, I *know* — I do not believe. If I am asked, “Do you believe in Immortality?” I have only to say, I am immortal.

The I AM, the God-life, asserts itself; and that is my proof, and charter of Immortality.

I have disputed, inch by inch, every new philosophy that has been brought to me, until it was not only clear to my intellectual sight, but to the humanitarian love of my heart, that it was a Truth and a Good. Whether I am well, or ill-qualified, by this character, to examine the claims of Spiritualism, and to sum up its evidences, by recording its phenomena, I do not decide. I find the work in my way, and I feel myself set to do it. Being a Woman, and a Lover, my prejudices will be in proportion to my want of Wisdom. To me antipathies are not only respectable, but sacred — and for a long time I had a great antipathy to Spiritualism, and everything connected with it. This antipathy forced my respect, and obedience, and I now see the wisdom of it. I was not ready for the subject — I was in a state of preparation. When I was ready to receive Life and Immortality, all obstacles were removed, and they flowed in upon me, and I became supremely blest, not in credence, or belief, but in Faith and Knowledge — the Faith that is “the *sub*-stance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

I have known J. B. CONKLIN about two and a half years. I do not need to rely on the testimony of others respecting his character and the miracles performed through him. I have had abundant opportunity to become

externally convinced, and interiorly conscious, of his childlike innocence, and positive truthfulness of character and being. He seems to be as true a test-medium, on the plane of material manifestations, as it is possible to find now living in the form; and high truths of harmony, of whose meaning he seems almost entirely unconscious, have been given through him in my presence. It is my wish to give in the following pages a fair, clear, and truthful account of the Medium, and the manifestations through him. I have no doubt that I shall do the good work well, and worthily, and all will accept the truth who can, and to those who can accept it in love, it will prove a priceless blessing.

MARY S. GOVE NICHOLS.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), June 1855]

CHAPTER I.

EARLY EXPERIENCES — STRIKING INTERPOSITIONS — FIRST MANIFESTATIONS

The great interest taken by the public in the spiritual manifestations of the present day, has made every fact in that connection of importance to investigators. At the solicitation of friends who are acquainted with some of the particulars of my spiritual experience, I propose to present a brief narration of incidents which have attended my career to the present hour, when I find myself engaged in making known, through the agency, as I must believe, of the spirits of those who have lived in the human form, the glorious truths of immortality.

I was born in the city of New York, in 1825, and remained with my family till the age of nineteen years, when I went to sea. Up to this period, I had observed nothing that had directed my attention particularly to the spiritual nature of man, either in this sphere, or in the after life. True, I had been taught, and had received, the general doctrines of the Bible, as they had been expounded by those who had charge of my poor education; for I know little but what I have seen in my experience of life, and what the spirits have taught me. Without reflection, I embraced all the dogmas that were given me, not questioning the authority that proclaimed itself as the exponent of God's will and truth.

An incident soon occurred in my new avocation, which served to awaken my attention to the ways of Providence in the government of individuals and of the world. My seafaring experience had made it easy for me to obtain employment with those who “go down upon the sea in ships.” Accordingly, I was shipped as a seaman on board the pilot-boat “John McKeon,” of New York, a fine vessel, of an admirable class, named, as is customary, in honor of a prominent citizen. The melancholy fate of that vessel, and of the “Gratitude,” lost at the same time, will be sadly remembered by many of my readers, for not a man of their crews has been heard of since they sailed from New York. I had fully intended to sail in the “John McKeon,” and went home, for the purpose of obtaining my clothing; but, on returning to the pier, I was much disappointed on ascertaining that the vessel had sailed about an hour previous to my arrival; the master, anxious to get to sea, having determined not to wait for me. This incident made a deep impression on my mind; for, had I sailed, my fate would have been that of the poor mariners who “were never heard of more.”

Another event, of a similar, but more decided character — deepened this impression. In 1841, I shipped for Thomaston, Maine, with Captain Dudley. I remained there three weeks, receiving from the Captain every kindness and attention, and was much attached to him, as he invited me to his own table, and patiently taught me navigation, encouraging me with the hope of becoming a mate. We loaded for New Orleans, but as we lay wind-bound, there came to me an inward monition, a mysterious influence, of which I then knew but little, which said, “*Leave!*” Though contrary to my views and inclinations, I felt compelled to obey the warning, and went ashore. It was in the dead of winter. I had no money — no friends — no mode of subsisting — yet I obeyed that voice! The Captain refused to pay me my wages, in order to compel me to return to the vessel; but all was in vain, and at last, finding me resolute in my seeming folly and obstinacy, he gave me my dues, and sailed without me; but not until after I had slept in a lime kiln, to prove that I was in earnest. There was another vessel in port, bound to New York. The captain of it would not take me on board, because he had an understanding with Captain Dudley. What was now to be done? Desperate necessities compel the use of desperate means. I took a skiff at night, rowed off to the vessel anchored in the stream, let the boat float away, and concealed myself in the forecabin, making my appearance when we were passing Owl’s Head, and were well on our voyage, much to the surprise of the captain; who, finding me on board without his knowledge, made the best of it, put me in the mate’s watch, and offered me a pleasant and lucrative situation. I had no *earthly* reason for this strange conduct. Every motive of inclination and gratitude prompted me to

remain with my kind friend, who had taken a personal interest in my welfare. The true cause was known by the result. The "Zephyr" was lost on that voyage, and all on board, except the captain and one seaman, perished! Was there no Providence in this? Or was it only a strange coincidence, unaccountable, but meaningless. I must think that *effects* have *causes*.

After this, I made several voyages to the West Indies. In 1844, I went before the mast, in the schooner "Red Jacket," on a southern voyage. On the next voyage, I was promoted to be first mate, sailed to the West Indies, and returned to New York. Every inducement was held out to me to remain with my employer, and I was promised the berth of captain of this vessel, the following year. The present captain now desired me to accompany him in another vessel, that he was about to take charge of. Here again did my strong impressions interfere to dissuade me, and, against every seeming interest, I was compelled to refuse the kind offer. The vessel sailed for Jamaica, and was *lost!* These internal monitions, powerful and vivid impressions, came to guide me in many things; but I record only those which made the strongest impression on my mind, and which, by their results, gave me most signal proofs that I was in the guardianship of some higher power. Though I had no proof to offer to others, it was, even at this time, present to my consciousness, that there were spirits or spiritual influences around me, although I was but poorly able to form any very just thoughts upon their peculiar nature and offices in the economy of Life. Still, that there were such existences, was evident to my intuitions, as the phenomena of nature to my exterior senses. What I *felt*, was as full of convincing proof, as what I saw.

In 1845, I visited my sister, in Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, where there occurred an incident which seemed to bring me into closer relations with my friends of the other sphere of being. One evening, while sitting in the back basement, and explaining Signor Blitz's thimble trick, for the amusement of the assembled group, the door of the room suddenly opened, and the rustling of what appeared to be a lady's silk dress was heard by all and so assured them of the presence of some stranger, that a general escape was made up stairs. I did not then know that that house was what is called "haunted"; and much less did I know that the front room, in which I was to sleep, was particularly liable to nocturnal visitations. I retired for the night, and after being on the sofa for a few minutes, and in expectation that my sister would remove my lamp, which I had placed near the door, I lay quietly awaiting its removal. I had been startled by the strange sound, but it had passed from my mind. As I lay here, a lady entered the room, took the light from its position, and placed it on the mantel-piece, where it remained burning till morning. Before she left the room, she put the clothes over me. I had supposed that this

was the act of my sister, but on inquiry found that neither she, nor any other inmate of the house had entered my room! Since that time I have become better acquainted with this being, who represents that she was murdered in the room I occupied. Although strongly urged to make some examinations of this house, I have never attempted it, though time may reveal some relics of mortality beneath the floors, However, more useful investigations may be made in other directions, perhaps, though they may be less marvellous to those whose studies are prompted by curiosity.

This anecdote will have little weight, I know, with many persons who believe that all ghost stories can be reasonably accounted for; and who will say at once, that it was my mischievous sister, making herself sport by working upon my credulity. I have entire faith in the honesty of my sister; and I am now too familiar with what is called the supernatural, to distrust her, for the sake of accounting for one of a thousand of similar appearances. I have related the circumstance as an event in my experience.

As I wish to make a frank, and as far as needful, a full record of my spiritual experience, that which I have had as a professor of religion, and a communicant of a Christian church, next demands my attention. Accepting the Bible, as taught and explained to me by the preachers of the denomination, whose meetings I attended; conscientiously wishing to walk in the right path; susceptible to strong impressions; I became a convert and member of the Methodist Church; and for a time, I meekly submitted to its discipline, and received without questionings, the dogmas of its creed.

My sincerity and piety, I think, were never questioned by the leaders of the flock. I was, for a time, as blind, as unreasoning, as teachable, as they could wish. When I heard of the "Rochester rappings," I believed them to be, either an ingenious fraud, or the work of the Devil. But as the subject became more and more noised about, my curiosity became excited; I felt an inward prompting to seek the truth; and when Mrs. Brown, one of the Fox sisters, came to the city of New York, I had the manly independence to visit her, and investigate for myself the claims of the alleged spiritual manifestations.¹⁷² I exposed myself to the ridicule, sneers, and scoffs of the unbelievers about me; the most bitter and bigoted of whom were members of the church to which I belonged.

¹⁷² Ann Leah Fox (Fish Underhill) Brown, the oldest of the three Fox sisters. All three sisters came to New York City to give séances — attended by some notable literary figures — in 1850. Leah then moved to New York City in January 1852 and offered test séances on a regular basis. And young sister Catherine also held séances there, in rooms supplied by the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge. A. Leah Underhill, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* (New York: T. R. Knox, 1885), 251.

Perhaps I ought not to take credit for my courage, for there was an inward voice, joining to the accumulating public testimony, confirming or explaining my own past experience, which said, "*Spirits can communicate!*" I went, then, or was led, to investigate these strange phenomena.

At my first visit to Mrs. Brown, the spirit of my mother-in-law, or an intelligent agency, purporting to be such spirit, and whose assertion I did not feel qualified to deny, made herself known to me, and stated that she had twice before communicated with me. It was true that I had seen her recently, in two dreams, of a very vivid character. Further communications were given to satisfy me of her identity, which I saw no reason to dispute.

At this, my first interview, through a medium, with a departed spirit, I was directed to go home; to form a circle there; and was told that this spirit would then communicate with me further. The request seemed to me but reasonable — it would remove any possible suspicion of trick, or collusion; and I obeyed the injunction. The first circle consisted of myself, my wife, and child. We sat around the table, laying our hands upon it, and waiting for the mysterious rappings to commence. No rappings came; but to our astonishment, the table itself raised up upon two of its legs, gently, and came down upon the floor, producing the "tippings," as they are called; a mode of manifestation easier to investigate, perhaps, than the raps, as being subject to the three senses of sight, touch, and hearing.

Efforts have been made to account for these tippings upon natural principles. They have been attributed, either to the trick of the medium, or the involuntary exertion of muscular power. But no theory accounts for a tithe of the various manifestations. And, where it might be possible to suppose deception, voluntary or involuntary, in physical manifestations, the supernatural intelligence of the messages and responses still remains — a still more unaccountable phenomenon.

The alphabet was soon called, and there was spelled out the following sentence:

"My dear children, these things appear strange, yet stranger things will soon convince you of their spiritual origin."

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), June 1855]

CHAPTER II.

DECISIVE MANIFESTATIONS — THE CHURCH AROUSED — PERSECUTIONS.

It will be easily imagined that we were startled with this manifestation. My wife, after the first surprise, very naturally thought that I had been amusing myself by playing off some trick I had seen and detected; and accused me of doing expertly, what I could not have done, if disposed, without great difficulty. I was interested and excited; my curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and I was anxious to pursue the investigation.

After supper we sat again “in circle.” Now something new astonished us. As if to satisfy my wife’s incredulity, we had the rappings. The sounds came freely and loudly in every part of the house; and frequently they could be heard for two or three hundred yards from my dwelling. The village where I resided, was aroused like a barrack at the beat of the morning drum. Neighbors flocked in from all sides; and for two months, during the winter, my house was besieged by those who were ready to enlist in the cause of truth, or who wished to show their own strength by opposing, ridiculing, or denouncing what they considered either an imposture, or delusion of man, or the machination of the foul fiend.

Here was I, a poor Methodist church member, ignorant of the world’s lore, selected as an humble instrument to convince thousands, as I have had the privilege and satisfaction of since doing, of the immortal nature of man; of the *reality* of the unseen world, and of the Great Living Truth, that the spirits of the departed can and do hold communication with us who are going forward to the same destination; showing that the grave is no longer “that bourne from which no traveller returns.”

My Methodist brethren, with a blind faith in their religious system, now called upon me, remonstrated against my doings, and begged me to acknowledge that I had been playing tricks, to astonish the people. They would have had me done this, even against my own consciousness of truth and right, for the good of the cause of religion, and the overthrow of Satan; but as I could not become a party to such a falsehood — as I could not resist the evidence of my own senses, and of the verity of the daily manifestations, of which I was the involuntary medium, they considered me unfit any longer to be a member of their communion. I was invited to leave the church, because I was ready to receive to-day, those manifestations and interpositions, which they wished me to believe, only occurred two thousand years ago. I was called a “backslider”; I had “fallen from grace”; I was an “emissary of Satan,” because I had been chosen to demonstrate to others the great realities of Eternal Life.

During my connection with the church I had opportunities of noticing the unfortunate and deplorable manner in which the active and leading members of the society play the part of shrewd, worldly men, and become the self-promoted vicegerents of our Heavenly Father.

Early did I notice, when my prayers and remarks were received with satisfaction in the meetings for religious culture, that the position occupied by me, could not fail to excite in the minds of the leading members of the society such demonstrations of jealousy, as to make my services in the cause of truth and religion, as I then viewed, exceedingly irksome. From this, sprang an attempt to destroy my usefulness, by acts which questioned my sincerity and feelings of good will towards my fellow men; and I cannot pass on with my narrative, without warning men who hold similar positions in the church, against the exercise of that tyrannical injustice that so often displays itself in base innuendoes, if not in those extra-judicial tribunals, so directly opposed to democratic institutions, in which character is inhumanly arraigned, and assaulted, if not destroyed by ecclesiastical inquisition. Honest, simple-minded men and women cannot be too careful how they place the "immediate jewel of their souls" in the keeping of those whose motives are entirely shrouded by the veil of external religion.

I well remember the attempts made to diminish my usefulness, if not to injure me in the eyes of my neighbors. Every trifling act was subjected to the inquisition, which might have been better employed in devising means for the happiness of the world. At one time, because I had taken part in a harmless serenade to a wedding party, my term of probation, before becoming a full member of the church, was extended to six months more — making a whole year in which I had been contented to surrender myself to a body of persons, who undertook to be custodians of my conscience, and who might have destroyed all my prospects in life by their injustice and folly. Brother B___, was particularly anxious about me. He found time to survey all my qualifications as a Christian, and after opposing my admission to the church for several months, he was constant in his endeavors to remove me. This he had some means of understanding to be an exemplification of Christian conduct, but the intelligent follower of truth and righteousness will perceive that he was merely one of those dogmatists who enact the part of tyrant, in a small way, with apparent impunity. It is to be hoped that the reign of such small despots over the souls of men is nearly at an end.

To illustrate the mode in which the church interferes with the temporal affairs of men, I desire to say that about eighteen months after I became a church member, I was advised to sue another member for a debt, for which I had sought vainly, the just payment. For this act, what can any American

suppose could be the punishment? Is any American aware of any law that gives men the power to put a man on trial for such a deed? Does any American know whence is derived the tribunal to condemn, or acquit a man, for any act not cognizable by the law? Yet, alas! in the church, tribunals exist which frequently wrest the guilty culprit from the constituted authorities, to hide the shame, or to destroy the innocent. Reform is needed here; and when I state that I was tried in my absence, and condemned, and punished, altogether unheard and undefended, I expose this act as a warning to those who may contemplate placing themselves in so critical a position. My crime was punished by setting me back six months in the path of Christian progress. As God did not signify to my conscience that I had erred, however, I was resigned to this exhibition of church punishment. Ah, Heaven was not against me. My mind contemplated no evil. Justice from my fellow men was all I required, and the church discipline, even, was my sedulous study, notwithstanding the work of my inquisitors. Heaven, however, was rapidly unfolding and illuminating my mind. I beheld the mockery of the leaders around me, and too plainly saw in their love of laudation — in their continual inquiries as to the merit of their prayers and speeches, that they regarded the good opinion of man, more than that of God. Pitiably vanity! When will men learn to know that they are not the proud doers of any of those works which they fancy arise from their cleverness?

About the time that the sounds at my house had created serious inquiries throughout the neighborhood, many members of the church were courageous enough to investigate the subject. Some of these, being sincere lovers of truth, became satisfied not only that I had no direct agency in producing them, but that they had their origin in spiritual forces, and they were partly converted to the belief that these manifestations were made by good spirits. Others preferred to rest their faith on evidences of immortality given to men two thousand years ago, and to believe only in things said to have taken place at that period. Of course, I came in for a share of vindication, and also a share of condemnation. One class leader, in particular, defended me nobly, and avowed his belief in what he had seen; but he was threatened with expulsion from the communion if he did not cease to acknowledge his convictions. The church is entitled to receive all such as have not the moral courage to acknowledge the power of God, and therefore I may state that this gentleman is now contented to believe that “there is something in it,” but he does not wish to seek for more light. His freedom — his manhood — all the noble qualities God has given him for exploring the works of His hands, are surrendered to an external association, that seems to dread the very

evidences which prove that some of the doctrines of Christianity are no delusion!

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), July, 1855]

CHAPTER III.

DIGGING FOR MONEY.¹⁷³

For the benefit of those who may be instructed by the errors of others, I desire to give a perfectly frank statement of the facts connected with my initiation into the mysteries of Spiritualism, even where such facts may give no favorable impression of my wisdom. I do not claim to be wise — only to be honest; and, as far as my memory serves, I shall give all important, and what many will doubtless think, unimportant particulars.

Soon after the fact of my being a Medium had become known, in the neighborhood where I resided, I was urged to visit a house which had the reputation of being “haunted.” There are such houses, it is well known, in all sections of this country, and I believe in all civilized regions; where strange noises are heard, or lights seen, or shadowy ghosts display themselves. There are probably dozens of such houses, even in the crowded city of New York, the inmates of which have seen or heard terrible things.

Interested in what seemed to me a mission, to be an interpreter to men of the revelations of the Spirit Life, I complied with the request to visit this house; and on my arrival, I placed my hands upon a barrel, which happened to be there, in the same manner that I commonly place them upon a table “in circle.”

The barrel commenced to move about, with great violence; sounds were heard, as if large stones were thrown about, in various directions; and, to the great consternation of those present, lights appeared, without apparent cause. But, in spite of these alarming manifestations, I persevered in the attempt to get some intelligible communication. I soon received one, purporting to come

¹⁷³ Conklin's *Digging for Captain Kydd's Treasure* adds the information that the object of this earlier money-digging expedition in his village was to recover a treasure that was purportedly hidden by Hessian troops during the Revolutionary War.

from the spirit of a little girl, who said she had been murdered, in this house, thirty years before, by being starved to death. She said further, that we must dig under a certain tree, which was indicated, and that at three and a half feet from the surface we should find a pot of money, amounting to ten thousand dollars. This statement ought to have thrown discredit on the whole story. But to most minds, money has a peculiar charm. The persons assembled were very much excited, and wished to proceed at once to the interesting investigation; but before operations for securing the money were commenced, the sounds and movements in the house became of such a frightful character, as to entirely overcome my courage, and I jumped from the window, while the rest of the party made a precipitate retreat in various directions.

But, frightened as we had been at the manifestations in the haunted house, we did not forget the story of the murdered girl. Immediately, and with great energy, we began to dig under the tree. At the depth of two feet we came to water, but, nothing daunted, we dug away, until nearly two o'clock in the morning, having, meantime, been encouraged to perseverance by another communication.

We explored all around beneath the tree, to the required depth, but no money! So intense had become the excitement of our acquisitiveness by this time, that, forgetting our recent fright, we resolved to return to the haunted house for further directions. But as we approached, the scene of our recent terrors, not even the hope of finding the pot of gold, could induce us to enter the house at this late hour. We then thought of a neighboring school-house, and concluded to use that for our consultation.

Arrived there, I laid my hand upon a globe, to obtain the movements, when a communication, spelled out by the alphabet, told us to dig one foot deeper. With lightened hearts we returned to our labor, but day dawned without bringing any reward; and we gave up the task, wearied with our exertions and mortified at our discomfiture.

Whether the others received any compensation for this night's work, I do not know; but to me it has proved of great importance, and has probably saved me from becoming the victim of more serious deceptions. Its objects have since been explained to me; and I have in several instances been made the instrument of similar deceptive communications, which have appeared to have been adapted to some condition of the inquirer.

False information is sometimes given, and that of a most startling character. Thus, a skeptical young man, full of notions of collusion, or deception of some kind, and believing that he had science enough to detect and expose the imposture, came to my room, with several of his friends; and

one of the first messages received purported to be from his father, whom he had left a day or two before, in health, hundreds of miles distant, announcing that he was dead; had died one hour before, of cholera, with such particulars as seemed to prove the identity of the communicating spirit.

The young man was an entire stranger to me — it was evident to him that I could have no interest, if he could imagine me to have the power, to impose upon him a story which another day would prove false, and yet he saw that if true, no mortal could have communicated the fact; while, if false, there was still needed an intelligent cause for such a phenomenon. The story was false; its object was afterwards explained — and the effect was to make a stronger impression, perhaps, than any truthful communication whatever.

These deceptions, though not very frequent in my experience, have yet happened often enough to put me on my guard. As every visitor may bring or summon spirits of his own order, I have learned to be simply the passive medium of all communications, trusting to my guardian spirits to protect me from harm to myself, and from being made the instrument of mischief to others.

Why spirits, who very evidently possess superior conditions for obtaining intelligence, do not enter more into the worldly affairs of men, is a question that perplexes our philosophers. They would have them tell us where to find or how to make money; engage them to bring foreign news in advance of the steamers; and invent machinery to enable capital to prey on industry. The spirits have thus far, apparently, declined to enter, to any considerable extent, on such speculations, how much influence spiritual impressions and monitions may have, in such matters, it is difficult to decide.

Many persons believe themselves to be guided by such impressions; others have appeared to receive important advice and suggestions, in business affairs, by spiritual communications; while others have been led a wild goose chase, as in the haunted house and the pot of money.

Is it strange that those who seek spiritual communications in a selfish and mercenary spirit, should be disappointed? Is it likely that good spirits will aid men in business speculations, which are often little better than schemes to rob others and enrich themselves? Spirits, it is thought, might reveal to us principles and facts in science; aid us in important inventions; or discover to us sources of hidden wealth. We do not know how much they have already done and are doing in this way — how much of genius in literature, science, art, or invention is due to their inspirations; nor can we doubt that wisdom will come to men from the higher spheres, just as fast as they are prepared for its influx, by a true life; and we may expect, also, that spiritual riches will be accompanied by their material correspondences.

There are few Spiritualists who have not received similar lessons of caution, not to be misled into errors and follies by such manifestations. We are taught that all the evils, mistakes, and sufferings of life, are for our good; why, then, may not even friendly and truthful spirits sometimes give us such lessons?

At the same time, I have observed that the truly honest and sincere, are always protected from any real harm by these manifestations. In the case of "money diggers," there is always a morbid excitement of acquisitiveness, amounting to covetousness or greed of gain; and it is proverbial, that suddenly and easily acquired wealth is seldom a benefit to its possessors.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), July, 1855]

CHAPTER IV.

MY DEVELOPMENT AS A MEDIUM.

Soon after the events related in the last chapter, my business called me to the city of New York; where, in obedience to spiritual directions, I passed my evenings, for about three months, in sitting in a circle with two mediums. This was for the purpose of development, as it is called; a gradual and unconscious fitting of the spiritual element of the individual, to become the medium of impressions, or the instrument of spiritual action.

How this process is accomplished it may not be easy to explain, but many analogies in physics and chemistry will occur to the scientific reader. The blade of a knife, brought into contact with a magnet, becomes magnetic. Proximity or contact conduces often to similarity of condition. We know too many facts respecting the subtle, and powerful influence of what is called animal magnetism, to doubt that qualities of being, and mode of action may be communicated. There is a popular and well founded idea that good and bad associations influence us, independently of any ideas acquired by ordinary means. The mere presence of a bad man is an evil — the good diffuse around them an aroma of goodness, as the flowers diffuse their odors. My life came imperceptibly into a more regular, orderly, and harmonious condition, and more regularly and habitually susceptible of spiritual influx.

When I had become developed into a consciousness of this medial character, and some confidence in my mission, an apparent accident gave me

an opportunity of offering some testimony to the public. Passing a hall, at the corner of Lispenard street and Broadway, I saw a transparency at the entrance, announcing "Spiritual Manifestations," and was impressed to enter.¹⁷⁴ I obeyed the monition. Confusion reigned. The audience assembled, dissatisfied with the manifestations that had been exhibited, jeered and mocked aloud. Never did the subject of Spiritualism seem so dear to me, as then I was moved to offer my own services as a medium, assured that the manifestations of spirit force and intelligence through me, would dispel all doubt.

Accordingly, I went to the proprietor of the room and offered my services, which were readily accepted. I seated myself at the table, and it moved, and the questions of those near it were freely, rapidly, and satisfactorily answered. Order was immediately restored, and those who had mocked, now watched the questionings and responses with a deep and excited interest. I continued to sit for these manifestations for several weeks, without remuneration, and also gave much time to private circles elsewhere.

It was during the anxiety on my part to understand more clearly than I then did the modes and purposes of spirit communication, that I visited the distinguished medium, Mrs. Brown. I know not how many times I went there — perhaps it might have been twenty — but invariably nothing satisfactory was given to me, while others were surprised and gratified. I received nothing more than "not now," or "some other time," to all my inquiries. This was exceedingly perplexing to me, and cost me in time and money much more than I could afford. Yet I persevered — for the investigation of truth, when once commenced, is not easily relinquished. Finally, one evening, at Mrs. Brown's, I received a communication by the alphabet, in these words:

"My son, thou hast not played thy part well. When thy minister and brethren smote thee on the right cheek, and set a mark on thy forehead, thou shouldst have bared thy bosom also, and permitted them to know that an honest man feareth not death.

"George Fox."

This astonished me; but as I was not the son of any person by the name of Fox, I was not satisfied, and felt some discontent, inquiring who it was. To which the reply came, as follows:

¹⁷⁴ The New-York Lyceum, under the direction of Dr. Robert T. Hallock, was at the corner of Broadway and Lispenard.

“John, be candid, and accept a word from thy friend, for there is a new song about to be put in thy mouth, whose echoes will vibrate sweetly through the souls of men.”

Directions were then given me to sit for the purpose of developing myself as a medium, and the communicator asserted that he would be a father, brother, friend, everything to me, that I might desire. This was done to make me easy with respect to those sacrifices which every Spiritualist is called to make in these days, for the truth — when for its sake relatives must be held inferior in importance to those grand relations of truth and love which bind man to his Creator. The communicating spirit subsequently was ascertained to be George Fox, the celebrated Quaker; and through many trials I have had wise counsel from him, and he has proved, indeed, to be all that could be desired, and even more to me than he promised. In the many difficulties which are liable to occur at public circles, I have seldom failed to receive his assistance, and he usually enables me to disarm very powerful sceptics.

Up to this time, I had never made any charge for my services, and was much averse to doing so, fearing the imputation of mercenary motives, when my only conscious desires were to seek and find the great truths of immortality, and to aid others in their investigations. But, besides giving all my leisure time, business hours were often trespassed-upon; and I felt the necessity of giving more attention to the requirements of my family. I finally compromised, by devoting all my time to my medial office, leaving those who might be benefitted to make me such contribution or compensation as they thought proper.

This plan was, at that time, a total failure. I persisted, until I found that those who wished to attribute to me unworthy motives were never at a loss to do so; while candid and well-meaning people were often thoughtless of justice, and seemed quite unconscious of the fact that I could not give them my time without an equivalent. While some would not hesitate to occupy hours of my time, without a thought of remuneration, acting as if they had done me a favor by consenting to investigate a subject, which, it seemed to me, ought to be of quite as much interest to them as to me, others did not hesitate to say that a man must be insane, who would sacrifice his time, as I was doing.

On consideration, and consultation with my guardian spirits, I therefore resolved to use such discretion as the circumstances demanded: to fix upon a moderate price for those who came to public circles, and a fair compensation for time spent in private ones; and in this way I was able to support my

family, and to defray the cost of keeping open a room, in a central, and therefore expensive locality, for public use. But at no time, even when giving ten or twelve hours a day to public or private circles, was this compensation considerable. I was anxious to give every visitor the utmost latitude of investigation, and to have them fully satisfied with the result. With awkward questionings, and needless repetitions, and trivialities, much time was consumed; and the methods, adapted to the condition of inquirers, were slow. Still, every day and hour gave convincing tests, to all who had the candor or discernment to perceive them, of the reality of the GREAT FACT, that *spirits exist, and can, and do communicate with men.*

In this work I have needed great patience; and it has been given to me according to my needs. My own experience has made me sympathize with those who are untrusting and slow of belief; for it was a full year before I could believe that they were really spirits, who caused the manifestations of which I was the medium; and it was another year before I was satisfied that they were good spirits, and not evil. But in process of time, and by multiplied evidences, my first doubt was removed; and I have come to confide in the benevolence of my guardians, who have been so patient and long-suffering with me, that I may well be charitable to the weakness and incredulity of others.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), July, 1855]

CHAPTER V.

TEST MANIFESTATIONS.

I have been called a Test Medium, because my work has been almost exclusively that of giving persons their first convincing evidences of the immortal truths of spirit life and intercourse — a humble mission, but one which seems to be the basis of development, and the first step in spiritual progress. Before people can accept of the wisdom ready to flow into the minds of men from the spirit world, they must believe that spirits exist. And when their existence is tacitly admitted, as men admit the dogmas of religious creeds, without any vital and practical faith, their power to communicate with men in the form must be demonstrate it.

I will therefore give, at this stage of my narrative, some account of the nature and character of the tests, of which I have been tile medium to thousands of believers — a statement of facts, which can lie verified, if there were need, by “a cloud of witnesses.” Facts of a similar character have now become so common, that they are no longer denied by any intelligent person. Those who do not believe that they are the result of spirit agency, resort to various hypotheses, which, upon examination, only complicate the difficulty.

Of these hypotheses, there are two principal ones, which may properly be here adverted to.

The one insisted upon by orthodox theologians is that they are diabolic, or the work of Satan or the devil. This is an admission of spiritual agency, but the assertion that it is in all cases an evil spirit — the devil or devils.

“Try the spirits.” If all who come to us are bad, why should we try them? “By their fruits shall ye know them.” If heavenly wisdom, divine consolations, holy love, and admonitions to live a pure and heavenly life, can come from Satan; if good can come of the personification of evil, then may spiritual communications be Satanic, and these “airs from heaven” be “blasts from hell.” To my humble apprehension, the only thing diabolic about them is such a suggestion as this.

The other theory is that these manifestations are produced by an involuntary and unconscious exercise of some latent power in the medium, by which he produces rappings, crashing noises, the movement of furniture, and the whole class of physical manifestations, as well as the phenomena of intelligent responses, communications, identification of deceased persons, and the thousand elements which enter into all classes of spiritual communications.

The credulity which can believe in the existence of such a latent and unconscious power is marvelous. I have no conception of the power, or of the capacity to believe in its existence. The latent and unconscious power must be uniformly depraved into a shocking dishonesty, for in no case has it ever admitted its own existence, or attributed to itself the wonders it has wrought. Of the thousands of mediums possessing this supposed power or intelligent force, there is no one who has ever owned it in themselves, or charged deception in this respect upon others. The uniform testimony of the acting and intelligent force is that it is spiritual. May we not admit that it knows, quite ns well as we do, whether it resides unconsciously in the back of the medium’s brain?

But I will proceed to the facts. Among the first which I particularly observed and noted as memorable, was one of so convincing a character as not readily to be explained by any of the theories which have been brought

forward to prove the mundane or Satanic origin of these interesting phenomena. A stranger called on me one evening, and taking his seat, before he had asked any questions, the alphabet was called for by the customary sign, and the annexed sentence was given, the stranger being addressed by his name:

“John, your mother is well and happy. It will be necessary for you to go to Boston. To prove that I am the spirit of Julia, I give you a test.”

Here two questions which the gentleman had in his pocket, and which had been prepared to test the spirits with, were spelled out, as may be imagined, much to his astonishment. The gentleman then asked if his mother was not sick. To this question he could obtain no reply. Indeed, he could get no direction, except to proceed to Boston. As his business could afford him a proper motive for his departure, he went the next day; and when he arrived in Boston, he found that his mother was not sick, and was happy — for she had passed into the spirit world on the very day that he had sought this communication.

In a few days the same gentleman came a second time to my rooms, and before he told me anything, received the annexed communication, in reply to the mental inquiry if his family were all well:

“No, your child is ill, and will not recover.”

On receiving this, he inquired how long the child would be ill. The reply was “six days.” In the sequel, it appeared that the child had been taken ill on that same day, and at the end of the sixth day it passed into the spirit world.

I now remember another case of an interesting character. Mr. H., a gentleman of New Orleans, who had never seen me prior to his visit, called. At his first interview with spirits, which took place at my table, a spirit, purporting to be that of his wife, communicated, and addressed him by a familiar nick-name, saying, “E. and H., our children, have been taken by you to the Museum. It is nearly out. You had better go for them.” She stated that she was always with him, and that she was happy that he was investigating this subject.

At another time, a gentleman called, and inquired if a certain spirit who had never communicated with him, would do him that favor. My hand was violently seized, and wrote —

“My dear husband, brother, friend, all — I have, not forgotten you, though death, as you term it, has divided us. I am ever with you, and will ever guide and watch over you, and will be one of the first to receive you as a spirit.

M. E. C.”

I hesitated about reading it, though positive that this was done by a power foreign to my own volition. However, knowing that I was not responsible for the result, I read it aloud. The gentleman was thunderstruck. The whole name, of which the initials only are given above, was signed to the communication; and, on inquiry, it was found that this gentleman had been engaged to be married, that the day was appointed, but that the earthly dissolution interrupted the event. Hence, the peculiar manner in which this gentleman had been sainted. Dr. Gray, the celebrated homeopathist, was present at this time.

These were some of my earliest experiences in the field of spiritual communications; but though they were exceedingly satisfactory, I did not deem that my part of the work had been perfect. Nothing valuable can be obtained except by labor; and I obeyed my spiritual directors, by complying with their request that I would sit for development. Accordingly, every evening, from six to seven o'clock, I sat alone to receive such influences as might be conveyed to my mind and physical constitution. Nothing occurred for two or three sittings. I had no manifestations, but soon after, peculiar sensations accompanied these solitary sessions. In the progress of them, I was often touched by invisible tangibilities, and obtained a number of responses, which encouraged me to proceed with the work in which I was willing to be engaged, provided I received satisfactory assurances that I could be as useful to society in this new vocation as in any other that I might have the ability to pursue.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), August and September, 1855]

CHAPTER VI.

SPECIAL PROVIDENCES.

There has been a great deal of talk in the world about "Providence," and "special Providence," and many who seem to think they are very wise, have decided that special Providence, or care over human beings, is impossible. It is, in their view, inconsistent with a general Providence, and with their idea of the character of God. They also think that it is unworthy the character of an Omnipotent Being, to be going about attending to poor, ignorant, and not very useful persons. If these people could see that spirits out of the form, are just as much men and women, as they were in this world of material forms, (perhaps a good deal more so,) that they can go instantly where they wish to go, or rather that they can be where they wish to be, that they can see our thoughts and conditions, and the thoughts and conditions of others; that they can see danger coming near and at a distance, I say if we can believe this, we can see the material in part, for special Providence. To complete the chain, it is needed that we be so consciously joined to these spirits, that they can impress and direct us, and save us from evil.

Now as one of many proofs of a special Providence, I will relate a warning that occurred to me, August 10th, 1853, on the Camden and Amboy rail road. I had entered a car with my sister, and proceeded to the farther end, toward the engine, where we found seats, in a good draught of air. I had the New York Herald in my hand, and before the cars started, I settled myself to read. I was startled by a mist of darkness before my eyes, — the letters all ran together, and I could not read. At this instant an interior voice said, "*Leave this seat.*" I looked around; a man back of me sat very quietly, and I thought I would not be foolish, and so I settled to the newspaper again. Again the darkness half veiled my eyes, the letters ran together, and again the voice said, "*Leave this seat.*" I rose quickly, and said to my sister, "Come." I was impelled to go back to the last seat in the car. Here we got seats, and I felt sure that I would be safe. In seven minutes after the cars started, the train came in collision with another train, the car in front of us was driven back into ours like the shutting of a telescope, four persons were killed where we first took our seats, and the car which was driven into ours stopped within six inches of the seat I had taken, and every person in the car, but us two, was wounded, and four were killed. If any one is foolish enough to believe that there was no guardian care, no special Providence in this matter, I must suppose that he will be also too foolish to heed the impressions, and warnings of guardian angels, and have thus little part or lot in the benefits they confer.

For myself, I do not believe that the Almighty God goes about in any absurd way to care for His children, but I do believe that our God is a Saviour, that He embosoms all angels, and all Providences; and if we humbly and truly submit ourselves to do His will, as we are given to understand it, we shall be

cared for, and blessed in all His worlds. The way to put ourselves out of the pale of the Divine Providence, is to be disobedient to our best Life, which the angels are all the time trying to enlighten, and to give ourselves up to a proud and silly unbelief.

We don't doubt that we are spirits, though we can see nothing of ourselves but our bodies. When the gas is let out of the balloon, it sinks to the earth, a collapsed thing, but nobody thinks of denying that the gas was there, and was a substance, though we could not see it, any more than we can see our own spirits, when they leave our bodies.

I am not one to find fault with, or blame persons for lack of faith. Faith seems to be with some a gift, and with others a plant of slow growth. I do not know why some believe more readily than others, but one thing I know, unbelief of Truth is punishment enough, without blame from those who have more faith. For the believer to blame the honest Unbeliever, seems to me, like a fortunate rich man despising and blaming an honest poor man, because he has not as good clothes, as fine a house, or as much money as himself. I repeat that it was a year after the manifestations began with me, before I was convinced that they were really made by spirits, and a year more before I was convinced that they were not made by evil spirits. People wonder at my patience with all sorts of inquirers — the fretful, the doubtful, the superstitious, the fearful, and the scornful unbeliever, who comes to prove me a cheat, a humbug, a liar, or an "electrical" fool. I *am* patient — I plead guilty to the charge, if guilt it be to try to demonstrate Immortality, and endless progression in goodness, to people who have a great deal of need to progress, and who want to be immortal, and better and happier, though they do not confess that they have any such wants.

I remember how I gradually grew in faith, with the constant coming of evidence. At first I had manifestations in dreams, and these were confirmed afterwards by the outward manifestations. My wife's mother first came to me in a dream, and then afterwards informed me of the fact, by the outward manifestations. Thus faith grew by degrees, till at last the reality of the communications was established, and then I was tried as thousands are being tried now, by a foolish credence of all sorts of directions and assertions, because they were made by spirits.

It is a great mistake to suppose that spirits are wiser, or better than we are, because they are spirits; this notion seems to be just as false as its counterpart, the idea that all communicating spirits are devils. Spirits are not angels, or devils, wise or foolish, because they are spirits, any more than men are all these, because they are men. Dr. Gray once said that he did not see that he should have any more wit, if his brains were knocked out — and why

should he? A man may have a better chance to be good, without a diseased body, that he did not come into by any choice or volition of his own, than when burthened with it; and I have reason to believe from my familiarity with spiritual facts, that all the folks in the spiritual world are in much higher and better conditions than we are in this world. They have an opportunity for progression that is denied them here; and though we sometimes hear sad and terrible stories from some mediums, about the conditions of some spirits, I am inclined to think that the worst stories come through the worst mediums. Green glass colors the whitest ray of light, and a superstitious and imperfect medium is likely to color the communications he receives, with his own dark and evil life. A true medium is as rare as a true musical instrument. I believe that there are degrees of wisdom and goodness in the Spiritual World, as there are in this — that there are imperfect and undeveloped spirits; but still much more imperfection exists in us mediums, than in the spirits. They are obliged to suit their communications to our conditions, and to take names that we can accept; and no doubt many spirits have taken merely ideal names, in order to be heard and accepted, as many writers instruct us over fictitious signatures. When people are credulous, foolish, and unreasonable in accepting every thing that comes from spirits, through imperfect mediums, as authority, the spirits give them enough of it. They get all sorts of contrary and conflicting communications, and are sent after things impossible to get, and are made fools of, till they are sick of their folly.

The way to progress in the true spiritual life, and to get truthful communications, is to do just as near right as possible; to keep the conscience void of offence toward God and man; to walk humbly and not seek curiously for communications, but seek them as impressed, for useful ends. This is in my opinion the way to get good from the other world, as it is surely the way to get good in this. It is the way to avoid undeveloped or unwise spirits, and to become true mediums for wise and good spirits. We are very apt to seek company here, like ourselves; and it is fair to suppose that the higher orders of spirits will not ally themselves to mediums, who are not suited to them. There must be fitness to receive Truth, in the medium. A simple, honest, truth-loving person, who is ignorant, and in the humblest condition, may be a better, and much more improvable medium, than the so-called great men of the earth.

I repeat, that I know no better way to be a good medium, than to be a good man, or woman; to be patient, humble, and obedient to the truth we see, not because that truth is told us by spirits, not because it is revealed in the Bible, but because it is Truth, and if obeyed leads to Good.

There is a powerful influence in a harmonic circle — a circle so composed that all act together, with no discordant mind or heart. In such a circle, what may well be termed miracles of healing are performed.

During the early part of my mediumship, I was at one time afflicted with a severe influenza. I had been four days very sick. A circle was appointed to meet at my house, and I took my seat in it, hardly able to hold myself up. There were twelve persons in the circle. Suddenly I was seized with a sort of buzzing sensation, or rather a buzzing, electrical sensation all over my body — the spirits saying that they were magnetizing me, through the circle. This continued some time, and then ceased, leaving me entirely well. I was thoroughly cured, and had no recurrence of my illness. It has not been my particular mission to demonstrate the healing powers of spirits — their ability to give freely of their life to those who are in the order, that enables them to receive. But I have received information, exhortation, counsel, and rebuke, with regard to unhealthy habits, and also have been made the recipient of their life and health-giving Influence. There is constant testimony from spirits against unhealthy habits, such as pork eating, the use of tobacco, and poisons generally. Their teaching is full as regards health, and effective as far as people are obedient. I refer the reader to the experience of healing mediums, for tests and miracles which attest their peculiar mission, and proceed with my own story.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (New York), August and September, 1855]

CHAPTER VII.

OF EVIL SPIRITS.

At this period my own doubts and fancies, also, began to perplex me. The reader will remember that I had been educated in the Methodist forms of religion, and in all the crude teachings of that sect, had imbibed those ludicrous notions with respect to the existence of a personal devil, which are common to most of the so-called religious systems throughout the world — those systems which seem to possess nothing in them strong enough to eradicate from their formulas the idea that God would create a being of aggregated, or personal evil, to afflict the world, while no benevolent individual on the face of the earth would create such a diabolical incarnation,

even if he had the power. "God is love," and to suppose that All Love can create such a monster, is a thought too blasphemous to be entertained by any reflecting mind.

Yet, such is the force of education, such the power of the instructors of our childhood, that I could not quickly eradicate from my mind that haunting *ignis fatuus*, which led me continually from the path of reason and true religion. Whenever anything was given to me for my good — for the purpose of tearing me away from that thralldom in which I was placed — I did not hesitate to attribute any part of the work that needed a better explanation, to the agency of that great black phantom — the Devil — who, as it seems, is more powerful with the children of God than their Creator!

Freedom is a God-like and God-given state of the mind. Not long was I permitted to hang suspended in a dark region of uncertainty in the chains of mental slavery. The dawn of a better day broke upon my benighted soul ere long. I saw in the brilliantly manifested and innumerable works of our Heavenly Father, enough to convince me that the day of his vengeance is only the day of his love — that all our troubles, and trials, and afflictions, are so many preparatory gradations of state, to teach His children that blissful enjoyments are in store for those who will submit to His Divine influence, and acknowledge themselves to be the bumble creatures of His care — destined to exalted uses in the great movements and designs of His Universe. Mental freedom! How little does the world yet comprehend this most inestimable blessing — this wonderful birthright of every human soul, the establishment of which throughout the earth must "make the desert blossom as the rose," and bring man in such relations to his fellowman, that a New Paradise will be in the possession of the human race. As society is now constituted and governed, the few, and those by no means the most enlightened, undertake, by the appliances of means conventional and legalized by delegated power, to control the immortal destinies of millions, each one of whom, once instructed in the great fact of spiritual life and its uses, would cease to regard this earth as the ultimate consideration, on the presentation of motives for action, and would perceive in the teachings of Jesus, the Christ, that no law could be more beneficial to the welfare of man than that of love to the neighbor, which he laid down as the grand principle for man to follow as a stepping stone to the eternal kingdom in Heaven.

Before I leave this subject of demoniac influence, I would allude to evil spirits, and the probability of their agency in the remarkable manifestations which are sometimes made in circles. An intelligent author has stated to me that he has never known any such spirits to present themselves, except where some person or persons in the circle, have believed in such existences and

agencies. He views these things as lessons to those who are seeking light, and holds that they can be discovered to be merely representatives of state, conditions, or of men who exist, or who have existed. In this opinion I am led to coincide, for it is difficult to believe that God would grant any power to evil spirits to interfere with the happiness of his earthly creatures in this sublunary sphere.

I have reason to believe that much that passes for demoniac influence is from the unbalanced state of the medium. I cite an instance. A young lady, who was partially developed as a medium, and who was unfortunately placed, having those around her who were antagonistic to her, was one evening in a circle of very discordant persons. The influence of a departed friend fell upon her, but her friends in the form were horrified by her using very violent and profane language. No other manifestation could be obtained, and yet there was the best reason to suppose that the spirit who was attempting to communicate, was of a high order, an angel of Light. Another medium, soon after, in a harmonic circle, where this young woman was present, was impressed by the same spirit to utter the following explanation of the violent and profane language spoken by the young lady under his influence. The spirit said, "I did indeed impress her, and seek to speak through her. I sought to speak through the unity of many faculties, but such had been the effect of antagonism upon her, that she was in a state of combat and contest, unconscious to herself. My influence would have fallen a blessing upon her whole being, and would have been uttered as such, but coming as it did upon the contesting faculties of her spirit, it was uttered a curse, as a musical instrument untuned gives a discordant sound, instead of the harmony that the musician seeks and expects."

It may be said that spirits ought to know discordant mediums, and not attempt to use them. Spirits are by to means all-wise — and in this instance the spirit had been but a short time in the other world, and could have had very little experience of mediums. Then again, if spirits only spake through harmonized mediums, they would never speak at all — for the best of us mediums are very poor, to my entire certainty. The angels have our sympathy, that we can do no better for them. If persons would keep in mind the imperfections of mediums, and of the means established for intercourse with the other world, they would believe much less in evil spirits — though it is reasonable to suppose that there are imperfect spirits, as there are imperfect men and women. Still, conditions are better out of the body, and we have the assurance that there is no unmixed malignity in spirits — or in men — but more especially we have this assurance respecting spirits.

In human society men are too ready to condemn, as well as to unwisely

judge their fellow creatures, whenever they see them departing in any degree from those paths, which they themselves deem it right to pursue. Such persons are called evil; and the antagonisms kept up in society from this cause are innumerable. Now, I think it would be impossible to find any human being, however apparently depraved, who would not yield to the persuasions of sincere and disinterested kindness. The man deemed to be the worst of malefactors, possesses within his breast a spark of that divine love and light that emanates from the common Father of all, and it is unjust to visit upon the weak, and seemingly fallen children of men, those frightful maledictions which society indulges in, against the down-trodden and ignorant violators of law and justice. There is room enough in our prisons for the exercise of the attributes of mercy and pity — for the display of the law of love to the neighbor — for the outpouring of a more reformatory spirit towards the unfortunate, that might result in blessings which would eventually make our dungeons tenantless, and prepare the way for the security of the people at large. The day may be distant, or it may be near, that will exhibit an improvement in society in this particular, but it cannot come till men are Christianized or spiritualized by a knowledge of the relations in which they stand to our Heavenly Father. Spiritualism can effect great changes, but eighteen centuries of unnumbered woes give man little hope for a better state of things, without that actual realization of future life that comes from the examination of the startling facts which are now revealed all over the earth. Preparations have been made by philanthropists for a “good time coming,” and in this we find much to give hope to the yearning soul. Journalists, however, must first learn to do their part in the work of kindness and reform. The columns of newspapers must not continue to be made attractive with the records of foul transactions, in which innocent characters are sometimes thoughtlessly assailed, and their names blotted with reproaches, without any opportunity for redress. The amount of wrong done in this way to the helpless poor in society is enough to make angels weep over the terrible havoc. Rich men, when thus assailed, can prepare a defence by letter or by threats of the law, but the poor man whose good name is as much the “immediate jewel of his soul” as that of the proudest millionaire, has to suffer the injustice and tyranny of the press in silence and in shame. If the exposure of crime be necessary, it is not important to make it a matter of deep interest to the community. It is better to save the criminal from further crimes, by showing him that society is paternal, and regards some of its members as weaker than the rest, and worthy of more particular regard as respects their education and enlightenment. We should never forget that we belong to one common brotherhood. This alone can make us Christians in action as well as

in name.

I have found in many of those communications which seemed to have originated from evil minds or spirits, much valuable instruction, and I may advise those who are troubled in this way to try such communicators with patience and with a desire for the truth. It has appeared sometimes that spirits in the flesh have their own wishes, thoughts, and even words, given to the circle. This is valuable. No better lesson could be received, perhaps; and as the best knowledge is that of ourselves, we may well be thankful that we are thus enabled to study our own interior condition, by a revelation of our own wants, desires, and weakness.

That we are to obey every direction received is neither wise, nor to be expected from any rational mind. The advice given is to be judged always, I presume to say, by its own intrinsic value; and danger may ensue from asking for the means of arranging our personal affairs. It should be our duty to listen to all that may be said, and to receive that which comes spontaneously, with respectful consideration and sincere study — as communications are found to convey oftentimes very deep meanings — but to be contented, if possible, with the most important fact of all, the certainty of the immortal existence of the soul, and of the power of spirits to communicate with men in the form. There are bold minds, which for the truth's sake have been willing to peril every earthly comfort to obtain some real knowledge of the value and extent of spiritual communications. These pioneers have suffered as martyrs, but their reward will be great. It cannot be otherwise. They may be termed unwise; but without their aid, where would Spiritualism have found its most lucid exponents? They have passed through the fiery furnace, and the narrations of their experience will serve as guides to explorers in the future. Brave men and women! Let the world, false and incredulous, smile at your patient perseverance — your long suffering — your forbearance — your descent from affluence to poverty, if so it be, but in the reign of eternal justice, ye will stand among the brilliant crowd of those whose names “were not born to die” — crowned with the unfading consciousness of having done what you could to solve the greatest problem of this or any other age — a problem that is destined to confer upon tottering, trembling, and antagonistic society, happiness beyond expression, and to resolve all the chaotic elements of a disrupted world into new forms of beauty and of use, which shall “turn the tables” upon effete and decaying institutions, venerable only from age, and soon to be shattered by the general elevation of mankind from positions of conventional respectability to that higher honor which becomes luminous in the constant worship and adoration, not of man and man-made images, but of the Deity!

I have already alluded to the fact that I sat during my early investigation of this subject with two persons, who have since become developed as mediums. These gentlemen are Mr. Demarest and Mr. T. G. Moulton. With the latter gentleman I occupied the same room. Wonderful manifestations were there given. Blows were heard on the wall, and the spirits wrote, during the night, upon paper left upon the table for that purpose. In the summer of 1853, we sat at the house of a distinguished artist of New York, Mr. Henry Isherwood.¹⁷⁵ This was before I became a public medium. The spirits usually gave their names. At one session at our own room, a test was given to a gentleman by very rapid tippings. It was recorded, as annexed.

“yhw lliw uoy syawla eb gniksa tset snoitseuq?”

After a little examination it was found that the words had been spelled backwards, and we were surprised to find that the inquirer’s question had thus been answered —

“Why will you always be asking test questions?”

Again, the same spirit communicated, and in the same manner:

“uoy tsum ksca ot wohs ruoy evol ot ruoy wollef nam erom.”

The interpretation to this was comparatively easy, and the instruction is unexceptionable:

“You must seek to show your love to your fellow man more.”

At Mr. Isherwood’s house Mr. Moulton made a record of some of the communications which were tipped out by the table. Among these were the subjoined:

“MY DEAR CHILDREN — I want you to tear down the partition wall between prejudice and truth, and let the pure light of spirituality enter without opposition.

ROGERS.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Henry Isherwood (1803-1885), well-regarded set designer and scene painter for the Park Theatre, Niblo’s Garden, Wallack’s Theater and elsewhere.

¹⁷⁶ Presumably, English poet Samuel Rogers (1763-1855); Note that an unsigned article that reads a lot like Mary or Thomas Nichols’ writing, “Woman — Her Character, Influence, Sphere,

“MY DEAR FRIEND — God is love. These manifestations are not given to the inhabitants of earth to excite the credulity of man merely, but to bring the various opinions of men in harmony — to rob superstition of its horrible and injurious effects. Fear not, my friend, to stand in the front rank, and herald the glad tidings of man’s continued existence. To manifest conclusively my identity, I give you my popular phrase, ‘Some things can be done as well as others.’

DAN. MARBLE.”¹⁷⁷

This purported to be from one whom I had never known or heard of, to my knowledge — a comedian of remarkable original endowments, and it was received with much astonishment by the whole circle, for he had not been asked to communicate. Mr. Isherwood having been long associated with the dramatic institution as a scenic artist, it was not strange that the spirits of artists communicated through me at his residence, but that which is surprising is the fact that many of the communications came as parodies upon passages from favorite poets. At one session, when a Mr. Charles B — , an actor of eminence, was present, the communications came thus:

“Seek not for names. Either the manifestations witnessed are made by the medium, or else they are produced by departed spirits, who once inhabited the earthly body. Receive, and believe the intelligence, and do not build your faith upon a name. Let reason predominate.”

“Charles, I could a tale unfold,
Whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul —
Freeze thy young fears — make thy most strange Imaginings
Like chaff to disappear before the wind.
If thou seek proof in this —
Tis given out by you that while information seeking,
An evil spirit stung thee. But know thou, fearful Charles,

and Consequent Duties and Education,” *American Phrenological Journal* 7.1 (January 1845) [Orson Fowler, editor], 9, seems to have been the true inspiration for the “Rogers” admonition communicated by Conklin: “Be the sentiment true, and even self-evident to an unprejudiced mind, his prejudice shuts his eyes against even the most *palpable* evidence of its truth, and he quibbles every way to convince himself of its erroneousness. Indeed, it has become a proverb, that ‘there are none so blind as those that *won’t* see’ ... The author of the sentiment not only has no bond which binds him to his prejudiced hearer, but a partition wall has been erected as a barrier between them, which even the force of *truth* will not surmount.”

¹⁷⁷ Danford (“Dan”) Marble (1807-1849), popular actor in New York and elsewhere; Jonathan Falconbridge, *Dan. Marble; a biographical sketch of that famous and diverting humorist, with reminiscences, comicalities, anecdotes, etc., etc.* (New York: Dewitt & Davenport, 1851).

The spirit that did excite thy fears was thy friend. Listen!

T. S. H.¹⁷⁸

These, and similar manifestations, having excited the attention of many musical, dramatic and other artists, circles have since been formed in New York composed chiefly of members of their professions, at which very extraordinary phenomena have been exhibited. The spirits of painters and sculptors have produced exquisite poems and wonderful combinations of color. Pictures have been produced under circumstances utterly inexplicable on any other than the spiritual hypothesis; and remarkable effects produced, such as might be expected from spirits, who, in the earth-life, were devoted to dramatic and other artistic exhibitions.

These manifestations, though they may not accord with the common notions respecting spirits, have served their purpose. They have deepened many lives, by giving convincing proofs of immortality. They elevate the present life, by showing its near relation to the future, which is truly present and around us.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Cincinnati), October and November, 1855]

CHAPTER VIII.

FURTHER FROM THE PLAYERS.

My readers must see how little I can ever have known of the Literature of the Stage, or of members of the Dramatic profession. Educated a Puritanic religionist, I early became a member of a Church whose discipline forbids such "vain amusements."

But my room being visited by actors and artists, connected with the theater, many of my communications were addressed to them, by the spirits

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Sowerby Hamblin (1800-1853), actor and manager of the Bowery Theater, with a reputation for being an aggressive and sometimes violent lecher; Mary Carr Clarke, *A Concise History of the Life and Amours of Thomas S. Hamblin, Manager of the Bowery Theatre As Communicated by His Legal Wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Hamblin, to Mrs. M. Clarke* (Philadelphia: 184 — ?). Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5: "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, make thy two eyes like stars, start from their spheres ... List, list, O, list!" Perhaps "Charles B — " was actor Charles Burke (1822-1854).

of departed persons of their own profession, with whom, in their lifetime, they had associated. These were often of a peculiar character, and of more interest, perhaps, to me, who was so unused to the stage, than they will be to the reader.

Among the actors well known to the profession and to theatergoers, was a worthy man by the name of Henry Henkins.¹⁷⁹ If I remember rightly, he had been a mechanic, but had an attraction for the stage, and an ambition to shine as a tragedian. But I knew nothing of this when the following communication was spelled out, letter by letter, by calling the alphabet and the tipping of the table, and taken down by Mr. Moulton:

“My name is Henry. On the hills of different opinions I stood and fed my spirit’s frugal emptiness, whose constant care was to check the current of the various ideas which flow from brain to brain, like torrents down the rugged precipice. This night you had scarce assembled, when I, with anxious bow and quiver full of electricity, began to move the table, and convey what to some may look ridiculous — but let the sceptical and trembling coward forsake his narrow and preconceived notions, while you, my friends, pursue the way of truth, and you in time will do the deed will gild your noble names.

HENRY HENKINS.”

This communication I found to be a paraphrase of the Speech of Norval, in Home’s tragedy of “Douglas.” I had heard the first lines:

“My name is Norval; on the Grampian Hills,
My father feeds his flocks.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Henry Henkins (1809-1853), Shakespearean actor on the New York stage.

¹⁸⁰ “Douglas,” a blank verse tragedy by John Home, first performed in Edinburgh in 1756. Near the beginning of Act 2 is this speech: “My name is Norval; on the Grampian Hills/My father feeds his flocks; a frugal swain,/Whose constant cares were to increase his store,/And keep his only son, myself, at home./For I had heard of battles, and I long’d/To follow to the field some warlike Lord;/And heaven soon granted what my Sire deny’d./This moon which rose last night, round as my shield,/Had not yet fill’d her horns, when, by her light,/A band of fierce Barbarians from the hills,/Rush’d like a torrent down upon the vale,/Sweeping our flocks and herds. The shepherds fled/For safety and for succour. I alone,/ With bended bow, and quiver full of arrows,/Hover’d about the enemy, and mark’d/The road he took, then hasted to my friends;/Whom, with a troop of fifty chosen men,/I met advancing. The pursuit I led,/Till we o’ertook the spoil-encumber’d foe./We fought and conquer’d. Ere a sword was drawn,/An arrow from my bow had pierc’d their chief,/Who wore that day the arms which now I wear./Returning home in triumph, I disdain’d/The shepherd’s slothful life: and having heard/That our good King had summon’d his bold Peers/To lead their warriors to the Carron side,/I left my father’s house, and took with me/A chosen servant to conduct my steps; — /You trembling coward, who forsook his master./Journeying with this intent, I past these towers,/And, heaven directed, came this day to

but not further; and I certainly had nothing to do with the construction of Mr. Henkins' parody; nor did I recognize the name appended to it.

The following communication, of a similar character, was spelled out one day by the table, for Mr. Isherwood, who had asked for some communication from his lately deceased friend, Mr. Hamblin, formerly of the Bowery Theater, New York. It is a very slightly parodied speech, from his favorite part of Othello:

"Most potent, grave, and reverend Harry,
My very noble and approved good friend —
That I am here is not strange.
Enough am I in composing — not gifted
In this mode of speech, and little given
To this set phrase. Therefore little shall I
Impress my cause in speaking of myself.

T. S. HAMBLIN."¹⁸¹

At the same sitting, when Mr. Isherwood inquired if the spirit of Mr. Booth was present, received an affirmative response from the table, and asked for a message, he received the following curt reply — a quotation from one of his favorite parts: —

"I'm busy — thou troublest me.
JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH."¹⁸²

This sentence was certainly never in my mind, nor, if I have been told, can I now remember the play which contains it.

On another occasion, the spirit of the great actor, seemingly in a more amiable mood, spelled out the following communication; which, though it may seem of doubtful import, was considered characteristic and highly satisfactory to the circle assembled. It is a parody of the beginning of one of his speeches, in the play of "Julius Caesar:"

do/The happy deed that gilds my humble name.

¹⁸¹ Othello, Act 1, Scene 3: "Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors, / My very noble and approved good masters, / That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter, / It is most true. True, I have married her. / The very head and front of my offending / Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech, / And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace ..."

¹⁸² Junius Brutus Booth (1796-1852), Richard III, Act 4, Scene 2: "I'm busy — thou troublest me — I'm not i' th' vein."

“Friends, neighbors, countrymen, I come to speak a word, not to monopolize the circle, but to clear up some wrong impressions. The evil that I [?] received often lives, the good dies with the circle. I am yours, with the highest consideration. J. B. Booth.”

At the same sitting we also received the following from Mr. Hamblin:

“I long to say to those on earth.
That death is but the spirit’s birth. T. S.H.”

Having been thus brought into relation, *rapport* with the spirits of dramatic artists, by the visits of their friends, I have at times been influenced by them, in the state of trance, and made to repeat long passages from plays, entirely unknown to me, and with an emphasis and action, of which, in my natural state, I am not capable, and which is entirely foreign to my habits. These trances fall upon me at uncertain intervals, and when some special work is to be accomplished, or some individual impressed in this way, as he could not be in any other. In my case, the trance state is not induced by my own volition; and in all the manifestations of which I have been a medium, I am conscious only of that quiet passivity, which seems most favorable to the action of the spirits upon, and by, the medial element, through which they have the power to reveal to us their existence and something of their conditions.

In writing, which is with me much more frequent than trance, and which commonly occurs at every sitting, alternating with the table tipping responses, my hand moves with great rapidity, and without any conscious dependence upon mental volition. The sentences and sentiments written seem curious, surprising, and often are incomprehensible to me. The names signed to communications are unknown to me; and when the meanings of the messages are explained by those to whom they are written, and the names recognized as those of their deceased friends, of course unknown to me, these things are tests to me as well as others; they encourage me in my work, and contribute to that humble and passive state so needful to my mediumship.

Several of the artists and actors, to whom I was instrumental in giving the evidence of immortality, have formed a circle of their own, which met at their own houses, and which was favored with physical manifestations of so surprising and beautiful a character, as to receive the name of “miracle circle.” Intelligent agencies, purporting to be the spirits of Ben Jonson, [David]

Garrick, [William] Hogarth, [David] Wilkie, and other eminent artists and actors, produced beautiful forms of the human organism; painted pictures, now in possession of members of the circle; wrote letters and communications, under marvelous conditions. But as these matters have found their record elsewhere, and do not belong to my own experience, I wish only to allude to them in this connection.

It must be a comfort to all benevolently disposed persons, to have some assurance that Booth, Hamblin, and other men of genius, though "wicked stage players" in their day on earth, "flitting their brief hour on the stage," are not consigned to that sulphureous region, to which they are doomed by the popular ideas of Providence and the Infinite Beneficence.

"What is the use of Spiritualism?" is asked by sneering unbelievers. If these manifestations have no use but to teach the single fact of Immortality, it is enough; but if they can remove from the clouded intellects of millions, that terror in themselves, and libel on the Almighty Goodness, a hell of fiery and eternal torments, all spiritualists and all mediums may feel repaid a thousand fold, for all they have done or suffered. Can we ask the use of that, by which "Life and Immortality are brought to light?"

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Cincinnati), October and November, 1855]

CHAPTER IX.

TEST COMMUNICATIONS.

Having rooms in the center of the great city of New York, accessible for several hours of the day to all who chose to enter; and visited by many thousands, citizens of this and the surrounding cities, and strangers from all parts of the world; holding, for months together, free circles for several hours in a day, at which few visitors, who came in a proper spirit, ever failed to get some satisfactory tests of the existence of their departed friends, it may well be supposed that a record of all these remarkable tests would fill many volumes.

Such record I have seldom kept. My time and strength have been too much occupied with my daily labors. When a case has interested me, I have

sometimes made a memorandum, or kept a copy of curious communications. For other records, I am indebted to friends who have made and kept notes of their sittings. I speak of labors, when I have said also my mind and body were in a condition of passivity. But to sit at a table from morning till night, with only time for meals; to attend private circles, often till late in the night; to answer hundreds of questions; to call over the alphabet thousands of times, in the spelling out of long messages — these are real labors.

But this life has its sustaining compensations. There is not an hour in the day that some one person is not startled into thought, and most unexpectedly so, by some communication that sets all the barriers of skepticism at defiance — battering down the preconceived notions which exist in the minds of men, devoted to external life — that brief and fleeting state of being, which, compared with that of eternity, is as an atom of matter to the measureless material universe.

It may be proper here to describe the manner in which tests are usually given at my table, when the spirits do not undertake to furnish them in some other manner, which they often do, when the beaten road is not agreeable to the thoughts of some inquirer. The person making an inquiry of the spirits, takes four or five pieces of paper, and writes on them father, mother, brother, sister, cousin, friend, &c. The spirit communicating selects one of these from the mixed papers, which have been previously folded by the inquirer. The table tips three times when the correct one is selected. This one is then placed by itself, and the Christian names corresponding to these relationships or designations are then placed upon similar pieces of paper. Now the table responds again, when the papers are touched, and the one is selected to correspond with the relationship. For instance, "John," and "Father," will be found to have been selected, if the spirit of a parson's father, named John, is the one desiring to communicate. The papers, however, are not always opened, and my hand is frequently moved to make some communication in writing, when the name of the spirit is appended, also. This test is frequently made stronger by being extended, in a similar manner to the age, place of decease, and the like; and it seldom fails to carry conviction, for by no possible theory can the peculiarity of the result be explained. In addition to this, usually, some further communications are made, suited to the condition of the inquirer — though seldom in conformity with his desire. He is usually fully made to understand that his own thoughts are wholly avoided, so that he shall have no opportunity to indulge in the theory that the medium has the power of reading his thoughts. The ingenuity displayed in defeating all the theorists and theories, is not the least remarkable part of the work.

It is seldom that spirits give information, often eagerly sought,

respecting affairs of business, or such as will aid in the selfish accumulation of property; as of finding money, drawing prizes in lotteries, and gainful speculations; yet good advice, as to the conduct of legitimate business, is sometimes given and followed with advantage. Spirits sympathize with our affections, and our intellectual wants, more than our selfish cravings and ambitions; yet there is reason to believe that when our lives are so harmonized, that all things have their due relation, we may find guidance in external affairs, as well as in spiritual growth and progress.

I will give here some instances of the test communications, which are continually occurring in my circles.

At my room, one day, while attending to a circle, a lady entered, and took a seat at a distance from the table. Soon this communication was addressed to her:

“Mary — William is homesick, and is about applying to be sent home. I give you this evidence that I am present. Your husband,

WILLIAM B — .”

The William referred to was in the Japan expedition, and it is not a little curious that Mrs. B — received a letter, dated on the day that this communication was given, from her son William, who stated that he was homesick, and was coming home. This same lady at the same session, asked if she had a letter in her box, at the post office in Brooklyn. The answer was “No.” To this she replied that the information could not be correct, as a letter, with money in it, never failed to be there by twelve o’clock on that day of the month. It was then after three o’clock. The spirit then said:

“The letter is not in the box; but it will be there; but there will be no money in it.”

Mrs. B — hastened to Brooklyn, called at the post-office, and, as she entered, the letter was placed by the clerk in her box. On inquiry, she learned that the letter had been mislaid for two or three hours, by an oversight. On opening it, too, her usual monthly installment was not found enclosed, but an apology for its delay! This case is one by which some of the sagacious theories of modern philosophers may be shorn of their strength.

No theory has been advanced, that I am aware of, which will explain this last fact. There is no way for the skeptic but to deny it, yet it can be proved as thoroughly as any fact can be, depending upon similar testimony.

The test manifestations, connected with the permutation locks, have

been noticed by the public press, but I have reasons for wishing to give a more full account of them, than has yet been published.

The peculiar safety of a permutation lock is, that it is capable of as many changes in its internal arrangement, as there can be in a certain number of letters, to which it is adapted. Every time the door is locked, the lock may be changed, so that it can be unlocked only by changing the guards on the key to correspond; and it is usual to make the arrangement correspond to some word, easily remembered. But a burglar, with the key, might try a thousand times, and its owner, if he forgot the word, as has sometimes happened, could not open the lock.

One evening, while I was at Howard street, Mr. S — , together with Mr. James P. Kenyon, and several others, came to my room with Mr. Bruce, of Williamsburg. Mr. Kenyon examined the table, to find any possible machinery that might be connected with it. He then commenced, in the customary way, for a test, by writing relationships, &c., on slips of paper. One of these was picked out. He then wrote the names corresponding to the relationships. One of these was selected. It did not correspond with the relationship that had been chosen. Some discussion now took place, and while Mr. Kenyon was talking, a fine communication was written out by my hand, and the Christian name of one of Mr. Kenyon's spirit friends was appended. All his questions were then correctly answered, but on one of the party saying to him, "Mr. Kenyon, you are getting converted," an evident attempt was made to throw off the impressions of truth which had been made.

Mr. Kenyon and his acquaintances now retired, and went to Williamsburg. A stranger to me and to them, who had sat at this circle, also proceeded to Williamsburg, and in this way I was enabled afterward to learn what transpired. Mr. Kenyon, while crossing the ferry, asserted that I was a very good clairvoyant, but that I moved the table myself. This the stranger denied, saying that he had purposely placed about fifty pounds' weight against the force, and that still the table moved!

The *Williamsburgh Times*, of which Mr. K. was editor, was now used to demolish me and spiritualism! The whole subject was pronounced a delusion and a lie, and fifty dollars were offered to any one who could move the table by any force other than that which Mr. Kenyon could apply. I read the article, and then asked my guardian spirit, George Fox, if he could assist me. The result was that I offered to give twenty-five dollars, against an equal sum, to be offered by Mr. Kenyon, in behalf of the Five Points' Mission, if I could not accomplish by spiritual aid, that which no unassisted mortal could do. This offer, which was to result in a gift of twenty-five dollars from either Mr. Kenyon or myself, was exceedingly interesting to me, for I myself was relying

wholly upon the word of my spiritual friend, and could only tell how far I was justified in so doing, by the sequel.

Mr. S — and Mr. Kenyon now obtained a permutation lock, with eighty-seven thousand eight hundred changes. They set the lock at a certain word, wrote that word on a piece of paper, and sealed it all up. They then gave it to Mr. Bruce. He brought it to my table, not knowing the word himself. The lock was now submitted to the spirits. In a short time S O O N was given as the key to open it. Mr. Bruce returned to Mr. Kenyon with the lock, and the reply was I was a very successful clairvoyant, to be able to read so cleverly.

Mr. Kenyon was not satisfied, however. He set the lock again to another word, and Mr. Bruce again brought it to my room. The experiment was arranged as before. Mr. Bruce was entrusted with an envelope, purporting to hold the word-key that would open the lock. This he kept in his pocket, not knowing what was in it, or what word would open the lock. When he came to the table he was about to put this envelope upon it, but the spirits said, "Put it in your pocket; we do not want it." Soon after the signal was given, and F O O L was spelled out. Mr. Bruce then asked if this word would open the lock. The reply was "No!" and then followed, "Do they think we cannot open it?" Mr. Bruce then inquired, "Do you mean to say I am a fool?" The reply was "No!" "Is it Mr. S — ?" "No!" "Mr. C — ?" "N o!" "Mr. Kenyon?" "Yes!" The alphabet was then used again, and "N M O P; now open the lock!" was given! The spirits then stated that the envelope was fraudulently arranged; that only two letters in it were correct; the other two fictitious; and that an attempt had been made to deceive the spirits. Mr. S — subsequently acknowledged that the envelope had been thus prepared, and Mr. Kenyon as yet has not satisfied me that he has paid over the twenty-five dollars, which were to have been given to the establishment of Mr. Pease.¹⁸³ I am not disappointed. When the spirits promised to open the lock, they said that Mr. Kenyon would not pay the money! So much for opposition to truth!¹⁸⁴

I can respect an abundant caution that fears to be deceived, in a matter of vital interest. I must respect that calm exercise of the judgment, which demands the most absolute proof, before it yields credence, in things of high importance; but I have no respect for a captious, prejudiced, willful skepticism, that no evidence can satisfy, and no proof convince. With such persons, there is not only blindness of mind, but hardness of heart; not only a

¹⁸³ Lewis M. Pease (1818-1897), Methodist minister and founder of the Five Points Mission in 1850 in lower New York City. Conklin's rooms on Canal Street were on the edge of the Five Points district.

¹⁸⁴ David Bruce, in a letter to the *Spiritual Telegraph* (reprinted in *The Spiritual Telegraph Papers* 3 (1854), 552-553, tells the same story on Conklin's behalf.

darkened and perverted understanding, but often a lack of common honesty.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Cincinnati), October and November, 1855]

CHAPTER X.

THE SPIRITS AT KOONS.

When I have been worn out with my labors in New York, I have been directed to take journeys for recreation, which have also enabled me to carry to distant places the means, so far as I possess them, of testing the fact of immortality. On one of these journeyings I visited the spirit room of Jonathan Koons, in Athens county, Ohio.

My experience at Mr. Koons' was in some respects more fortunate than others, though the aggregate of facts is greater than I can give. Ignorant and unbelieving persons have no idea that certain conditions are necessary to spiritual communications of a convincing or valuable character. If a telegraph wire is broken, we do not expect any message, and a storm may derange the order of the wires. Every one knows that we can't breathe freely when choked; that our blood can't circulate against a ligature, and that the brain can't be used to think when a piece of the skull is depressed upon it. A hundred other illustrations, pertinent to the case in point, might be given, and yet the ignorant and unbelieving must wait for enlightenment and conviction.

People go into circles, at Mr. Koons' and elsewhere, demanding impossibilities — demanding to be convinced against their will, and with a theory to explain all the phenomena that they can wriggle and twist by, and a ready denial for all the rest.

Clairvoyance has been made to do a deal of duty, though this remains as great a wonder and as little explained as the raps themselves. A distinguished professor, who has written a book with the thing or theory, called "odic force," to explain the manifestations, and account, by the unaccountable, for what is perfectly plain, has adduced the echo as a reasonable analogy and explanation why I get an answer, when I propose a question to a spirit.¹⁸⁵ He

¹⁸⁵ Baron Carl Ludwig von Reichenbach, *Physico-Physiological Researches on the Dynamics of Magnetism, Electricity, Heat, Light, Crystallization, and Chemistry, in Their Relations to Vital Force*

says: "The boy cries out in the wood, and his words return to him — he is answered — so the inquirer questions a spirit, and an echo is produced." Now, is not this too childish to answer. I ask of an unknown spirit friend, of some person at my table, "What is your name?" The name is spelled by the sounds, and a whole chapter of facts may be given that I can know nothing of, but all is correct and relevant to the person addressed. I am as well satisfied, and so is the friend, as if a letter had been received from England, signed by some friend of the inquirer; and yet this reverend gentleman gives the boy and the echo, as proof all sufficient, against individual immortality, and sensible communications from spirits who have left the form. When such people come into circles they spoil the conditions of communication as much as a storm deranges an electric telegraph, and then, they say that all communications is a pretense, or a humbug; or if they get false and foolish messages, they say that devils only communicate. A false message on the telegraph, or from spirits, cannot be decided to be from nobody. It takes an intelligence to work the media falsely, as much as to do this truly — hence those who have got as far as the evil spirit theory, are further advanced than those who deny all the facts of spiritual communication.

I might give a particular description of Mr. Koons' place, but so many have done this, that I deem it only needful to say that it is in a rough country, some years behind the age, as we say. The inhabitants of Athens county, about Mr. Koons, are a plain, simple people, who dress in their own fashion, and that a very comfortable if not a very tasteful one. They live in log-cabins, and are kindhearted and sensible, so far as I know them.

Mr. Koons' residence is a double cabin, with an entry or hall between. Near this cabin, and in the same yard, stands a new cabin, about sixteen or eighteen feet square, with one door and two windows, having strong shutters and fastenings.

This is called the spirit-room, and was built under the direction of the spirits. The fixtures of this room, fitted up by special direction of the spirits, are one table, about six feet long and two feet wide; upon this table are two arms extending from each end, and rising about two and a half feet high over the center, in the form of a segment of an ellipsis; at each end, resting upon the ends of these arms, are a base drum and a common military kettle-drum, fastened to the table by wires. On the table are four drum-sticks, and two or three small tin trumpets. Behind the table, which stands about three feet from the wall, are two or three rude shelves against the wall, upon which are from twenty to thirty toys, just such ones as you may find in any of our toy-shops.

(New York: J. S. Redfield, 1851), trans. John Ashburner.

At the end of the table, against the wall, hang several musical instruments — a violin, guitar, triangle, and tambourine. At the other end of this room are two seats, extending entirely across the room, one above the other, so that persons on the back seat can overlook those on the front seat. These seats will accommodate twenty or thirty persons. The phenomena that are usually witnessed here, have been again and again described, such as those following, related by a person who was present some evening before I went there:

“When Mr. Koons played on the violin, there was a brisk rattling among the drum-sticks, and then was heard the beating of the drums, keeping perfect time with the music of the violin, in a very loud and distinct way; the fact is, I never heard such drumming before in my life, though I have often heard the drum beaten with skillful hands. Then came the tinkle of the triangle, keeping perfect time with the other instruments. Next the tambourine was taken, and carried over the heads of the company, near the ceiling or loft of the room, very swiftly, the meantime chiming with the other music, as though handled with the most skillful hands; and, finally, one of the trumpets was taken up, and a most delightful female voice was heard issuing from it, harmonizing delightfully with the other music. Several varied tunes were thus sung and played upon these instruments, lasting about half or three-quarters of an hour — then all was silent. After a short time, the trumpet was taken up, and a conversation held with Mr. Koons. Then I saw a piece of illuminated paper dropped at my side. I picked it up, and held it in my open hand; then came an illuminated hand and took this paper from me. The paper, illuminated and shining with phosphorescent light, was taken around and across the room over the heads of the company, with the velocity of lightning. Thus ended our first evening’s interview.”

Such manifestations as these are common to most visitors: for myself, I witnessed some things more interesting still. A spirit hand was formed and placed in mine. I saw this hand; I felt it; I closed my own upon it.

I shook the hand, and whilst holding it grasped in mine, it was withdrawn from me like a vapor, and held up before me.

I then held paper by the two edges before this hand, and it wrote two hundred lines upon the paper thus held by me.

I laid a horn or speaking trumpet down. This horn was raised and spoken through. I then thought of ventriloquism, for, notwithstanding all that I have witnessed of spiritual manifestations, I have lost no power to question or examine, and guard against any deception. As I thought of ventriloquism, the horn was blown through.

I asked the spirit his name? He said he lived in Africa, before the human family had progressed to language.

I said, "How long have you known me?"

He answered, "Since you were a member of the Methodist Church — then you were in a very low spiritual condition there."

I said, "I thought I was right."

He answered, "Thinking don't make us right."

The spirits now announced that if I would put clean paper and a pencil on the table, and go out, they would write. I did this, and they wrote a communication, signed by "King" George Fox, and eighteen others.

These were some of the most remarkable manifestations that I saw at Mr. Koons'. There seems to be more difficulty in securing the requisite conditions for forming the spirit hand, than for a great number of other phenomena.

One reason why these material manifestations are so rare is that people do not understand how to form circles, or have not the proper persons, or the requisite amount of patience. Orderly persons, who are sympathetic with each other, and who have unwearied patience to wait for the order that precedes the manifestations are needed to form a circle for any very valuable manifestations, whether material or otherwise. The higher, or more compound phenomena, whether of a physical or intellectual character, require a circle of highly developed and very sympathetic or affinital persons. One person coming in because another does, will entirely spoil the value of a circle for higher manifestations. The sounds may be produced, and messages given, and many tests may be given, in circles formed of various dispositions, discordant to one another, provided several of them are honest inquirers; but in circles for the production of the creative phenomena, or the transmission of interior wisdom, no person should be allowed to come who is discordant to the circle, and more especially to the medium, or the individual who tones or forms the circle.

Wives think they must be admitted to a circle because their husbands are. Husbands will not allow their wives to go without them. Parents, relatives, and friends, tyrannize in like manner, and the result is, the conditions of the higher manifestations and communications are taken away. The spirits will regulate us by our affinities, or they will leave us to the fate inevitable to discordant relations. In ill-toned, unrelated circles, mediums, and all persons sensitive to harmony and discord, suffer indescribably. This suffering will make itself understood, as well as felt, after a time. Honest inquirers will be taught how to get heavenly wisdom from the spirit spheres, and how to get miracles wrought for great uses.

CHAPTER XI.

EXPERIENCES OF A SPIRIT.

Though I have been chiefly the medium of brief and distinct tests of Spirit existence, I have also been used for fuller communications respecting the phenomena of the higher or inner life. The following series of communications will give the reader an idea of the method and manner in which spirits succeed in holding intercourse with those they wish to instruct and benefit. At repeated sittings from day to day, a spirit patiently used my hand, and wrote out the following communications, furnished me by the friend to whom they were written.

FIRST SITTING.

"My dear Friend: — It is a pleasure to the Spirits, when they can control the hand of the Medium, to convey their thoughts on paper to their friends. I am now blessed with the time and privilege of saying a few words to you, by way of preface. I wish this to be the commencement of a brief history of my experience here; and I trust you will bear with me in the many impediments which I may have in the way of freely conversing with you. Rest assured that I will as often as I can, from time to time, resume the subject until I complete. I will commence from the hour of my parting from the body, and give you a minute description, as far as I can, in your language: it may be beneficial to yourself, (I know it will be to me,) and others; — I will commence it at the next interview, if possible. Your friend, George."

SECOND SITTING.

"My dear Friend: — As I promised, I cannot better employ the time allotted to me than to commence. I found, on escaping from my body, that I had indeed lived in a mist during my earthly career. I found that my Spirit-home consisted" — [Here the communication was suddenly broken off.]

THIRD SITTING.

“After having been relieved from my earthly tenement, I gazed in wonder and amazement at the scene which opened to my view. I there saw my body lying, with friends weeping over my supposed death. It appeared to me like a dream. I could not, for a time, realize that I had passed from my body. I found that I was still in the form of a man, and that I was conscious of the presence of my earthly friends.” [“Upon examination,” says the individual addressed by the Spirit, “I found that the foregoing communication was not an exact continuation of the preceding one; and I asked if there was anything wrong? The answer was *No*. I then inquired if I should erase the unfinished sentence concluding communication No. 2, and was again answered *No*. So they remain.”]

FOURTH SITTING.

“The process of restoration occupied, as I have since learned, some two hours. That is not always the ease; it often does not consume more than an hour of earth’s time. It depends a great deal upon the physical condition at the time of dissolution.

Done to-day, GEORGE.”

[I asked if the Spirit could not continue and write; and the answer was a communication from “*Florence*,” explaining that Spirits had not the power to continue to write a long time at once.]

FIFTH SITTING.

“I was met by my congenial Spirit, and we together remained where my body was until I was conscious that I should have no further use for it. We then floated forth to my new home; of which I, in my next, will speak further.”

SIXTH SITTING.

“I was conducted by my companion, of whom I will speak further hereafter, from the earth-sphere, — passing millions of happy Spirits, each of whom smiled a welcome as we passed; knowing that I was a stranger, on my way to the sphere of my attraction, to receive my first lesson.”

SEVENTH SITTING.

“My first lesson consisted of a presentation of my past earth-life, from my earliest infancy up to the moment of my parting from the body. I then saw what I had to do in order to retrieve that which I had neglected while a resident of earth. I saw that I had to return and do much, very much, of what I had left undone; the manner of which I will explain in my next.”

EIGHTH SITTING.

“My punishment consisted in being compelled to linger near earth, and to use all the power that I had to impress those who were (or are) in the dark, as far as I was able. You will readily perceive that that was “punishment” sufficient to inspire the soul of every mortal to cultivate the more important part while on earth; I mean the Spiritual. To be surrounded by happy Spirits, all going to and fro, and feel that you are inferior to them, and at the same time have the knowledge that the cause of your inferiority is the result of your own willful ignorance! My mission to retrieve past errors was, as I have before said, to do all the good I could to those whom I could by sympathy impress with the truth. GEORGE.”

[At the end of the latter communication, I began to criticise, and find some fault with its language, when Mr. Conklin’s hand wrote the following:

“Friend, the chapter of any book needs no comment until its completion. Record as written, and *when it is finished, comment.*

GEORGE FOX.”

NINTH SITTING.

“I spoke of my congenial partner, and told you that I would, at some other time, tell you more of her. She was one whom I never knew on earth; and one whom, as soon as my Spirit was relieved from the body, at once, by the beautiful law of attraction, I recognized as my celestial mate. — I will speak to-night through this Medium.”

[In the evening, Mr. C. was thrown into a trance and “George” continued as follows: —] “The one of whom in the short way I spoke through this hand, as being coupled with me through my celestial journey, was the daughter of a nobleman of Scotland. I had never seen or known her, she having passed from earth to Heaven in early infancy; she being, according to your time, some twenty years my junior, was known as part of myself when my Spirit-eyes were opened. She taught me, as my seeking Spirit was capable of receiving, that which I desired. I, with her, the first few days of my Spirit-birth, attended those who were most in sympathy with me; and from them, with her

assistance, I gradually mended up my past earthly errors as fast as possible. I saw in him with whom I often converse, a mind earnestly seeking knowledge; and as that was my mission, I gladly undertook to be one of his guardians.

“When Spirits make an appointment, and conditions are favorable, and the instrument we desire to use can be influenced, we always fulfill it.”

TENTH SITTING.

“To impress those of earth from the path of error is a pleasure; but to be compelled to linger near earth and learn from thence that which ought to have been done while a resident, is a ‘punishment.’ To feel your inferiority; to see that there are those still encumbered with the body who are far more advanced than you are; and to be deprived of the privilege of enlightening those spirits who are ignorant, and yet feeling that you ought to be superior to them, will enable you to conceive the truth when I say, that impressing those who are inferior to me on earth is a punishment. I had neglected to do what — “

ELEVENTH SITTING.

“I was unsuccessful for a time in my endeavors to impress you. I at length so influenced your mind by directing your passive moments to these phenomena, and with what pleasure — yes, with what a degree of delight — did I first sound you a welcome! I saw that I could, in that way, make up for the past; yet I was often disappointed when I found that I could not gratify your every desire. When you asked for proof, I tried, and was assisted by all the spirits who visited the circle, and was enabled to give you partial evidence of the presence of some unseen intelligence. I have much soon to give before I complete this, which will remove your misgivings as to my individuality. For the present, farewell.”

TWELFTH SITTING.

“Finding that you had some light upon your soul, I, assisted by my helpmate, endeavored to remove the darkness that shrouded your mental perception. We found your mind, in a great measure, free from the contaminating influence of superstition.”

THIRTEENTH SITTING.

“I then, for the first time since my spirit was free from the body, realized the blessings resulting from being instrumental in removing from the mind of mortals the darkness which early teachings had caused to overshadow the spirit’s perception. You will remember, my friend, that my idea of the future was almost a blank; then you can understand my feelings when I was in the knowledge of immortal life, and was in possession of even an imperfect way of being the means of removing from the minds — ”

FOURTEENTH SITTING.

“Of others that horrible idea of annihilation. Yes, my dear friend, the mode of conveying by impression, or by any other form, light from heaven to earth, is gratifying to the spirit; and when I saw with what rapidity I could progress with every idea of truth that I could convey, can you wonder that I often attempted to converse with you when conditions were unfavorable ‘I ’

FIFTEENTH SITTING.

“When you consider, my dear friend, that every circle for communications is generally attended by many Spirits who are all anxious to converse with their friends, — and who are often in stronger sympathy with the Medium or inquirer than with the spirit with whom they suppose they are conversing, — you will see that we do not at all times converse directly, but through the agency of others. I have often, when trying to answer your questions, been repelled by another Spirit who was desirous of sending a word to Earth; and my anxiety was so great that I directed him, in our Spirit-language, to answer, which, with the confusion of the circle, often reached you in conflicting answers.”

SIXTEENTH SITTING.

“Yet, when you reflect that we are but *men, women, and children, with our bodies off*, what then, if a Spirit should at times give directly a wrong reply? We sometimes have to reflect back in order — ”

SEVENTEENTH SITTING.

“I often, when you called for tests, in my eagerness to respond in promiscuous circles, gave incorrect answers, which on you, for the time, made a wrong impression; and I often felt grieved in spirit, trusting that the day

would soon arrive when I would be more competent; when I would explain.”

EIGHTEENTH SITTING.

“We move together by attraction, and those with whom we are in sympathy; we never leave as long as we move in the same plane with them. This sympathetic feeling can only be severed by discord — discord, not as you understand it, but as we, which is, [arises from] *an advancement of the mind*. I often leave your immediate presence, yet can still be in communion with you. I do, with my companion, who, for a better name, I shall call LOVE, visit other planets. I have learned much from the inhabitants of the planet known to you by the name of Jupiter, which has elevated me, and caused my Spirit to rejoice. I found at first that it was extremely difficult to approach.”

NINETEENTH SITTING.

“In our endeavors to manifest to you, we rejoiced to find that, you were freed from that which is so annoying to the Spirits — *credulity*. Often Spirits find in their friends the condition that would enable them to give manifestations; yet are compelled to withhold from doing so, from the fact, that should they unfold their powers at once, it would unbalance the reason. But to return: I frequently, when you were alone, would use the emanations which proceeded from your body, and by the power of *will-force* (for it can not be explained by any other term) cause the slight touches, which you are now feeling, to be made.”

TWENTIETH SITTING.

“I watched with deep interest each vibration; and O my friend! if you only knew the joy I felt when you countenanced or credited their heavenly origin! — ”

TWENTY-FIRST SITTING.

“ — for however light it may seem to mortals, it is a great and important point to gain, to have our friends feel an interest in the slightest impression felt by them.”

TWENTY-SECOND SITTING.

“It is only those that we are in sympathy with in whom we can single out thoughts. We see you, as you see one another, yet we can not see *thoughts*, only as a confused mass, *unless we are in strong affinity with the person*; and then it requires concentration.”

TWENTY-THIRD SITTING.

“You can, by fixing your mind on any particular Spirit, who has an affinity for your Earth, draw that Spirit to you, but it may not be able to converse. It is best to get information from those that tell you they are your guardians. How often have I impressed high thoughts — and watched with a degree of interest to see if you would trace them to their origin. *We can not convey words through all Mediums. We give the ideas and let them word them.* That accounts for the many contradictory communications in regard to names. *Names are not ideas*, and it is difficult to convey them. We leave with the body our names, and are only known here as the children of one Universal Father.”

TWENTY-FOURTH SITTING.

“There is not a mind on Earth that has not its superior; neither is there here. Thus you will readily perceive that we are constantly moving toward higher and more perfect knowledge. I feel at every interview that I have with you, that I should like to give you that intelligence that will tend to enlarge your mind; yet I can not at all times write as I desire; conditions of the Medium prevent. After having unsuccessfully tried to write through your hand, without the aid of your mind, I commenced, as I have before stated, to vibrate sounds; feeling confident that when I could control the surrounding fluid through which we operate, I should be able to give you positive proof of the origin of the sounds.”

TWENTY-FIFTH SITTING.

“It may appear strange to you, my dear friend, that a Spirit should at one moment write and tell you he had not the power to converse, and the next moment control the hand of the same Medium and write. We are governed here by laws, and those laws are immutable and good. When circles are formed for the reception of Spiritual truths, they are often attended by many who are also anxious to converse, and who are strangers to us, as well as you on the other side, and whose spheres prevent us. Often when my influence is

just about operating, a different sphere approaches, and causes an instantaneous cessation of my communication.”

The following was spoken by me, in trance, in May, 1855:

“I remember, at one time while the elements were in confusion, that the ocean, mad with the rude reception of the storm, tossed like a feather the barque in which I sailed: but retiring to the cabin, and finding this Medium perusing the Book that the world worshiped, to have said: ‘Lay it aside, and pick up that and read it which will teach you to do your duty!’ And how many times, in after days, did I reflect upon that command! Since I have passed from the body, I have met with one that gave me the impression which caused me to look at the spiritual in coming days, and see that it was done for my own good.

“It may appear strange, that to command a fellow-being not to read that which had the germ of truth, should ultimately result in my own progress — but so it is.

“My Spirit-Guides saw that I was living and moving constantly upon the surface of Materialism; that the Spiritual, instead of being developed, was daily being smothered; and took this method of reaching the better feeling. Reflection came, and with it condemnation; and with condemnation — penitence; and with penitence — religion; and with religion — a preparation for the home of the Spirit, which I was in a few years to enter.

“A loved one — dear and bound to me by the laws of the land as well as the law of Heaven — mourns me dead, and will not be comforted, because she is deprived of my sight. She has, in the outpouring of her heart, asked me to fulfill a promise that I made, on the eve of my departure from the body. Yes, yes, my dear, dear Amy! I promised that if this Spiritualism was true, I would endeavor to communicate with you. But I little thought, then, the difficulties that attend, and the many obstacles that I should have to overcome in order to do so. The communion of Spirits is truth. The dying of the body lessens not the affections of the Soul — lessens not the manhood of the Spirit — buries not that desire to protect, counsel, and love. I am still your husband, still, with an anxious angel’s care, watching over you — realizing your loneliness and sorrow of heart at my supposed loss. I *do* impress you, and I *do* make heavenly sounds for you; and I do know, that to pursue your investigations will make you happy, both on Earth and in Heaven.

“Be governed — and follow your impressions, as circumstances may cause you to receive them.

“Respecting the disposal of all the valuables that I left you, I would advise you to turn all into money that you can; *not* to go to your friends in the far distant south-west, but to try to be comforted and consoled in your aching heart, by the knowledge that I am always with and near you.

“The cause of my death was complicated: excessive anxiety for yourself,

with fever, and various other inharmonious disorders of the body, caused the Spirit to be freed. *Do not desire to know when you will join me here.* Try to be happy, and live out every hour that nature requires; and rest assured, that when you lay off the body, your Spirit will be united again — no more to part — with me, I have much, very much to tell you. Oh the contrast, the vast contrast, there is between the real and the unreal — between the Heaven of Man's ideas and the Heaven of Spirit's realities! Religion consists in love — not to one, but to all. I am happy in the company of your father, mother, Almena, and an innumerable host of happy Spirits; some that I knew in the body, and many that I never knew.

"Do investigate, and as you read this, *read it again* — and I will stand over you, and give you the inward feeling of its truth.

NELSON."

After these words were uttered, my hand selected a sealed envelope, among several others, lying on my table, as the one to which the foregoing communication was a response. A copy of the communication, and the unopened envelope, were soon afterward sent to an address which had been given — and the following extracts, from a letter in reply, complete the narrative:

"It was with feelings which I find no words adequately to express, that I perused the contents of the purported communication of my departed husband. I will only send you the questions which were sealed, to convince you of the truthfulness of the answers given. I do not wish you to publish my name nor the captain's." These were the sealed questions:

"My dear N. — Do you remember, while in the body, you were an unbeliever in spiritualism? You then promised to me, if you were to die first, and find it true, you would communicate with me, so as to convince me of its truthfulness. And long have I waited for this communication. Do now, if possible, through our old friend Conklin, send me something that will relieve my almost bursting heart. Are you constantly with me? Do you approve of the course I have pursued since you left me? How much longer shall I remain in this vale of tears? Are Pa, and Ma, also Almena, with you? Can you inform me what was the immediate cause of your death? Is your loving, watchful care, still the same for me? Am I a medium? Will it be for my good to investigate the subject? Also inform me in what way I may know I am one. Inform me, my dear N., what your last words were; also, whether you can guide me in my affairs in this life. Perhaps you see how lonely I am — I know not what is for the best. Things remain as they were when you left; only they have gone to wreck. Shall I sell them or leave them still as you directed? Shall I go to my friends in California, or not? Oh, how I need your counsel — your advice — your prayers! Do, my dear N., answer

these questions if possible.

A.”

Mrs. I — returned the copy of the communication sent to her, making a note against the words — “Yes, yes, my dear, dear Amy,” &c., to this purport: “*This is word for word as he answered me, when I asked him to communicate with me, in case he found Spiritualism true.*”

Early in the same month, a lady sitting in a Circle at Mr. Conklin’s, asked some questions of the Spirits mentally. Two had been answered affirmatively, when the usual signal for the alphabet was given, and the following spelled out:

“You will get the picture again in a few days. FANNY.”

To another mental question, the answer given was “Four days.”

The inquirer acknowledged the relevancy of the answers to her questions, and promised to repeat those questions to the Medium, in case it should turn out that the Spirits had predicted correctly. She accordingly returned, four days afterward, and showed the Medium a locket containing two pictures which she said had been left at her house that day (the fourth after her previous interview,) by a person who said he had found it in West Broadway. Her mental questions and the replies had been:

Ques. — “Do you know that I have lost your picture?”

Ans. — “Yes.”

Ques. — “Shall I ever get it again?”

Ans. — “Yes;” and then — “You will get the picture again in a few days.”

Ques. — “How soon?”

Ans. — “In four days.”

The following copies of records made at my rooms have been placed at my disposal for this narrative:

On the 18th of May, an envelope was opened in the presence of the subscribers at Mr. Conklin’s rooms. After the following description of its contents had been given, partly in writing by the Medium’s hand, and partly by the table-tipping, “A variety of J. H. H. (meaning initials) with paper bound with strips — always paper: — Report of Protestant Board. I see one thing, aside from questions: a question from Rom., 5 ch., 5 v., worthy a reading.” Then, after some conversation, “J. H. Harley” was

written; and shortly afterward — “Friends, the interior of the letter need not be opened; there is sufficient to satisfy this company, and the other is for the individual.”

The letter, so far as opened, was in conformity with the description.

F. O. DEGENER.
DANFORD NEWTON.
GEO. P. GORDON.
JAMES JOYCE.
A. A. TYNG.
N. S. KIMBALL.
JOHN F. GRAY.”

From one who once professed to be an Atheist, now in the Spirit-world, to a friend on earth, of like opinions, who suspected that he had been murdered. Spoken through J. B. Conklin:

“Your suspicions are groundless. My dear cousin, have you cause to rejoice? My death was accidental; I was suddenly called to realize that change to you and myself so doubtful. I still exist, not in a vain dream, but in reality; and wish you, my cousin, to wipe from the book of your imaginings, that horrible idea of annihilation. The time will come when you and your friend will commune together. I will say more in private. I will not be done with you till I have convinced you of my individuality.

R. B. S.”

About a fortnight ago, the Medium being entranced, took up sealed letter, which was subsequently shown to contain a newspaper abstract of a sermon against Spiritualism, and spoke as follows:

“Men claiming to be the servants of the living God, stand in their gilded pulpits, and attempt to be the expounders of that which is of the Deity; not because they have the internal response that to which their mouths give utterance, — not because they feel that they speak from the interior of the soul, but because it is applicable to, and needs must be in conformity with, the respectability — the influence of their respective hearers; who, did they preach God in all his purity, would be disarmed of their high station, would lose the resources which enabled them to clothe themselves in purple and fine linen, and ride at ease in all the luxuries of life; while those whose circumstances have placed them in the hovel, have scarcely a sufficiency to keep the body healthy, and a fit encasement for the Spirit to grow in. I say, did these men, representing themselves to have been sent by God as leaders and teachers, preach as their intuition tells them, they could not retain their

position.

“We pity them; — we do not condemn, — and yet we do condemn them, — we condemn all error; yet we do not — because we have passed from all that is condemnable.

“Oh! ye men and women, how long will ye halt between two opinions? A well-ordered discourse, forcibly delivered, — accepted, because conceived and given to meet the views of a prejudiced congregation of hearers” — [Here an interruption cut short the sentence.]

“Here stands a man, purporting to be a man of God, bearing testimony to that which his eyes have beheld, and his ears have heard, to be the production of an intelligent power out of the body; that power being compelled as it is by so much imperfection in Media through which they [the Spirits] converse, often conveys or gives impressions different from what they would, were they able to speak as I do now. Is it reasonable to suppose, — taking for granted, or, in other words, for argument’s sake, to admit with our brother, the Rev. Samuel, that we are evil. I say, is it reasonable to suppose that an All-wise, All-powerful, and All-loving Heavenly Father, would suffer demons to return and revisit your earth; snatching His children from their holy sanctuaries; torturing them by severing their preconceived opinions of Death, the Grave, and the future? I say *torturing*, because all bound-up minds, before they can cast asunder, and cleanse themselves from early teachings, necessarily pass through a degree of mental torture. Again, I say, is it reasonable to suppose that such a being as every child’s Soul tells it its Heavenly Father is, would suffer these ‘daemons’ as our reverend brother says, to return to lead His children astray by teaching; and then, after they had done all the good they could, eternally punish them, because they had consented to listen and receive as truth the evidence which all there is of man tells them is true, and not permit a good spirit to come to the rescue? Oh, error! Ignorance! darkness! ‘By their fruits ye shall know them. A good tree can not bring forth evil fruit.’ The evil ‘daemons’ that the learned Doctor who delivered the discourse contained therein [*pointing to the sealed envelope*] would have as a provision made, ‘provided,’ he says, ‘these are Spirits, they must be evil, for good ones must be better employed!’ Now, what could be a more beautiful employment? ‘Take it upon your individual self. Now, fancy that physical death separated your spirit, and deprived a dear child of the presence of a mother, what could be a more delightful mission to a mother, passed from a world of care, perplexity, and sorrow, leaving a child still heir to all a body has to encounter; what more heavenly? what better employment for that mother than to hover around that child; tell it to live in hope, love all mankind, and be thereby fitted to become an inmate of the house of its Heavenly Father; to tell that child that the home of the mother is beautiful? What could be a more delightful mission than that? And yet this wise, or would-be wise man, concludes that if, peradventure, these are Spirits, they must be evil! Oh, wipe out from the mind all such erroneous

ideas, and live — as God intended every man should live — upright, just, loving to all, having no fear of the future.

“I am, THOMAS PAINE.”

Several days subsequent to the receipt of the foregoing communication, and when the contents of the envelope forming its subject had been examined, the inquirer remarked:

“Friend Paine, in this notice of Dr. L — ’s discourse, there is no mention of the Spirits producing those phenomena being “evil.” Is it the whole discourse, as delivered, that you have animadverted upon?

“*Ans.* — (By table-tipping.) Yes.

“*Inq.* — There seems more of simple ignorance than of wilful error in the discourse, as far as the outline of it it goes: do you not think you have been *rather severe* upon the writer of it?

“*Ans.* — No.

“*Inq.* — Will you indulge me with a further communication upon this subject.

“*Ans.* — Yes.”

An hour having elapsed, the Medium was entranced, and spoke as follows:

“Friend, you know that Thomas Paine disliked to retract words. Do not think me abrupt or uncouth in my speech, as I am the same man now, with the exception of the body, and — a larger perception of truth. I gave the discourse a hasty glance. I saw that in the soul of the speaker there was a conviction as to the agency of that which he vainly attempted to explain away. That conviction was, that the spirits were evil; because love of approbation had erected a wall so high that the true conviction could not reach the soul. But we will waive the subject now, and come on to one that will be of more interest to you, and equally of as much benefit to mankind.”

Mrs. P. Jackson, of Mamaroneck, Westchester, recently addressed a letter to J. B. Conklin, relative to a young lady in the village of “a thoughtful turn of mind, highly accomplished, and constitutionally religious,” who, having been partially developed as a Medium, had been warned by a Spirit-friend to withdraw from circles and desist from practicing her Mediumship, since it would render her insane. The letter proceeds to state, that there is no hereditary disposition to insanity in the young lady’s family, and concludes by asking advice on the subject. The following reply, purporting to have been written under impression by Thomas Paine, was sent:

“Dear Madam: My friend, Mr. Conklin, has received your letter, but his time being too fully occupied to allow him to reply to it, he has requested me to do so for him; and as he will see the letter before it is sent, you may read it as coming directly from him. I will endeavor to comply with the request you have made to him, by giving you the best advice which it is in my power to give, and which I should wish myself, under similar circumstances, to receive.

“My impression is, that the communication of which you speak was not entirely from a disembodied spirit. The lady through whose Mediumship that communication was given, being filled with preconceived opinions when she was under control, it was a reflex of her own thoughts which predominated. ... Such a communication might also be partially dictated by an undeveloped Spirit; one who, while living, was under sectarian influences, and who has not yet progressed sufficiently out of his earthly errors to throw off the chains of bigotry and superstition with which the dogmas of the Church had bound him.

“As to the question of Spiritualism inducing insanity: At all times, and in all ages of the world, minds of a certain order have been in danger of losing their balance under the influence of strong religious excitement. It is possible that some minds, under certain conditions, may be affected by what is called ‘Spiritualism,’ as they would be by any other strong excitement of their religious nature; but upon a mind such as you describe — well balanced and progressive — I should say that Spiritualism must have a *directly contrary effect*. Its influence by such will be felt to be, not antagonistic, but quieting and exalting to the whole nature.

“To be a Medium is a holy privilege; and I would say to your friend — Seek the highest influence. Look to God, the Infinite Parent of all, for inspiration, and you will then become a recipient for the highest Spirit-influences. Pray that highly developed Spirits may control you. Be passive and receptive; and live so that such Spirits may find themselves in affinity with you. LIKE SEEKS LIKE. As you progress, you will draw around you higher and higher influences. Above all, and first of all, strive with all your might, and prayerfully, to cast off the shackles which the Church has thrown around you. Go not to the Church for inspiration. Go to God in the silence of your own heart; and God, through the Mediumship of highly progressed Spirits, will give you inspiration. Be strong, self-reliant, and unwearied. Become passive and receptive, and high and powerful

Spirit-influences will flow in upon you.

“And fear not! God has called you to a high mission. Turn not back. Strive only, diligently, after a more perfect development — strive to live in conformity with Spiritual law that you may grow.”

A gentleman who recently commenced his investigations, gives the following account of his experience at Mr. Conklin’s table:

Accident having called my attention to the manifestations purporting to be made through mediums by departed spirits, a fit of curiosity induced me to while away a tedious hour in looking at an exhibition. The result, though it increased my curiosity, was unsatisfactory; and I concluded to have a private interview, with no person present but the Medium and myself. I have had several; and have found the monosyllable answers, “Yes” and “No,” to be entirely unreliable and frequently contradictory. Occasionally, I have found the more extended answers inapplicable to the question, and sometimes I have found them to be a continuation of an answer previously given, in part, to some preceding question. At other times I have found the answer to be an obvious reflection of my own mind; my own thoughts being thrown back upon me in the shape of an answer to my question.

My questions were written with a pencil, carefully placing my left hand so as to conceal even the character of its motion. I gave no intimation of the sex or relationship of the Spirit I indicated; and I carefully avoided uttering a word which could betray the tone or character of my queries. As I have remarked, in order to prevent collusion and guard against the action of confederates, I held the interview alone with the Medium. It was under these circumstances that I wrote the following queries and received the indicated answers.

So stand the facts: I leave others to speculate upon them. I wrote various names, male and female, on slips of paper. The paper with “Mary” on it, was indicated as bearing the name of the Spirit. I asked its relationship, and by means of the alphabet the word “Mother” was spelled out. My mother’s name was Mary. I then wrote: Do you love me now?

Ans. — “My son, a mother’s love for her child can never be obliterated: yes, my son, I love you with a pure and holy love. I have

watched your seeking soul, and am doing all that I can to assist in giving evidence. MARY."

Other questions were then put; and then I wrote to another Spirit: Will you give me your name in any way? *Ans.* — I will *try* to give you more soon. *Inq.* — Give me your name now. *Ans.* — We are only permitted at times to give names; I can not just yet; but will try during the intervals. *Inq.* — Can I do any thing to please your spirit? *Ans.* — No, you can not do any thing at present. *Inq.* — You have repeatedly promised to satisfy me that you were the one who made these manifestations. Now *do so*. Why will you not satisfy me? *Ans.* — Oh! if you know of the many difficulties that I have to contend with, you would not ask me to give a reason. I would gladly satisfy at once. There is an immutable law that compels you to *tread gradually; you can not leap*. *Inq.* — Would you be better pleased if I never sought any further manifestations from you? *Ans.* — *Your own heart tells you no!* *Inq.* — Do you know all my acts? *Ans.* — Not minutely. I see your prominent ones, mixed in the spheres of others. When you are passive, and your mind dwells on me, *then* I understand each thought. *Inq.* — Do you approve my thoughts of you? *Ans.* — I do not condemn. *Inq.* — Do you wish to torment me? *Ans.* — No; I do not. *Inq.* — Do write something to satisfy me of your identity. *Ans.* — I can not satisfy you now. When you retire to-night think of me. *Inq.* — Do you love me? *Ans.* — I live in a sphere of love.

On a second occasion the following conversation took place:

Inq. — Give me your name *now* to satisfy me that I am not imposed upon. *Ans.* — I want to have my presence accepted from the convictions of *your heart*, and *then* I will give my name, my dear, w. d. *Inq.* — The last two letters seem to be without sense. Give me some manifestation of the fact. *Ans.* — What kind? *Inq.* — Any kind will do that will satisfy me of the fact: tell me so by the alphabet. *Ans.* — Do you remember my last request. *Inq.* — I can not understand you — speak plainly, and tell me something by which I shall know you. *Ans.* — That is the case with me: *I* can not at times understand *you*. I will do my best. *Inq.* — Have you ever held any communication from the Spirit-world with any one but me? *Ans.* — Yes. *Inq.* — Will you tell me with whom? *Ans.* — I would tell you if I had the power to do so. *Inq.* — You have lost all interest in me. *Ans.*

— Yes. *Inq.* — Tell me why? *Ans.* — I can not give the reasons. *Inq.*
 — You bewilder me, and I am in suspense: say something to satisfy
 me! *Ans.* — The mind of a grown man, my brother, can not be
satisfied; it must and will constantly seek for more: a sifting of the
 chaff from the wheat will develop the truth — *go on!* WILLIAM.
Inq. — Is this last reply from my father? *Ans.* — I endorse the
 sentiment — YOUR FATHER. [Remark — I had a *brother* William,
 now deceased.] *Inq.* — Is Mrs. D.'s Spirit present? *Ans.* — Yes. *Inq.*
 — Why will she not say something to me? *Ans.* — There is a law
 which prevents her from complying yet. *Inq.* — Can she not talk to
 me to-day? *Ans.* — No. She will, with us, meet you this evening
 alone in your room; and if possible give you evidence of our
 presence.

At a third sitting, the inquiries were presented as follows:

Inq. — Well now, give me some manifestations which will
 convince me that it is — . *Ans.* — I will do all I can. *Inq.* — Will you
 give me some written communication sufficient to satisfy me of the
 fact? *Ans.* — I would, if in my power, give it willingly. *Inq.* — Is my
 father's Spirit here? or my brother's? Will any Spirit communicate
 with me to-day? Will my mother? *Ans.* — Yes, my son, you have us
 all here with you to-day; and as I am compelled to converse
 indirectly we all prefer a better electrical condition; the Medium's
 guardian Spirit assists me to write. I am your father. *Inq.* — Why will
 not — talk to me? *Ans.* — I have stated the reason, my son, why she
 will not. *Inq.* — Is she happy now? *Ans.* — Happy! yes; the word can
 not convey her present feelings.

Such were some of the questions, all of which were rapidly and
 guardedly written, as I have stated — and such were the answers. There
 were other answers still more remarkable. The replies were sometimes
 given by the alphabet, and taken down by myself, letter by letter; and at
 other times the Medium wrote the answers and read them. In one case,
 as he finished writing the answer, the Medium remarked: "This is
 singular — part of this has quotation marks." I inquired the words: *they*
were part of my question! He did *not* see my question, nor has he seen it
 yet. I make no speculation upon these facts, but there they stand.

A new "test" of Spiritualism. Not, indeed, a new wonder, to feed a
 love of the marvelous; but an every-day, homely fact — an ever-

recurring phenomena seen in a new aspect.

A few days ago, I stood by a dying friend! a man who had exchanged with me the name of brother — not as acknowledging consanguinity, but as signifying the truer brotherhood of affection and esteem.

He appeared to suffer much, and wandered in mind — still he knew his friend to be near, and a light passed over his features, and the look of suffering was changed for an instant, by a gleam of joy; but the external was quickly receding, and the blank look of unconsciousness returned again, and incoherent words, and exclamations of pain, becoming more and more feeble in utterance, marked the ebb of life, and told of the coming change.

I had been two nights on the road from a distant city, having traveled unintermittingly to reach the sick chamber as soon as possible. This was the third night of wakefulness; and to weariness of body was added an exhaustion produced by much anxious business, and depressing thoughts concerning my friend's affairs. Here was a condition eminently favorable to gloomy impressions from the scene of suffering. And yet, I looked for the coming event with unruffled calmness. Was this callousness to suffering? Not so — for most willingly would I have lightened my friend's load of pain, by bearing it for him. *But there was no doubt regarding the future.* As a materialist I should have said to myself: "here is the closing scene of our friendship, I am gazing on my friend for the last time; the body before me will soon be dust, and the breath, which animates it, diffused through all space; and with the form will perish the man. As an orthodox churchman with orthodox notions of Christian theology, I might have been perplexed with doubts of my friend's future, hinging on the possibility of his not apprehending rightly certain formula setting forth the mysteries of the Divine existence. And then, the association of death, the "King of terrors," with the fall of man, and the wrath of God; and the vague shadowy fears which gather round the grave — in this view, the symbol of desolation and woe! As a Spiritualist I saw not the agony of *death* — this childish terror was no more — but the throes of nature once again in travail, and about to bring forth the being which had been molded and fitted in its tenement of clay, for a higher state of existence. A grand and soul stirring event was before me; the contemplation of which, while it left unchecked the flow of affectionate sympathy, watchful of the need of each moment, banished all the trivialities of thought which minister to selfish sorrow, and placed the mind in an attitude of calm worship before Him whose wise and loving purpose was being fulfilled.

And so the end came, — the free spirit passed away and all was still. And also passed away all traces of suffering, leaving on the now calm face, the lines which told of the clear thought, the generous impulses, and the manly frankness and energy which had traced them there.

My friend was not a Spiritualist, — no matter now, — opinion, happily, does not endow us with immortality, nor consign us to annihilation.

On the following day I was at Conklin's room. I did not mention my friend's death; indeed, some other serious matters, for the moment, had diverted my thoughts. Our Spirit friends were indisposed to communicate then, but made an appointment for the next evening. On this second occasion my mind was still pre-occupied with the foreign subject which engaged it at the former sitting, and when the table moved, comment in regard to it was looked for. But the words spelled out were: "I am Gideon, — happy with the change." This was my friend's name, wholly unknown to the Medium. I put a question, which called forth the following: "Do not ask questions, — spontaneous communications will be the best.

GEORGE FOX."

Some time elapsed, when the following was written by the Medium's hand: "A description of the passing from the body, I will try to give soon. I will say nothing more at this time.

G. T. S."

"My friend's initials! An apparent attempt was made to write the entire name, which was abandoned after five or six trials.

"Two days afterward I was again at Conklin's; some visitors were present. 'Thy friend has *come with thee*,' wrote Mr. Fox, with the Medium's hand, 'and will try, during the evening, to converse; thy time can not be better employed than to remain.'

"I sat apart, while a visitor occupied the Medium's attention; he had received several communications, when one was written out, which, after the Medium had read it aloud as addressed to the visitor, he discovered was intended for me. It speaks the language of a Spirit awakening to the realities of its sphere, and viewing the light of knowledge with a grateful, overflowing joy: —

"God is all in all! He is the First Cause — the Great Ruling Power. God is Love, and has developed all things well. God is all meekness, God is all forbearance, God is all love. My soul is happy! My last moments on Earth were not painful, my friend.

“GIDEON.”

Among the common objections urged against Spiritual Manifestations is the objection that the communications given are frequently unworthy of the supposed communicators; that the Spirit of a man, for instance, who was known in the society he moved in as a man of culture, will often be made to express himself in the style of an uneducated, mind.

What follows throws some light on the subject:

One day Mr. Conklin brought with him, to our private sitting, a communication said to have been addressed to him by the Spirits forming the circle at Mr. Koon’s “Spirit room,” in Ohio; and to have been written by a Spirit-hand, temporarily organized. [Phenomena of this kind were once very rare, but they are now becoming more frequent.] The communication was written with a pencil on one side of a half sheet of paper, and a letter, with a pen, on the other by Mr. Koon. On looking from one to the other, it was impossible not to recognize the close resemblance of the hand-writing in pencil to that in ink; some of the words, common to each, were facsimiles of each other. The Medium and I were speculating on this fact, when he was suddenly intranced, and a Spirit spoke through him as follows: —

“Friend, I am come to cast light, as far as I am competent.

“In sifting out all that emanates from Spirits, it will be observed that it bears a resemblance, in a ratio, to the Medium’s intellect. Not that it is the production of the Medium; but *as wine put into an oil bottle will taste of it.*”

“Now the philosophy of it is this: — *Ideas* originate in Heaven — *forms* on Earth. We convey ideas, and are compelled to form them in proportion as the instrument through whom we convey them is developed; and at the same time, with proper Mediums and proper conditions, we do, to all external appearances, give an independent communication, form letters, and make sentences. *Yet, while doing it, the first formation and composition is made in the brain of the Medium.* Hence, come at times, bad grammar, mis-spelled words, and communications tinted with the language and ideas of the Medium.”

[*Nichols’ Monthly* (Cincinnati), January 1856]

"WHAT IS THE GOOD OF IT?"

While at Howard street, I was attending to a large circle one day when two young women entered, and took their seats at some distance from the table, awaiting an opportunity to investigate the mysterious subject of which they had casually heard so many strange reports. They seemed to be unwilling to make their examination and inquiries while so many were present, and it was deferred till most of the company had departed. One of them, then, made her inquiries, and received satisfactory communications from her mother's Spirit. As she was about to leave she inquired: —

"Have you any thing more to say, mother?"

"Yes, my dear child, I have much more to say hereafter," was the answer.

After she and her companion had left the room, I felt an influence of more than ordinary power upon me, my hand was violently moved, and I was forced to write. Then came the following, with respect to this total stranger to me: —

"My dear friend, — That is my daughter. Write to Miss B — , 35 A — Street, immediately, and say that her mother wishes to communicate with her. Take her from that house — pay her board — and Heaven will reward you."

Accordingly, I wrote a note, and sent it by my office boy. Miss B — came to the door, and took the note, endorsed upon it that she would come with pleasure, and sent it back. In a short time, she sat at my table in communication with her Spirit-mother, who directed her to avoid the dangers by which she was surrounded, and to rely upon the assistance of her Spirit-guardians, who would sustain her against the heartlessness of the world.

It now became a question with me what to do. With the full assurance that "charity" is more a word than "a practice," and that those who can sigh and cry over the kindness of a benevolent heart exerted in behalf of a down-trodden human soul, when depicted upon the pages of a novel, can also calumniate and be censorious when the reality is exhibited in the actual life around them; knowing how many are always ready to assert the "I am holier than thou" principle; still, my duty in this case came before me with a plainness I could not misinterpret, and I felt that my professions of charity,

¹⁸⁶ Original text mistakenly has "XXII."

benevolence, and love for my neighbor, were to be tried by the fiery ordeal of a censorious world. I procured a respectable home for the young lady, and did all in my power to restore her to society and to happiness, having the assurance that by her excellent education and habits of industry she would be able to surmount all difficulties, and throw off that weight of grief — that burthen of despondency, which hung upon her.

There were those, however, who forgot the story of the good Samaritan — there were those who no longer bore in mind the beautiful story of Mary Magdalen — there were those who could, in their foul and sensual imaginings, transform this good to evil; and such, not contented to pass by in silence, not to say with a kind and charitable word, a rare instance of Christian charity, and faith in the human heart; unwilling to look with sympathy upon a slight exemplification of Christian love, and a sincere devotion to the welfare of a human soul; plucked calumnies from the buried past, and falsehoods from the promising present, to poison the existence of that soul, and to push it back into the realm of infamy and perdition.

O Christian age, and Christian people! Ye who are so zealous in good works, when will you lay aside your own human pride — your own proud sense of fancied security from danger — your own assumed superiority in virtue over those whom circumstances may have hurried headlong to despair, and stand forth Christianized in action as well as in spirit; slow to judge others, lest ye, in your turn, shall be judged, also?

I am happy to say that through good report and through evil report, I have been able, thus far, under pressing difficulties, to be true to that trust imposed upon me by the Spirit of a mother watching over the immortal destinies of a beloved child; and I shall endeavor so to complete the work which I have been impressed and urged to do, as to show the world that it is possible for each earnest heart to turn some one less fortunate brother or sister from the pit of misery to the heaven of comfort and of hope. Surely it is reward enough for me to know that I have saved one — even amid the reproaches and obloquy of those who may have had too much pride — selfish pride — to save any, for fear of a world's contumely and scorn. "Go, thou, and do likewise!"

This lady, of whose salvation I was thus made the medium and instrument, owing to difficulties which may be readily conjectured by one who knows our social hypocrisies, has had hard trials of many kind in her path. Yet she has surmounted them, and is now engaged in a pursuit by which she will be enabled to sustain herself in a genial and pleasant employment, that promises to yield her a handsome income. She is restored to her family and friends, who see in the future a bright prospect for her, as it shines in

brilliant contrast with a few dark fleeting moments of the past. By the spirit of her mother, tipping truth from a table and influencing the hand and heart of a Medium, has this soul been restored to its pristine state of innocent self-reliance, while a mocking world will still inquire, "What good comes from these spiritual manifestations?"

And well may the world inquire *cui bono*? Well may the manifold Christian societies, so named, inquire what good comes from a mere assent to the principles of the New Testament, when they are not vitalized by action. Our poets may sing of the down-trodden till whole nations weep over the word-pictures of suffering children of humanity — but what good are all such tears, when not only no effort is made to restore the struggling sufferers in the world to society, and to happiness, but thousands upon thousands shut the door upon every returning prodigal, and even rush into the street by loud words and uncharitable thoughts, to afflict the repentant heart, and to crush out of it every remaining hope inspired by its inherent virtues. Spiritualism teaches that the active charities alone are essential to our own good, or the good of others. Vain prayers and vain hopes are nothing. Energetic efforts, and truthful action, are the things required to increase the sum of human happiness, and unless men and women can do more than to talk, there is little reason to suppose that any practical results can accrue to society from the best volumes ever inspired by the Almighty mind. Words must give place to deeds, and he who extends the hand of fellowship to a fallen brother, alone can be considered as embodying the Christian principle of him who sustained the fallen Mary, and raised her, by his divine example, in the eyes of the world, so that she might pursue the path of virtue, and "sin no more."

It is a source of deep gratification to me that the simple table communications in my room have satisfied many persons of the immortality of the soul. At this moment, I call to mind three gentlemen of intelligence and education, who have declared to me that they could not be satisfied that the soul exists after the decay of the body. All arguments had failed to make the necessary impression — but the facts made known to them at my rooms, had accomplished that which the theological literature of ages could not consummate. Surely, those who scoff at Spiritualism, and who would seek in its various phenomena, to find something upon which to hang the folding and concealing garments of sarcasm and ridicule, may cite these cases as evidence that some good can come out of Nazareth! The probability is, that thousands in the United States who believed, five years ago, that the soul was not immortal, are rejoicing now, not in a vague assent or passive belief in this doctrine, but are convinced that it is a solemn and earnest truth. It is no longer a vague impression, or a blind unreasoning faith, but an actual

knowledge, based upon the evidence of their own senses. What evidence can be stronger than that given by the tests in my rooms, and in those of other mediums, where the most sagacious minds of the present century can erect no theory, save that of communication with departed spirits, to explain a phenomena of hourly occurrence. These, then, are some of the fruits of the Spiritual phenomena, which the uninitiated would fain deny, or blot from the “fixed facts” of life.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Cincinnati), February 1856]

CHAPTER XIII.¹⁸⁷

SHALL WE OBEY THE SPIRITS?

Few questions are asked with more frequency or anxiety than this — “Shall we obey the Spirits?” And yet the question is not very wise. I have given my experience in the experiment of gold digging. I will relate another incident of later occurrence. While residing at Howard street, where my room was crowded day and night with visitors, my hand, by its own peculiar movement, and uncontrolled by any conscious volition of mine, wrote this sentence:

“Go to Boston to-night at five o'clock.

GEORGE FOX.”

I had no reasons for making this journey, and did not feel prepared to do it. However, the Spirit seemed to urge it, and at last, for the sake of the experiment and to better understand my duty, I made up my mind to comply with the request. Accordingly I went, and on arriving there, I went to a medium who was a stranger to me, where I received the annexed words:

“I am here to meet thee. Recreation — and to test thy confidence. Now go home.

GEORGE FOX.”

¹⁸⁷ Original text mistakenly has “XXIII.”

I remonstrated a little at so expensive an experiment, and inquired if such advice, under the circumstances, was Christian-like; for I could not afford the time or expense. In reply, I was told that I needed rest — that the money was of no consequence, and that he, George Fox, was happy that I had followed his advice. I do not know that I did any good to others in Boston, although I visited the *Daily Herald* establishment, and satisfied some inquirers there, who were desirous to learn something with respect to the phenomena of spiritualism.

As a general thing, however, I do not deem it prudent to comply with similar requests, where the interior convictions of duty do not urge a compliance. There may be occasions where it may be the part of wisdom to follow out such direction, but it is only for those who are determined to be bold experimenters to push forward in answer to such requests. Every person who undertakes any such journey, or services, should be prepared for disappointment in every case, and take the responsibility of his act. Doubtless there are many reasons and a deep philosophy underlying the whole of this portion of the spiritual field, which at present are not comprehended, even by the most deeply skilled in the history of the phenomena. I am acquainted with gentlemen, who, to test the matter, have suffered and endured many hardships, and have expended much time and money, to solve various problems. They have settled, at least for the present, that it is not wise to follow spirit directions, except for experimental purposes; yet there may be exceptions. I can only say, each one must be his own guide — while it is possible that there may yet be found some mode of settling, within practical bounds, this branch of the subject.

We do not follow advice or obey directions, given us by persons in the form, unless we have great confidence in their wisdom and goodness, or capability to advise or command; or unless the advice and direction is in accordance with our own final judgment. May not the same rules apply to suggestions of spirits?

If we employ a physician, or a lawyer, we find one we can trust, and then follow his directions. In a military expedition or at sea, or wherever there is the necessity of unity of direction, every subordinate must yield obedience to his superior. In the common affairs of life, we seek advice of those we consider capable of giving it. In traveling, we follow with confidence the directions of any disinterested and intelligent person who knows the routes. In business, we consult men of experience and integrity; is there any reason why, when we are assured of the identity of a spirit, and of the verity of our communications, we should pay them less deference, than we would have done to the voice of the living?

It is wise and well to be careful, not to be deceived and imposed upon, either by Spirits or Mediums. A person so impressible as to be influenced by spirits, may well be supposed to be susceptible of the influence of spirits still in the form. Every thing is to be tried by our common sense, or clearest impressions of right. We should not do that which we feel to be wrong, at the advice or direction of all the men, or all the spirits, in the universe. This inward sense or feeling of right — an internal satisfaction, peace, and rest, in what we do — seems to me the best test that we can follow in our search after the right way.

Yet, I would not have it thought that I undervalue the leadings and monitions of those guardian spirits, or groups and societies of spirits, whose lives are joined to ours; who assume a charge concerning us, and who are the active media and manifestation of the Divine Providence. That we have such guardians and friends, I have a happy assurance; and while we live a simple, honest life, observing their impressions, following their promptings in truth and goodness, and minding the inward cheeks they give us, when we are tempted to go astray, they will watch over us.

How far one may “grieve away” these spirits by disregarding their silent monitions, and by a course of reckless wrong-doing, is not for me to say. It seems evident that many are left, for a time, at least, to plunge into evils; to live dishonest, hypocritical, false, bad lives; and many who die early and sudden deaths, or endure great sufferings as the penalty of their misdeeds, may be permitted in this way to escape from unfavorable conditions of circumstance and organization, and enter upon a new scene of progress, in some sphere of spirit-life.

In this, as in all other things, we are to “try the spirits” by our own reason and sense of right. We are to “prove all things” and “hold fast to that which is good.”

In the earlier chapters of this work I have given several examples of what I believe to have been the monitions of guardian spirits saving my life. Thousands of similar instances might be collected, in which some strong impression upon the mind — sometimes a vision in sleep, has saved persons from peril and death. In other cases men have had such warnings and premonitions, as have enabled them to prepare for their inevitable fate. Are these monitions from some faculty in ourselves, or do they come from some superior intelligences, or from intelligences, who are in superior conditions?

In many cases, there is nothing to prove that these warnings do not come from some usually dormant faculty of provision, or second sight in ourselves. But there are others in which the warning is external to us, and must come from some other intelligent source. When, by night or day, the form of a

departed parent appears to a child, with a warning of impending evil, which is the more reasonable supposition — that it was an action of some usually dormant, unconscious, and involuntary power of the mind; or that it was really what it purported to be, the spirit of the father and mother, intervening to protect a beloved child? If the former supposition may seem to some persons the more philosophical, the latter appears to me the most natural; and as I have been for years the daily medium and witness of manifestations, which prove beyond all doubt the possible and actual existence, intervention, and communications of the spirits of those who once lived in the form, I can have no question of the nature of such monitions.

And whenever they come with a vivid impression of their verity, to my internal consciousness, I would heed such monitions. This feeling is one of internal satisfaction and rest. It is what the scriptures term “peace in believing.” From such monitions we do not well to turn away; and yet they can not be too carefully discriminated, from mere imaginations, morbid fancies, and those vagaries of the mind, which so often lead astray. It is to be remembered, also, that a medium, so impressible as to be acted upon by spirits, may also be susceptible to the impressions of spirits in the form. A medium may be entranced, magnetized, or psychologized by those around him; and he may write or speak as they may wish. This is, doubtless, a great source of uncertainty and error. The communications are contradictory. Great masses of what are supposed to be spiritual communications, from distinguished personages, are the mere effects of those psychological impressions.

It is, therefore, of great importance that the medium be of a simple, candid, unprejudiced character, that he may not influence and distort his own impressions. He should be a clear lens, transmitting the rays of spiritual light without distortion or discoloration. The circle should be of the same character; each mind a plain, clear surface, upon which the rays may fall. In the examination of the spiritual doctrines, a man should lay aside all theories, prepossessions and prejudices of his own. There should be a harmonious receptivity, and a willingness to accept all truth, submitting it only to the test of reason, and its correspondence with other truth. All the truths in the universe harmonize by a law of universal analogy. This is the great test of truth in all spheres of being. Every truth is fitted to every other, by a perfect mutual adaptation; and if any statement is made, which has not this fitness of relation, it must be rejected as untrue.

Shall we believe the spirits? If what they tell us is reasonable, is probable, is in harmony with other known truths, yes. If unreasonable, shocking, revolting, and discordant, no. If it be some fact not connected with

principles, within the scope of their vision, and in regard to which there can be no motive to deceive, we shall do well to heed them, particularly when satisfied with the character and identity of the spirit; but in matters of frequent deception and hallucination; in those in which our own passions are liable to lead us astray; as in mercenary speculations, and searching for hidden treasures, we do well to doubt, and to exercise due caution. It is asked, why do not the high intelligences communicate important information, connected with the physical wants of man; discover mines; invent machinery; reveal the mysteries of science, and so enrich the world.

I think there are very good reasons why such knowledge is withheld. It is best for men that they should go on by the law of growth and progress. Such discoveries would almost certainly, in the present state of the world, be perverted to bad uses. Men are first to be enlightened and harmonized, before such knowledge can be of real value. There is more wealth in the world now than men can make any proper use of. A Divine Providence, an Infinite Wisdom and Love, presides over all spirits, and controls or over-rules all manifestations.

Further, it is not to be assumed without evidence, that discoveries, inventions, and important movements in the world are not effected by spiritual agency. The whole Catholic Church believes in the Communion of Saints, in their angelic guardianship, and promptings to heroic deeds and religious duties. Shall we say that the invocations to departed spirits are without efficacy? Men in all ages have been conscious of supernal aid.

The inspirations of genius, as they are called, have often a remarkable resemblance to what are now termed spiritual communications. Poems, full of great thoughts, come into the mind, without effort. Discoveries of the most wonderful character come to men, in the most sudden and unexpected manner, both waking and sleeping. Thomas Paine, in his *Age of Reason*, declares that he owed almost all the knowledge he possessed to thoughts that would suddenly bolt into his mind, without effort or conscious volition. Those who complain that the spirits do not enlighten mankind, and improve their condition, must first prove that the progress and achievements of the past have been without their agency.

If we reflect that spirits are still men and women, with the same natures, thoughts, and loves, we can judge of their actions by our own. They do as we would wish to do, so far as they have the power. We may rely upon them, as we rely upon each other.

CHAPTER XIV.¹⁸⁸

VARIOUS TEST COMMUNICATIONS.

Believers in Psychometry, Clairvoyance, Mesmerism, Psychology, and the various phenomena by which one Spirit in the form, influences, controls, and reads another; by which mind, so called, controls matter, so called, in various extraordinary manifestations, require a class of tests, of a peculiar character, to compel their belief in the manifestations of spirits whose bodies they can no longer see. Those who already believe so much of the powers of the human soul, are often very slow to believe any more; and like President Mahan, Bishop Hopkins, and the Beechers, are the hardest skeptics, as to the truths, though they may admit the *facts*, of Spiritualism.¹⁸⁹

Mahan solves all problems with Mesmerism, Clairvoyance, and Odyle; Bishop Hopkins believes devoutly in the devil; and the Beechers, driven to the wall, have also no resource, but his satanic majesty. Let us see how a few facts, in my own experience, will stand the test of such hypotheses.

At my table, where a gentleman (Mr. J. A. S. Tuttle,) had received the usual tests of identity, elsewhere described, by selecting five from twenty-five pieces of paper, on which were written names, places, diseases, &c., and after he had received several responses from his father's spirit, he said —

Will my father write?

Ans. — Grandfather says he can't write as he wishes just now, my dear father — I am here and happy. SARAH MARIA.

This message from his deceased daughter was entirely unexpected, and was considered a most convincing test.

At another time a visitor wished for a written communication from the spirit of his mother, with whom he was conversing He received one, signed "Your mother — Lucy." This surprised him, as that was not his mother's

¹⁸⁸ Original mistakenly has "XXIV."

¹⁸⁹ John Henry Hopkins (1792-1868), Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Vermont — see John Worth Edmonds, *Bishop Hopkins on Spiritualism: reply of Judge Edmonds* (New York: S. T. Munson, 1858); Rev. Asa Mahan (1799-1889), President of Oberlin College, *Modern Mysteries Explained and Exposed* (Boston: J. P. Jewett, 1855); Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) and his brother Charles Beecher (1815-1900).

name. But, on inquiry, it was explained that the message had been written by his daughter, Lucy, for her grandmother, who, she said, could not write, as she had died at 83, and had not written for 30 years.

The following statements are copied from the *Public Circle*, a paper published by a friend of Spiritualism, for the benefit of my Free Circles:

Mr. S. W. Britton, of Troy, permits his name to be given with a recital of the circumstances of a visit paid some time ago to Mr. Conklin, 'for the purpose of getting a test from the Spirits.' He states that he was a stranger to the Medium, and carefully concealed his name. The usual method of writing various names, ages, &c., on small pieces of paper having been resorted to, the several selections by the Spirit were found to tally. Mr. Britton then put mental questions, which were promptly answered by a spirit purporting to be that of his wife; and he was assured by her that she was his guardian Spirit. The question instantly occurred to him, but he did not speak it — why she seemed to have forsaken him, since of late he had not felt her influence for several months; and had, besides, sought communications in vain. The Medium's hand wrote:

"My dear husband — I have never forsaken you. Circumstances have prevented my approaching you of late; but I have over been with you, and although not tangibly felt, my presence must have been appreciated at times. I will try to impress you more hereafter.

Your Spirit-Wife, LUCY BRITTON."

"Thus," adds Mr. Britton, "revealing to Mr. Conklin who I was."

It may be said that, in the above case, I, as a clairvoyant, saw the thought, feeling, and even name, in the mind of Mr. B. I can only say that I have no consciousness of any such power. My mind was a blank, and the writing was made by the rapid, involuntary action of my hand.

The next case is, perhaps, a still better one:

The subjoined statement has been sent to the Medium by Judge Mayo, of Illinois, whose name is subscribed; it was first published in a western paper, over his signature.

"During a stay of a few days at New York, in the month of June last, I frequently witnessed the manifestations 'believed to be Spiritual,' at Mr. J. B. Conklin's, Mrs. A. L. Brown's, and Miss C. Fox's. The first is a writing, and the last two are rapping Mediums.

"At Mr. Conklin's, on the 29th day of June, I received the following

communication, or rather communications, purporting to come from the person whose name is to them attached:

“My friend — I have not been long in the spirit world; I feel that I should like to converse with you. Your sister will converse, if she can, soon. H. R. Bowers.”

“My dear friend — I lingered long with physical pain; yet relief came, and my happy spirit left the form but a few short weeks since. I saw you where I could converse, and felt a desire to speak to you from beyond death’s portals, and tell you that I was happy.

HIRAM.”

“On my inquiring where he died, and what his age was at the time of his death, I received the following answer:

“I departed at St. Charles, on the 15th of the present month, aged 51 years.
HIRAM R. BOWERS.”

“After a few moment’s conversation with the Medium, I received the following additional communication:

“I must now go; I have fulfilled my mission; tell my dear friends that I am happy.

HIRAM.”

“At the time I received the foregoing communication, I did not know that I had ever known or seen even, a person by the name of Hiram R. Bowers; but while on my way home, and after I had arrived in this State, learned, for the first time, that the name of him whom we had always familiarly called ‘ Joe Bowers,’ was *really* ‘Hiram R. Bowers.’

“I have committed the foregoing to paper for publication, at the earnest request of friends, and not with the view of bringing myself conspicuously, and perhaps ridiculously, before the public. I will merely add, that I left the State of Illinois in May last, and had not been in it since, when I received the foregoing communications; nor had I then even heard of the death of ‘Joe Bowers.’

E. L. MAYO.”

SYCAMORE, *August 7th*, 1854.

Mr. P. Jackson of 343 Spring street, New York, gives the following singular incidents:

“One evening, Mr. J. B. Conklin called at my house, and while there formed a circle for the ‘manifestations.’ After sitting awhile, the Medium was suddenly entranced by a Spirit, purporting to be that of George Fox, and spoke, as nearly as can be recollected, to this effect:

“Want and suffering are abroad in your city.”

These words were hardly spoken when the medium’s hand drew out his pocket book, and took from it a note for one dollar; then turning to myself and wife, the Spirit desired each of us to put down a like sum. “*To-morrow,*” said the Spirit, “will be disclosed, *through this medium, the purpose of this.*”

On the following day, the Medium stepped into a barber’s shop, where he was unaccustomed to go, and while there, a gentleman present related in touching language a case of extreme destitution and suffering; explaining that the sufferer was a poor colored woman, and giving her address. Immediately, and as by a “shock from a galvanic battery,” Mr. Conklin was impressed that this was the case for which the three dollars had been collected, and he stated his convictions to me. The poor creature was sought out accordingly, and found on a little straw, upon the floor, in a most deplorable state from cold and starvation.

The only way to escape the admission of the spiritual theory in the above cases, is to deny the evidence; and that is a method more easy than philosophical. What explanation will be given of the mediumship of infants, of which there are now so many cases similar to the following? A gentleman lately took his seat at the Medium’s table with a determination to “test Spiritualism.” He wrote names, ages and relationships on various slips of paper, which were as usual mixed up and intermingled. The selections did not correspond. The Spirit was then asked to write, and immediately the Medium’s hand wrote:

“My little sister is with me, dear Father. I did not mean to answer wrong. I was seven years old. I am
MARY.”

The visitor assented to the correctness of the communication, and stated that the age of his younger daughter had been written by him, and chosen. He

asked:

Ques. — “Do you manifest to your little sister at home?”

Ans. — “Yes.”

Ques. — “Who is the man she sees with you?”

Ans. — “Uncle John.”

It was explained that the little sister at home was two years old, who, while at play, would often exclaim to some one unseen to all but herself, — “Go 'way, man!” On these occasions, also, the child would appear to have the companionship of another child invisible to all eyes but her own.

The following will be referred to Clairvoyance, but as it was a sufficient proof of Spirit identity to the party most nearly concerned, it may answer for others:

In the month of March last, a stranger from the State of Maine came in, and, joining the circle, remarked: “If any spirit can tell me my name, or the name of any of my departed relatives, I'll believe!”

The Medium's hand was at once controlled to write:

“That which you call DEATH, my dear husband, I have found to be the *beginning of LIFE*. I still love you, and feel a deep interest in your welfare. You have a glorious opportunity to hear from those who have passed from the body-life to the spirit-state, in your own family. All that is necessary for you to do, is to form a family altar — not the altar of lip-prayer, but sitting around your table; be passive, patiently waiting for the heavenly echoes that I can vibrate to you. Do not doubt, it often repels me.

“Your wife,
CHARLOTTE.

“21 years and 6 months.”

The visitor frankly owned that the conditions he had laid down had been fulfilled to his entire satisfaction.

The following is of interest in its relation to the magnetic, or healing powers of spirits:

Dr. Samuel Gilbert, of this city, while seated recently at Mr. Conklin's table, asked, mentally, if any spirit would converse with him. The Medium's hand wrote:

“When you are passive, my dear father, I change conditions, so that I can

approach and magnetize your leg. I am glad to perceive that I have been of great benefit to it, and the whole physical body.

“WILLIAM.”

The doctor stated to the company that William was the name of a departed son, a physician when in the form — and that no person on earth but his own wife and himself knew that he had a complaint in his leg, which at times was very painful. The doctor then asked mentally, if his son could point out the cause of this suffering It was written:

“The inhalation of various complicated diseases from patients;” [you] “being susceptible to influences from persons in and out of the body. Remedy — recreation, and a cessation from all mental labor, will restore health.

WILLIAM.”

I give the following, as recorded in the *Public Circle*, as one of the best tests to me and those present, of a cause out of the minds of any person in the circle:

While seated lately at the Medium’s table, he gave the narrator an account of the expulsion from his room of an ill-behaved visitor, who had grossly and gratuitously insulted him. Knowing the Medium to be averse to any disputation, and unlikely to provoke such rudeness, the recital tended to awaken feelings of indignation against the offender, which prompted the narrator fully to concur in his violent expulsion, and, for a time, to forget the better wisdom of forbearance. This being the prevalent feeling on the subject, the conversation was interrupted by the table tipping a call for the alphabet, when the following was spelled out:

“Every intelligent spirit says that thee didst greatly err.”

No one who had heard the previous conversation, and who could have witnessed the surprise and mortification on the Medium’s face, on receiving this emphatic disapproval of his conduct, could have doubted the intervention of a third mind in the debate.

“I’m quite sure, Mr. Fox,” said the Medium, in a tone of vexation, to his unseen censor, “that *you* could not have borne to be insulted so yourself?” Of this remonstrance no notice was taken; and soon afterwards the request was spelled out, of — “get the letters” — meaning some closely sealed, which had been left to be answered by Spirit-friends without being opened.

The following, even in its drollery, is a test of no mean character. A Spirit,

in response to an inquirer at Mr. Conklin's table, having spelled out his initials of its earth name, viz: E. G. G., proceeded, in a humorous way, to address its friend as follows:

"Father! your *egg*" [see the initials], "has been hatched in the Spirit-Land, and has produced what I call a fine chicken, though it got pretty roughly handled after it left you; but that only hatched it the quicker. But I meant to have brought you a golden egg, dear father, when I returned home.
"Good-night!"

The visitor stated that his son died as a volunteer, during the Mexican war; which explains the "rough handling" alluded to in the communication.

In hundreds of unrecorded cases, there has entered the element of unexpectedness, as if purposely to show to both Medium and Circle, that they were not the dupes of their own unrecognized powers. With the mind of the inquirer fixed anxiously on one departed friend, he has been addressed by another, of whom he had not thought, or as in one of the cases given in this chapter, by one, of whose death he had no knowledge. Often when several persons are sitting around the table, while one is anxiously seeking a communication, some Spirit will address another passive member of the Circle. Even false and entirely deceptive communications, as from what purport to be spirits of persons still living, test the honesty of the medium, and the intelligent, extra-mundane source of the communications.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Cincinnati), March 1856]

CHAPTER XV.

TEACHINGS OF THE SPIRITS.

There has been and is, much controversy as to what the Spirits teach. I am not about to say that there is no difference between spirits in their views of truth. We have reason to believe that there are advanced, and harmonized spirits out of the form, as well as in it. And that there are unwise, partial, and isolate, or vagrant spirits. There are single colored rays of light, and there is the full spectrum consisting of all rays, and there is the unity of all in the pure white ray. A mind may transmit one ray, and a mind may have so many

unities in itself, and be so related to the harmonic life of the higher spheres, that it may transmit all the rays.

A principle may be given us from the spirits, with whom we are in unity, and then a direction that seems to contravene that very principle. For instance, we may be told that we should live in the highest conjugal love; that marriages of hate and indifference are evil; and yet we may be told to remain quiet, and suffering in an evil, unholy marriage. This may be our highest duty for a time, perhaps for all our time, because we may not be able to live to the pure principle which has been given us, without doing an amount of harm to others, perhaps to children, or sickly and unhappy partners, that would greatly overbalance the good of severing ourselves from arbitrary relations.

Now the spirits are not to be blamed for teaching in a seemingly contradictory manner. Principle, Divine Law, are always to be kept in view, and we are to live as near to the higher law as we can; but we are not to forget duties, limitations and atonements. They are a part of us, and our past, as much as a broken leg, or cramped lungs may be. The Divine Law is that we walk with unbroken limbs, that we breathe into healthy and expansible lungs. If we have not these, then we are to breathe and walk as well as we can. The great law that we are to live to in all things, is the Law of Love. This the Spirits of ancient and modern times agree in teaching.

Opinions are never dangerous but as they induce practice. This is emphatically an age of power, and of change. Opinions are impressed and revealed from the spirit world, often accompanied by an impulse that is hardly to be resisted, and men make changes and mischievous changes, that frighten those who are embargoed by custom, who rot at their wharves. It may be quite as bad to go where the Prophet's servant went, viz: "no whither," as to be subject to this moral embargo. The problem to be solved is, how shall we move and advance to the best advantage?

The spirits teach us as we can receive. If we can receive but little light, then we must make our way the best we can by that little. If but few of our faculties are livingly active, and the impulse comes to us from their life, then our life must act in a particular, and oft times mischievous manner. To cultivate a spirit of loving usefulness in us, seems to me, from long experience, to be the will and wish of our guardians spirits.

An unbeliever in Spiritual manifestations asked this question: Can Spirits reveal a murderer and enable us to track him, and discover his place, and thus bring him to justice? The answer is plain from events that have transpired. If a greater good is to be accomplished by the revelations than would be otherwise done, and if the "justice" of human punishment be a greater good than to leave the individual at large, then spirits having the power to make

such revelations will exercise it.

We may say the same of the discovery of hidden treasures. If it were a good for men to become suddenly rich, we may believe that they would be informed by guardian spirits of hidden treasures. The reverse of this is true as a rule. Hence as a rule, Spirits give no such information.

When new forms of truth are revealed to man, alliances are sought with them on various grounds; and often, when it is found that they can not be made subservient to special ends of mere personal gain, all interest straightway ceases. Thus Spiritualism has had inquirers whose aims were to forestall a rival in a lucrative market, to make a lucky stock speculation, or otherwise to obtain the rewards of study, foresight or industry, without first deserving them. These attempts to pervert spiritual intercourse to ends of self-aggrandizement have more than once been deplored in communications from the Spirit-world. To the writer it was once said:

“As your own interior teaches, we return not to earth to sow discord — neither to ferret out perplexing temporal matters; but simply to remove from the minds of our fellow-men that mist which hath intervened and caused the most advanced mind to have misgivings as to its futurity. Our mission is to remove the mist, and enable the struggling soul to see clearly its spotless Celestial origin. ...

“Now, trace back, and see what men — men professing to belong to the harmonial philosophy — are striving to obtain. Having once been satisfied that a power independent of self, bringing with it intelligence, was manifesting itself — they are using that power, not for their mental advancement, but for the building up of that house which ‘moth and rust do corrupt,’ and would fain make a Spirit a clerk for mercenary purposes. It is upon that I wish to speak. ... The subject that I desire to convey through your brain is this: ‘The necessity of seekers after Truth, seeking Truth for Truth’s sake, and avoiding to ask Spirits for directions in temporal affairs.’”

The following on the same subject was recently given through the Medium in a trance state, and taken down by the narrator, who was not aware until afterwards that the Medium had been solicited (thoughtlessly perhaps) to aid some mining project in the country:

“Men who, after having suffered their individuality to become dormant, and having looked, as it were, upon the sky to find directions thereupon written, fail to have all their desires realized, must not expect that *our* mission is simply to reveal to man secret treasures or mines of gold, silver or copper. We would not have the Medium associated with a visionary

enterprise of one who seeks that, and that alone, which is of earth. It were better for that soul that disappointments of that kind meet him daily, until want shall bring him to his own individuality. We would not have the Medium journey to the place, to be the instrument in the hands of a less intelligent Spirit, to designate that particular ore that he seeks; therefore, as his counsellors in all things that appertain to his spiritual good, as well as temporal — we say NAY — *go not — mix not in with the contaminating influence.*”

The letter, to which the following was an answer, was carefully placed in a sealed envelope, a mile from the Medium’s room:

“It was truly said it was from *me*.

“The Bible contains many beautiful truths; and many, very many errors. I have found no such location — no such state — no such an existence here as that which you term ‘HELL.’ I have found the future to be beautiful: *the inner part of all things that I once inhabited with you.*

“You know that I would not advise you wrongly in any thing that concerned your welfare while I was with you in the form; and now that I am out of the body, and still able to counsel you in many things, I will not advise you wrong; and in that, too, which is of such great moment, of such a vast importance, the welfare of your soul. I am in a progressive state; and I am in the company of your father and mother and sister; and they, with me, again advise you *not to think of going to California*; because, if you do, you will part from the body before the time which nature has designed you should. You will not be wronged by the one to whom you have entrusted that which is so important to make your earthly life less tiresome. Do, I would advise you, do as I have told you before — turn all that floats into money, and try to remove from your mind the idea that I am absent. Think of me only as a guardian, a protector, a child of heaven, watching over you continually, using all the influence that I can to harmonize the mind which my physical dissolution hath caused to be agitated.

“You will settle in life, I see, again; and it is my wish that you should do so; because a union with another, on earth, will not interfere with your future happiness — neither will it make me less happy. I know that such an idea has not for one moment yet entered your mind; yet, it is necessary that you should again seek and have a companion to comfort you through the remnant of your earthly days.

“You know, Amy, that I always told you that a home, however small, if we could only call it *our own* — it was sweet. I should advise, when you return again to your friends here, *to keep your own house*, and not be boarding with others. I have a reason for this. I wish to hasten your development; and if you are the mistress of your own house, you will have more opportunities to give

me interviews, and be less subject to the annoyances of those who will naturally oppose. I could tell you all about Spiritualism if you were prepared to receive it; and as you are ready, and I have the opportunity, I shall endeavor to instruct you.

“NELLY.” [Nelson.]

The letter to which the preceding answer applies has not been returned, as in the former instance, for publication.¹⁹⁰

To another sealed letter the following answer was given:

“A prediction of the death of any individual should never be relied upon, when in his own sphere of action there is no perceptible event that is likely to cause a separation; whether such a prediction comes from a spirit in or out of the body. The future, to the most of spirits, is unknown. There should be a greater discrimination in sifting and carefully analyzing all that is received through partially developed Mediums. Your own experience has taught you that Spirits are not infallible, especially those that are attracted to the responses of the one hundred and one inquirer.” [The narrator not understanding what was meant by “the one hundred and one inquirer,” here asked if he had heard aright, and was answered affirmatively.]

“When a man would speak, or gain information from our side, he should be ready to receive that which we are best able to give. We withhold nothing that we see would be beneficial when we have the facility for conveying it. Now, respecting a friend’s departing the Earth-life, he may, in the time appointed, enter the land of Spirits; yea, and before that day, may be rejoicing with the myriads of happy progressive souls. I have no positive knowledge; and I do not think that the Spirit who made the prediction knows more than I do respecting the individual.”

“No more.”

The tone of voice and manner of the Medium in delivering the foregoing communication were peculiar, and characteristic of one accustomed to the exercise of authority. A lady present asked —

Ques. Will the Spirit give the name he bore on earth? Who is the Spirit?

Ans. One that has never yet spoken through the organs of the Medium, and who, for reasons that will be made known, has NO NAME.”

¹⁹⁰ Presumably the same couple—“Amy” and “Nelson”—that are featured in an earlier exchange (pps. 47-48).

Permission has been given to publish the contents of the sealed letter thus answered.

NEW YORK, *May* 21, 1855.

"To the Spirits:

"A prediction has been made to me of the death of a party, and the time stated.

"1. Should such statements from the Spirit-World be received with any more faith than a similar one made by a person in the form?

"2. When such predictions are made, do they (the Spirits) speak from positive knowledge, as if the future was to them revealed; or, being Spirits, and having greater opportunities of tracing cause to effect, are they merely given as their opinions?

"3. Knowing the prediction, could I not, by warning the party and taking other precautions, so alter circumstances as to prevent its fulfillment? ...

"HENRY A. BROWN."

That Spirits not only teach us principles, but give us warning and direction when we err, and cease to be governed by the truths they impress and reveal, we have abundant evidence to prove. The following belongs to this class of evidence:

The following caution was lately addressed to me through the hand of another Medium seated at my table:

"Mediums should always be in harmony. There is a strong affinity existing between yourself and the opposite Medium.

"I have come from the land wherein there is no disease, no pain, no death. I have come to advise you of the condition of your health, which is not as the Spirits would have it. Your lungs need bracing. You must throw back your shoulders, walk in the open air before breakfast, practice gymnastic exercises; but above all, keep your chest and lungs fully expanded. Unless you obey these injunctions, you will lie where the willow, the cypress and the elm will wave their branches over your *still form* before the season of flowers shall return.

I am a Spirit M.D.

DR. MEMPHIS."

A lady seated at my table, after conversing some time with a departed sister by means of the table tipping, asked —

"Ques. Can you not *speak* to me?

"Ans. Daughter! she can not. There are but few who have the ability to

control the organs of a Medium to give utterance.

“It would be of no avail to multiply words in confirmation of thy progress. Thy own soul tells thee that thou art a pilgrim journeying on the road to knowledge — progressive knowledge. When in thy outgoings among thy fellow creatures, thy soul looks upon those who appear to feel that they are in the Ark of Safety, and need no other instruction or counsel, save that which was given to man to suit a generation in by-gone days,” [the successors] “of which have, through the process of physical and mental development, arrived at that position where the vague ideas which had been translated into the various languages the tongues of men give utterance to, are no longer sufficient for their instruction: when thou seest one of these, that move by thee, and fancy that thou art an outcast, and not an heir of Heaven — pity, and *pray by actions*, that they may become heirs of Truth and joint heirs with thee in thy knowledge of the future.”

Unceasingly the light travels to the earth, and as constantly the interior truth, the soul of the material light, comes to us from the Spirit-world. Love and Truth are one in the unity which we call God, as light and heat are one in the sun that sustains the material life of our earth. We receive as we are able. The darkened soul alone is arrogant and intolerant. The loving and prayerful inquirer seeks for Truth in Love and feels always that there is something for him to attain, and looks with charity and tolerance on his brother seekers after the great good — the Divine Truth.

“By this,” said the Great Teacher of old, “shall all men know that ye are my disciples, *if ye have love one toward another.*” Again: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them.”

The fierce controversies of the early churches; the subsequent crusades against the infidel; the tender mercies of the “Holy Inquisition;” the persecution of Protestant by Catholic, and of Catholic by Protestant, and by each sect of the “Reformed Church,” as it has attained power, of all others; the estrangement; nay aversion, which too often in our social intercourse follows the recognition of differences in religious opinions — all these offer a strange and sad historical commentary on the precepts and example of the meek Founder of Christianity.

And yet all has been, and is, professedly done in the interest of Truth, and for the honor of God; and the advocates of intolerance will say that they “employ severity merely to drive men, as children, into obedience, and consequent happiness.”

Men not only assume the possibility of comprehending truth absolutely, but of presenting it in such a comprehensive form to others, that it must needs be seen as truth itself, by all who are not willfully blind. Hence each

church holds the acceptance of its tenets as “necessary to salvation;” and their rejection as indicative of a sinful, depraved heart. To say to a sectarian that not only his own church-made creed is not an infallible standard of truth, but that no such standard has been or can be framed for all men, is to state something inexpressibly shocking. When indeed he asserts that there can be but one true church — but one right exposition of religious truth — he will sometimes falter a little when asked for some sign or some rule whereby to determine which of many conflicting creeds, of equal pretension, is indubitably the right one; yet he can not bring himself to admit that in any sense all are right, or that all are wrong. The first admission would, to his mind, be a confession that truth can contradict itself; the second, that there is no truth revealed to men.

The confusion of ideas here is plain, and whence arises it? Simply, it may be suggested, because truth itself is confounded with human perceptions of it; the object of sight, or the object of reflection, with the Impression produced upon the mind of him who observes or reflects.

What is truth? It may be answered, truth is the universal revelation or manifestation of God, infinite as himself. What is a truth? A fragment, so to speak, of the universal manifestation of God; finite, as regards the form in which we consider it; but infinite in the relations it bears to the Great Whole; in accordance with which are the fashion of its existence, its past history, and the determination of its future.

To comprehend truth absolutely, man must, therefore, comprehend God; the finite must compass and possess itself of the infinite. To comprehend any portion of truth absolutely, likewise implies, not only the knowledge of its fragmentary constitution, but of its past, present, and possible relations to the infinite, of which it is a part.

What follows? Not that truth does not exist for any finite being; but that truth, existing for all, possesses only that relative significance to each which accords with its powers of perception, reflection, and appropriation.

“Let us consider,” says Blanco White, “what is that which men understand by CHRISTIAN TRUTH, when they accuse one another of heretical error; in other words — what is that which the Catholics have thought it their duty to defend by severe punishments; and many or most of the Protestants, by penalties, or privations less revolting? ... The more obvious and plain the leading terms of some questions appear, the greater the danger of their being used by the disputants in various and even opposite senses, without the least suspicion of inaccuracy; for nothing appears more free from obscurity than words of indefinite meaning, when they become familiar.

“What do Divines understand by Christian truth? The answer at first

appears obvious. Christian truth, it will be said, is what Christ and his Apostles knew and taught, concerning salvation under the Gospel. Thus far we find no difficulty; but let me ask again — Where does this truth exist as an object external to our minds? The answer appears no less obvious than the former — in the Bible. Still I must ask, is the *material Bible* the Christian truth about which Christians dispute? No, it will readily be said, not the *material Bible*, but the sense of the Bible. Now, I beg to know, *is the sense of the Bible an object external to our minds?* Does any sense of the Bible, accessible to man, exist any where but *in the mind of each man who receives it from the words he reads?* The Divine Mind certainly knows in what sense these words were used; but as we cannot compare our mental impressions with that model and original of all truth, it is clear that by “the sense of the Bible” we must mean *our own sense* of its meaning. When, therefore, any man declares his intention to defend ‘Christian Truth,’ he only expresses his determination to defend his own notions as produced by the words of the Bible. No other “Christian Truth” exists for us in our present state.”¹⁹¹

What, then, is each man, as a truth-seeker, to be left *unaided* to follow the bent of his own inclinations, and to pursue his search alone? Not so. The bond of brotherhood which we confess, enjoins mutual help, for mutual advantage; and we can help each other in many ways, without invading the sacred freedom of each other’s conscience. We can offer facilities for acquiring knowledge; we can give information, counsel, kindly encouragement. For this use of the aid thus rendered, our brother is responsible to God alone, not to us; as we are responsible for any willful neglect by which he is deprived of such aid as we might well afford. In all our relations never let us forget that he is free, as we are free; that his charter of freedom is the same as ours; and that this is his true title to TOLERATION.

[*Nichols’ Monthly* (Cincinnati), May 1856]

CHAPTER XVI.¹⁹²

TEACHINGS OF THE SPIRITS CONTINUED.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Blanco White, *Heresy and Orthodoxy* (London: J. Mardon, 1835), 3-4. White was a Catholic Priest who became an Episcopalian, and then a Unitarian.

¹⁹² Original text mistakenly has “XXVI.”

Although my mission, up to this time, has been chiefly that of a Test Medium, and the work done through me has been to give to many thousands of persons the first tangible proof they ever had of immortality, yet in these many thousands of communications, my own spirit guardians, or the friends of those who have sought communications, have taken occasion to give many instructive messages. They are scattered through the records of my Mediumship. I find it difficult to arrange these messages or teachings into any regular and harmonious system; and I have no desire to impose a creed upon a world which has already too many. It is right, however, that I should give the reader some further idea of the teachings of the intelligences to whom I have been a medium of communication.

The spirits testify to their happiness. One, in answer to the question "Are you happy in the Spirit Land?" said: —

"All spirits are happy in their condition, my dear Brother; my spirit is in the enjoyment of all the happiness which it is capable of receiving.

"Avoid all that will tend to bind your mind. Let your soul be free to receive truth in its simplicity. Strive to live a life of charity; and let the inward monitor guide you in all your daily walks, — and live in no dread of the future."

Another spirit says of the happiness of the future life: —

"Listen not to the doctrines of any that tell you that the future is not a happy place. There is no place so miserable as your earth, — yet there are conditions, or slates, here, where the sinning soul atones for earthly crimes."

Some one inquired: Do we carry our evil passions with us to the next life?
To which it was answered: —

"We may carry them with us; but we lose all desire to indulge them."

It is difficult to see how it is possible to commit many crimes in the spirit life. There can be no murder there, as there seems no way of destroying spirit existence. War, for a similar reason is impossible. There can be no slavery, no theft, no treachery or deceit, where all is clear to every spirit. It is difficult to conceive of crimes of any kind being committed in the spirit world. To a question regarding other worlds, the answer was: —

“They are countless! — On some of the planets they are far beyond you. Their departed friends can assume forms, and converse face to face.”

Of the condition of the spirit life, another says: —

“Earth’s language is inadequate to convey the beauty of the spirit-home. Our state is delightful. Our happiness is *increased in proportion as we are capable of receiving*. Oh, that the veil could for one moment be removed, that your spirit might take one glimpse of the home that awaits you. Your spirit, like an uncaged bird, would delight to fly away into the regions of eternal happiness.”

Spirits testify to the absence and uselessness of regrets for the past. One who had committed suicide, said: —

“I became tired of my earthly life, and in a phrenzy of despair, — the result of a mental growing, — lost myself from the rudimental sphere. I have never regretted the change; though I now see the benefit which might have been derived from the rapid unfolding of my spiritual perceptions.”

The spirit of a man who had been an “orthodox” clergyman, answering the inquiries of his brothers, said: —

“What we term sin, is a violation of Natural Law. There is no such word as punishment — but there is suffering, as the consequences of an ill-spent earthly life. Heaven is where Harmony is — it is not a locality.”

Of the spirit-life, another testifies: —

“The spirit-life is very far beyond your anticipation in every point of view. We have our amusements and employments, which are elevating and instructive. Prepare yourself for an elevated position in the spirit-land *by living up to your best light and privileges*. This will keep you on a parallel line of progression with those you love in Heaven, and you will be enabled to unite with them and spend a happy eternity together.”

The following is part of a communication at one of my sittings: —

Ques. — Are solid substances any obstacle to your passing to any place you

think proper?

Ans. — No.

Ques. — Do you recognize time where you are, the same as we do here?

Ans. — No.

Ques. — Is the Emperor of Russia in the Spirit world?

Ans. — I was not acquainted with him in the body, consequently I do not know. Millions enter the Spirit world that I have no knowledge of.

Ques. — Is your religious belief the same as on earth?

Ans. — No. I now preach universal progression.

[The Spirit was that of a Presbyterian clergyman.]

At a private Circle, the question was asked, "What is the usual duration of time between the *apparent* and real separation of the spirit from the body?"

Ans. — "Generally, about thirty-six hours. The expression of the face of the dead — calm and beautiful — is attributable to the presence of the Spirit, during the period named."

Ques. — Regarding the insensibility of the body; is it perfect, when respiration ceases?"

Ans. — "Yes."

Another Spirit, questioned as to the truth of certain dogmas of ancient theologies, says:

"The Bible contains many beautiful truths; and many, very many, errors. I have found no such location, — no such state, — no such an existence here as that which you term 'HELL.' I have found the future to be beautiful: *the inner part of all things I once inhabited with you.*"

A husband in the Spirit world gives the following advice to his wife: —

"You will settle in life, I see, again; and it is my wish that you should do so; because a union with another, on *Earth*, will not interfere with our future happiness, — neither will it make me less happy."

A Spirit, purporting to be that of William North, who was himself the medium of one of the most remarkable communications ever penned — I refer to the "Infinite Republic" — spoke the following by me, when in the state of trance. There can, perhaps, be no better test of mediumship, than the character of many of these trance manifestations. The Spirit calling himself

North spoke as follows:

“Be bold, and fearlessly pursue every thought pertaining to man’s immortality to its ultimate; whether it come to you with an electric leap, or gently as the distilling dew. Fear not to speak the truth, and speak it boldly. No matter if for it you are considered an unprincipled outcast, and the religious world points at you with the finger of scorn. No matter if you are denounced by orthodox ministers from daintily cushioned pulpits. Push steadily and unflinchingly onward. As by labor and perseverance the mariner pursues his way across the trackless waste, through storm and tempest, and at last reaches the place of destination on some island known only to science; so you, by patient toil and unwavering determination, must approach the haven of your desires.

“The one who addresses you, while he inhabited earth, was a despised ‘INFIDEL.’ He was scorned by the religious as an unprincipled outcast. But the sneers of the world had no terrors for him. He was known by the name of NORTH.”

Farther testimony of the condition of Spirits is given in the following account of that change which has been made to us so full of terror: —

“My joy was so great; and my happiness so far exceeded my expectations; — in fact the change was so incomprehensible to all my previous ideas, — that when I first sounded back intelligence to you of my continued state, I felt as if I should like to give you all the information, — and describe, minutely, all the grandeurs that opened to my view.

“How happy I am, — and oh! how thankful, — that I find in you a willing receiver of such messages as I am able to give back to you. I am blessed amongst those that have left the form; and why? Because I see around me innumerable multitudes that assemble together, at divers circles, and would gladly manifest their presence back to earth; — but being unknown, are not able to do so with that efficacy that would benefit them, as much as this, which I now give you, benefits me.

“But a few short days a resident here, — and I found myself competent to convey to a dear friend, still in the body, a welcome tidings of my future existence. I have lost all cares of Earth, *though I have a slight impression that they will be presented again to me*, — and that I shall be enabled to realise, more particularly, reminiscences of my Earthly career. I shall come, if the conditions offer, and shall gladly continue to converse, and tell you that my state *has never for a moment been less happy than the happiest period while upon Earth.*”

To a question at a private Circle, regarding the ceaseless unfolding of the interior Life, it was said:

“The outer layer is continually falling, and giving place to its successor.”

The advice given in regard to temporal affairs and relations seems to be influenced by the individual characters of the advising spirits, and to be also adapted to the mental and moral conditions of those who seek advice. Thus a spirit advising a man respecting his domestic relations, said:

“It is the wish of all thy friends that little ...” [giving a name in full] “should remain with her father; and if thou canst not harmonize and live in peace with her with whom thou hast, in the sight of men and Heaven, promised to live, we say, *act thy own mind*. It is wrong to let the affections be placed upon another. Thou art joined by a ceremonial law to one thou shouldst endeavor to love. Therefore, if thou shouldst separate from thy present companion, thy Father and Grandfather would advise thee to *remain without another*.”

A spirit describing the consequences of suicide, and asserting that a sudden and voluntary death is not favorable to the growth of the spirit, makes this distinction between the sudden and violent suicide, and the more gradual destruction of the bodily life by evil habits:

“The gradual self-decay of the body differs somewhat from the case of him who instantly deprives the Spirit of the power of enlarging in its earthly tenement; because, while a more gradual process of severing the Spirit from the body is in operation, the mind, at intervals, finds room to grow; and thus, though the body fall before its time, the Spirit is a little better prepared to inhabit its ethereal home. Yet it is most important that the body should be so nursed and kept in harmony, that when the dissolution takes place, it may be with as much ease as the ripened fruit falls from the tree, having no longer use for its support.”

Another gives the following testimony, as to the influence of the present life upon the future:

“It is true, that physical death changes the man but slightly; and whatever may have been the evils of his earthly life, — in proportion as it has been pure and holy, so is his happiness measured. We are come to rob the human mind of the horrible idea of an eternal state of punishment; and in doing so, we would not have men build up a *vain idea or hope, that there is no suffering*

for an ill-spent life oil earth. It is true, there is no yawning gulf prepared, ready to receive the immortal spirit; but it is also true that a condition" (consequence) "awaits every man and woman for the violated laws of nature resting upon them."

Among the answers, given by spirits to sealed letters, sent often from a distance, and laid upon the table unopened, were the following, showing the power and care of guardian spirits: —

"Our dear friend! we sympathize with you; and your friend has, by great exertions, at length ascertained that the *bill of sale has been destroyed.*

"Our friend William hath interested himself in that which his friend and brother desired; and desires me to slate, that the paper containing the memorandum which he wishes to have is between the leaves of the Ledger, page 250."

Much excitement having been caused by discussions on "Free Love," a communication was given, containing the following sentences; —

"We countenance not this *Free-love-ism*, in the light in which most mortals view it. Men are not prepared to enter into that sphere of universal love, in our light, yet.

"It is true that Spirits do preach Free Love; but not in the light that many receivers, to gratify self, receive it. We proclaim the universal love, — the love that draws from the East to the West, and from the North to the South, and blends together the human family in one common brotherhood."

I shall elsewhere give my impressions, and the result of my most interior convictions on this subject. It is scarcely necessary to say that the Freedom of Affinities, taught by elevated spirits, is not the licentiousness of unrestrained and morbid sensuality; nor is this taught, that I am aware, by any spirits, either out of or in the form.

The spirit of a man who had occupied an exalted military and civil position, gives his experience of the change:

"I stood alone! All around me was incomprehensible. In vain did I call: In vain did I command! I remained in this condition, to the best of my remembrance, some two hours; when, suddenly, there stood by me, with extended hands and a loving heart, one that said unto me these words — '*You have been born again.* You must now live the life belonging to the child, and bring to its equilibrium each faculty that laid dormant while encased in

flesh and blood.”

The spirits often teach the most interior truths of science. Thus a spirit speaking through the entranced medium, on one occasion, said: —

“Life is everywhere: — in the humble crystals as well as in the highest angel; — in the granite rock, as well as in man. Otherwise, you will perceive, that what is called *crystallization* could not take place. Life is in all processes of formation; and, obedient to the law of progress, it passes on, from the lowest to the highest forms; the mineral kingdom constantly becoming absorbed into the vegetable kingdom, *in association with vegetable life*, and as a component part of it; the vegetable, in like manner, passing by assimilation into the animal; which is also, in turn, absorbed and made a component part of the highest type of the Divine Idea, namely, MAN. The form of Man is the only imperishable form, — because it is the ultimate form or ‘Image of God:’ — all other forms — mineral, vegetable, animal, — having relation in their processes of successive development, to this ultimate image or type; in which they are continually merging. Man, thus, is indeed a microcosm, — a continent of all varieties of living existence, — their ultimate goal; the lake into which their tributary streams all flow.”

The following will interest inquirers respecting the modes of spirit communication: — To a visitor at my table, it was recently said: —

“My brother in the flesh, — it is a fact demonstrable to the investigating mind, that an intelligence other than the mortal, does communicate — and it is a fact clearly demonstrable, that such intelligence cannot at all times be relied on, — and why? In your present stage of advancement, the explanation is necessary.

“There are many causes of complications and contradictions. The most prominent one is this: — Every mortal creates around himself a *light* through which he is distinguished by Spirits (so called) out of the form. A well analyzed idea produces its effect, and becomes to the Spirit like the distant beacon-light to the mariner — a guide by which he knows he is near the land. Every idea comprehended, is the vehicle on which the thoughts of mortals traverse; — and as the man thus self-illuminates the surrounding atmosphere, he becomes more easily — or his wants are more readily understood by his invisible instructors.

“When Circles are formed of intelligent minds, and harmony of thought pervades the whole, — then it is that the infallible truth is conveyed.” [Or rather, the truth as the communicating intelligences conceive it, is then *infallibly transmitted*.] “Then how can it be expected, when minds have no

rays of light emanating as a guide to the Spirit, that *all* inquiries should be responded to correctly?

“All Mediums are, more or less, illuminated: — and here may be explained the reason why an audible question becomes necessary, when the questioner has no light sufficient to enable his attending Spirit to perceive the thought. The question not only takes form in the individual’s mind who puts it, but also in the Medium’s; — who, having a more accessible condition, conveys to the attending Spirit-Friend the desires of the questioner.”

Next to GEORGE FOX, the Spirit most frequently communicating through me, is that of THOMAS PAINE, a man who made great sacrifices in this life, from an earnest love of the truth: a man often stigmatized as infidel and atheist, but whose writings prove him to have been, all his life, a devout believer in God and immortality, and a friend of freedom and humanity. He was a man of intuitions, and wrote often by impression. I give one of his communications:

“I have come to reply to a Brother; one whom I call ‘Brother,’ because he is the son of our Father, and feels anxious to emerge from the darkness in which the creeds of a church have placed him. I have an attribute which I inherit from the Father of all the human family; and which I have endeavored to cultivate with more earnestness since I left things material; — that attribute is *Love*. Men thought me severe: — and so I was. The clergy said I was in error: — and so I was. The Free-Thinkers said I was in truth; — and so I was. I was right, and I was wrong. My ideas were from above; the language was my own. I endeavored to do my duty, so far as I was competent to understand that duty. I wrote as I thought; and spoke as I felt.

“Our brother is anxious to ascertain much; and I am anxious to give him all that I can. Now, when a man’s interior becomes agitated; when the ruffled water will not be calmed by the rays of Theology; and when he feels that he is endeavoring to explain the words of Omnipotence without himself *realising* its truth, he is on the point of Progression. It may not do, suddenly, to step aside, and take another path, leaving the flock who have looked to him as their shepherd: — but it *will* do to preach Love and Progression! Thus, brother, at thy Father’s bidding have I come to answer. There are ministering angels hovering near, who manifest to Earth: — they all bear with them the one testimony — PROGRESSION! They intervene, as far as they can, to add to the knowledge of their fellow-men; and they are ever trying to add to the enjoyment of all. PAINE.”

The following, purporting to be from the same source, will interest all who have become acquainted with the writings of the distinguished author of

the Age of Reason, and the Rights of Man, who, persecuted in life, and vilified after death, is now beginning to receive the justice of a more enlightened era.

In answer to the question, "Is there more light proceeding from some Spirits in the form than from others?" the spirit of Paine said:

"I have spoken upon that point to others, and will again reiterate for your personal benefit. The external eye cannot behold the spiritual; the ethereal substance to the material touch is as air. The spiritual beholds the material *through the spiritual*. Earth is peopled with thousands that move in darkness, to the direct gaze of the Spirit, appearing only as a mass, with now and then a faint ray of light proceeding, to enable their attending guides to designate their individuality. It is through the spiritual that we behold the material; and when the mind hath created a sufficient light around itself, it is then that we are enabled, by looking through that, to behold objects or things material. Sympathy, the guide which tells the whereabouts of a dear friend, unenlightened, enables the guardian to accompany him, and thus gradually to diffuse light."

Of the different circles of Spirits, he said:

"Could your Spiritual eyes be opened, and view the difference between the circle of inferior minds, and that of minds advanced, it would cause you to gaze in wonder. It is true that the skeptical mind receives truth; and in many cases truth is conveyed direct from personal relatives to those who seek it. Yet, in the *majority* of cases, the Circle formed of undeveloped minds, attracts groups of minds out of the form, some of whom are very little further advanced — and others, on the same plane — *while many beneath them, assemble*. From these Spirits, the worldly-wise man expects to derive wisdom of a God! and with their silly, unprofitable questions, such will assert that if a name can be revealed, their faith will be established, and they will at once step into the ranks of those laborers who have toiled night and day to surmount error, — and who, even now, are children in truth! Another would openly avow his belief, if, peradventure, the table could be suspended in mid-air!

"'Tis true, that we devise all means to make proselytes: — *yet Man cannot leap that which is designed for him to tread*. It is of rare occurrence that an intelligent Spirit overflows a youth in knowledge with more than can by his condition or organization be digested. Train the mind in the way it should go, and when it arrives at that position which enables it to realize the truth, it will not depart from it.

"Now, there are many who profess to believe — yea, to enjoy the reality of Spirit communion, whose minds are so diseased by eating Spiritual food — *that were that which is truth digested, they would need the support of many to*

keep them from falling!"

The following communication purports to have been given through an impressible Medium, by Thomas Paine:

"Man feels the necessity of a supreme intelligence, with which his soul can commune. It is not sufficient for him to be told that God is in all Nature; that Nature is God. He still craves the sympathy and inspiration of a spiritual intelligence, superior to his own. He strives, therefore, after the idea of an Infinite Spirit; and in that to embody his thoughts of God. In striving to make this idea personal, he loses his conception of Infinity, and makes Deity a *man*, fashioned as a man, and with attributes limited like man. Here is an idea of God, embodying all that is true in Pantheism, and, at the same time, satisfying the craving of the soul after an Infinite, Supreme, Spiritual Intelligence — a Being to commune with, to converse with, to pray to — an Infinite perfection to strive after.

"As the spirit animates the material body — as the animal body through the spirit only has its being — so does God, the Great, Infinite Spirit of all Spirits, animate the material universe. Without the spiritual essence, which pervades every limb, every organ, of the material body, it must die. So with the material world. Without the Spirit of God, which pervades all space and vivifies all nature, there would be no life. In *spirit alone* there is life. All the life in nature is from the Spirit of God, which pervades all. The intelligence of the spirit of man is distinct from the material body. The hand is not *man*, neither is the tree *God*; yet neither could live without the Spirit which animates it. The intelligence is *distinct*, yet *pervades* the whole. The material universe is not *God* any more than the fleshy body is the *man*. It is, as it were, the body of God pervaded by the Infinite, Spiritual Intelligence, which reigns Supreme."

On another occasion came the following:

"The spirit of a man is a portion of the spirit of God. He is our in-dwelling life. Progression may be infinite and eternal, without reaching Infinite Perfection, *as you may add decimals to infinity, and never reach the unit.*"

In answer to questions respecting the comparative advantage of an early or late removal from the earth sphere, a spirit replied:

"Given, first, an organization, removed from the Earth-sphere before the evils of the external have been stereotyped upon it.

"That child is then surrounded, first of all, by influences that balance and

produce symmetry. Deficient organs are brought up to an average. There takes place, so to speak, a gradual re-organization, the result of which is symmetry. The infantile body is then surrounded with a pure sphere, instead of absorbing, as all children do here, poison from a diseased atmosphere. Its lungs are continually receiving the elements free from impurity. On the earth, every infantile organization is thrown into contact with physically diseased organization. Consider the difference produced, when the child is through Spiritual agencies positive to diseased structures. Consider, further, the resultant differences in education. It is affirmed that the presiding instructors of each child are gifted with insight to perceive the exact capacity and peculiar genius of the child, and that education is harmoniously adapted to the constitution of an harmonic character for the infantile germ. The insanities of the earth-sphere have no influence upon it. The infant is gymnastically exercised in all that may develop the composite powers of being. It becomes logically accurate in each process of reasoning — morally harmonic in each emotion; and emerges from harmonic childhood to harmonic manhood, without passing through any period of subversive development. Standing *en rapport* with harmonic spheres of thought and action, the subjective and the objective, the internal and the external, maintain their poise: *there is completeness*. It is otherwise in this life with infants of corresponding organization, whose education takes place amidst the discordances of the external world. So, at least, it is presented to my mind.

“Each is necessary to all! In the long run, a principle of compensation is introduced. When a man has manfully battled against the evils of the external, while in it, drawing down powers from above, and projecting a divine sphere of order into physical ultimates, he prepares himself for heavenly progression *at a ratio that is immensely accelerated*. Yet he needs, on entering into the Spiritual sphere, an equilibrium or balance, — or rather a completeness of deficient faculties that have remained dormant.

“The blissful influences from the Heaven of Infants flow into the *old man*, while he remains on earth; and that period, which externally is called second childhood, is a period of the subjective re-arrangement of the internals of the mind — a useful period of life. Old people are surrounded by infants and infant spheres; watched over, also, by youths and maidens of the external world, who left the earth in the morning of life. On the other hand, there is that serene quietude; that autumnal of peace; that blessedness undisturbed by passion, which — ” [the remainder of the sentence was lost.]

Of intercourse with other planets, one spirit said: —

“We do not always linger near your Earth, — but visit others to the extent of our attraction. We learn from superior minds that which we could not

acquire in so close a proximity to your earth.”

Of progress in life, in the higher spheres, a spirit said: —

“The infant is recognised as an infant, and so on to maturity — as with you; after which age ends.”

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Cincinnati), June 1856]

CHAPTER XVII.¹⁹³

A BROTHER IN THE CHURCH, AND OTHER EXPERIENCES.

The disposition of men to persecute one another for differences of opinion seems very strange and unaccountable to me. I cannot see why my former brethren in the Methodist Church should wish to injure me because my faith in immortality is supported by different evidences from theirs. They knew me for an honest man before my belief in modern Spiritualism. If they would take the trouble to follow me into my present life, they would find me just as honest. Why then am I to be treated as badly as if I were an impostor, and a designing and dishonest person. I have said little about this matter of church persecution, for it is a very disagreeable subject; but I feel bound to relate a course of conduct pursued by a Methodist class leader toward me. Before I became a medium I had earned a little place in the vicinity of New York, worth about one thousand dollars. I owed in 1855 about \$36 to different workmen on the house. This class leader went around and bought up these claims, and I have reason to believe that he represented me as so unreliable a person, that he got the demands for less than half their value. I was in New York absorbed in my work, and knew nothing of this matter till I was sued and a legal paper was served on me. I did not understand it and tore it up, and thought no more about it, till a friend wrote me that my place in the country was advertised to be sold by the sheriff for a debt of over one hundred dollars. On inquiry I found that the demands bought up by the class leader had been swelled by legal charges to this amount, and my little home

¹⁹³ Original text mistakenly has “XXVII.”

was to be sold for it. I immediately went to a wealthy and kind-hearted spiritualist in the city, and asked him for a loan of one hundred dollars, offering a mortgage on my place as security for the loan. This he did not wish to take, but as he was a man of positive will, I was not free in my mediumship to come under obligation to him, though he was entirely willing to assist me.

At this time Judge S. of Newberg was investigating the phenomena of spiritualism with me, and I asked him to make a mortgage for me. He inquired why I wished to execute the paper, and I told him the circumstances. He asked me how much I lacked of paying the debt. I answered, seventy-five dollars. He handed me the amount in bills, and told me to pay him when I could.

With great joy and thankfulness I accepted this loan from Judge S., which I was providentially enabled to pay in the spring of 1860 from the money received on my western tour.

In the foregoing I only give specimens of the kindness and unkindness I have received.

I have wished to say a few words more on the conditions of Mediumship. People are constantly saying, "If the spirits can come to one, why can't they come to another? I would like some of these things to be done to me. If the spirits can rap for one man, why not for another?" I might as well say, if a message can be sent by a telegraph wire, why not without one? My little boy, when not five years old, had the table moved for him, with only his own hands upon it, and as intelligent communications spelled as for me. On one occasion he asked, "Spirit, what is your name?"

The answer was, "King."

"Where are you going, when you go away now?"

The answer was rapped out, "To Heaven, my little man;" seeming as specially adapted to the child, as if the speaker had been in the form.

One day a lady called and requested the spirit of her brother to tell her what she was then thinking of. After a few minutes my hand was taken, and the annexed communication was given, it being signed by the name in full of the spirit. The reply was a full one to the thoughts in her mind at the time the inquiry was made:

"MY DEAR SISTER: — I will now converse with you. You desire to know whether you will ever be a medium, and if so, what kind? Your condition will admit of various kinds. At present we can better impress than sound. You are rapidly becoming approachable, and we hope soon to echo vibrations for you when you are alone. Your brother, B.

"You, my dear Sister, are under no obligations to me. Now learn a lesson;

whenever you do a voluntary kindness, consider it a duty, not a task.
B.”

Another case was as follows. It occurred while I was at Washington. A spirit first communicated to her brother, giving proof of her identity in the usual way:

“MY DEAR, DEAR BROTHER: — I am indeed very happy to meet you and to witness your honest, earnest desire to know the truth. Is it not a great blessing that the holy Omnipotent has permitted the spirits of those who have passed from the view of mortals, to hold communion with those they so fondly love? You cannot be too grateful. You cannot love and praise Him too much. God is ever near to answer humble, earnest prayer. Fly to Him in all times of trial for strength, and it will be given you; and praise Him in all seasons of joy. There is great rejoicing in Heaven among angels, that God has permitted the veil to be partly withdrawn, and the inhabitants of the celestial to hold converse with those of the terrestrial world. The time is near at hand, my dear brother, when you shall believe this great and wonderful truth. You, with many others, have much to do in this glorious cause. I will be ever near to counsel and advise you.

“Your Spirit Sister,
S.”

Previously to this communication the person desired the spirit of his sister to use some familiar phrase that he might recognize her by it. Immediately was spelled by the alphabet —

“Do let me have my own way.”

He acknowledges that she was always in the habit of using this expression. Governor Tallmadge’s experience at my rooms has been very satisfactory to him.¹⁹⁴ His questions have been mentally directed to the spirits. One day he entered, and took a seat, remaining in silence, when in answer to his desire, the communication was as follows, he had desired to have a communication from the spirit of Barnabas Bates:¹⁹⁵

“My Dear Friend, I am here. I think I can influence the medium, Pardee, to

¹⁹⁴ Nathaniel Pitcher Tallmadge (1795-1864), U.S. Senator from New York (1838-1844) and then Governor of the Wisconsin Territory until 1845.

¹⁹⁵ Barnabas Bates (1787-1854), Acting Postmaster in New York City under President Andrew Jackson.

speak. At least, I will try.

B. BATES."

The medium alluded to is Mr. Pardee, formerly and then of Washington. Governor Tallmadge's questions were never audible, be it remembered, yet he always has received replies in writing to his questions, whether made mentally or in writing. My interviews with this distinguished believer in the phenomena of spiritualism were at Washington.

One day I received a sealed envelope from the country, accompanied by a letter, requesting me to have it examined by the spirits. I made inquiries accordingly. The reply was, that the letter contained thirteen questions, only two of which could be answered by them, stating these, and adding that the writer, Thomas Ripton, would become a medium. I subsequently received a letter from Mr. Ripton, stating that all the questions were touched upon in the reply.

The following correspondence tells its own story. It is one of many of a similar character, accompanied by more or less convincing proofs of spirit identity: —

"NEW ORLEANS, Dec. 11, 1853.

"Mr. J. B. CONKLIN, Medium:

"DEAR SIR — I desire to hear from my spirit friends, and will thank you to sit for me.

Yours, truly, F — ."

"NEW YORK, 31 Howard street, Dec. 24, 1853.

"DEAR F — : Yours of the 11th inst. was duly received, and I hasten to reply. I have often received manifestations from your spirit wife. The spirits write through me with more facility than heretofore. Believers in Spiritualism are still multiplying daily. I have given your spirit friends the sitting you requested, and enclose the communications received.

"Yours, very truly,

J. B. CONKLIN."

The following is one of the communications referred to. Its publication will serve the object in view, and it is brief.

"NEW YORK, Friday, Dec. 23, 1863.

ALONE.

Q — Is the spirit-wife of F — present?

A — Yes.

Q — Do you know that I have received a letter from your husband at New Orleans?

A — Yes. I impressed him to write to you.

Q — Have you manifested to him since I last saw him?

A — Yes, daily. I make miniature sounds to him, and breathe heaven's blessings on his brow.

Q — Can you send him something that will be to him a test that this is really you?

A — My dear friend, he needs none. His soul feasts with his angel wife, daily, and in his reposing hours I watch his slumbers, while his dear little INNOCENCE rests on his bosom.

Q — Have you any communications to send him?

A — Yes, I have met you for that purpose, and am happy to find that conditions are favorable. Say to my dear F — , let not your heart feel sad, or your soul despond — your spirit wife is with you, and has tried at all times to manifest. There is a language of the soul, my dear, that speaks louder than words, which can be felt by the internal, while the external knows it not. I whisper in your soul sweet words of hope — I walk by you unseen, and administer to your wants. The time will soon come, when I will be able to give you a faint idea of this, my spirit-home. O, that I could now impress you with anything of its grandeur — but cannot. Until then I will guide you, and when the hour for separating from the mortal man arrives, I will be the first to meet you."

These communications are among the private gratifications which F — habitually enjoys. They are of the blessed truths open to all. What soft persuasions from the ignorant followers of King Creed, what denunciatory eloquence from the gilded pulpit, could lead F — to close the door in the face of this loving spirit?

To an Inquirer, it was recently said, concerning death: —

"You can, by the unfolding of your Spiritual faculties, so advance, that when the body becomes no longer capable of supporting the wants of the Spirit, *the hour of its dissolution may be the pleasantest hour of your Earthly life.* A perfect consciousness of the change can be retained, with but a few moments of sleep during the passage. There is no pain" [necessarily] "attending the separation; for I have witnessed many — very many — which to the outward senses manifested extreme agony; when, could the inward workings of the Spirit have been seen, the contrast would have been presented of an enjoyment far exceeding the apparent pain or suffering.

"My sympathy often attracts me to the death-bed of many who are suffering internally the horrors of an uncertainty of existence after death; — and I then — having more facility in casting forth impressions than those who have never communed with earth — do all that I can to allay their fears, and impress upon their minds the beauties of the change.

“*Do good,*’ can be found written upon all intelligent minds; and the more you are instrumental in enhancing the happiness of others, the more you increase your own enjoyments. There were many with you yesterday, listening to your conversation, and conveying to each one impressions,” [alluding to a conversation on the personality of Deity,] “and I have attained into a more perfect realization of God than I once had, and yet I cannot define. We all live, as we feel, in His presence; and all still entertain a belief that we are approximating to a more perfect idea of His individuality.”

To another Inquirer it was said: —

“*Now* you have to labor not only for your Spiritual good, but also for that which invigorates and keeps the body in health. When you enter this sphere, you will not be compelled to toil for physical requirements; and all your aspirations which have been cultivated while living upon earth, can be realized by you *there.*”

“To enjoy Heaven,” says another Spirit-Friend, addressing a lady at a private circle, through Mr. Conklin — “it is not necessary to be freed from the body. Heaven can be realized, and is, — when true feelings prevail internally — where all is harmony, there is Heaven!

“I could not let the opportunity pass, finding the Medium moving in my sphere, without conversing with you — my Earthly sister. *There are many Thomas Paines here;* many others who bore different names while upon Earth. It does not require the individual presence of Thomas Paine to communicate Thomas Paine’s ideas. It is true that out of the great number of minds that move in *his degree* and knowledge, lie, as an individual, has a peculiar, a personal guardian care over you; all Spirits that communicate from his sphere of intelligence, can as well be called by his name as his individual self. *Names, we have none* — because we live and exist in the sphere of ideas; — yet it is pleasing to our Earthly friends for us to conclude our messages with the names we bore on earth — and this is why we do so.”

A spirit gave the following account of the phenomena of spirit life:

“Sounds, with us, when in sympathy sufficient to partake of the senses of our friends, correspond precisely as with you. Noise of the carts and stages,” [pointing with the Medium’s hand towards the street,] “we are equally as sensible of as you are, when we are in harmony. The streets and buildings, the sky, or sun, the heat and the cold, can alike be seen, and felt, by the Spirits as by you. This may appear strange, because you fancy — or some do — that the Spirit is mind, and matter is a different element. But it is not so; for when we are not in communicating rapport with our friends, we then see all the

spiritual within the material. For as the body encases the Spirit, so do *all things* encase the Spirit.

“We have horses and birds, and flowers and gardens, and fruit and water — and everything to correspond with what you have. We do not subsist upon air; we take our regular meals. We do not have to prepare them, because we live upon the essence. We repose even as you do; and while sleeping — or in that which corresponds to sleep — at times, reflections of things occurring are presented to us, the same as the reflection of your mind sometimes causes you to review things that are past; and just at other times, the future will be [is] presented; and though but confusedly, yet it has been found, that all things dreamed of really occur. Now, we also are impressed by those who exist in a higher state, and those whose condition can not be seen, or realized, any more by us than your external eye can see the Spirit. Therefore, we often receive impressions while in this state (corresponding to your sleep,) of events, which do actually afterwards occur.”

Two days afterwards came the following:

“It is indeed interesting to me to have this privilege. I am, at times, at a loss for words to suit the idea which I wish to convey. It is true that *I* speak to you, and in a great measure control, unconsciously to the Medium; at the same time ideas and sentences conveyed through his organism must be fitted according to his development. *Pour wine into an oil bottle, and it will taste of oil.*

“Now, as regards the clothing of the Spirit, and the food. I know of no better way to explain than this: You can see how a dress would look — cut, and made, according to your idea of the pattern you have formed in your mind; yet that is material — and in order to become applicable to the material, *labor* is necessary. Now, when tee desire to be clothed, being Spiritual, with a peculiar dress or clothing, we have it — *because we live in the real.* Our food, we receive as we desire it. Our recreation can be anything we wish, according to our advancement. Our devotions, also, can consist in the assembling of musicians, sounding forth harmonious music, if necessary; or if sufficiently advanced, which is the case with those who have reached that plane of enjoyment, live *in the harmonious music of thought — the union of thought.* I have recently been examining the conditions of inferior minds — those that exist in the lower circles of the second sphere; and their state, though superior to the corresponding state of those on Earth, is at the same time miserable. For an example a man leaves the form, with all his appetites, be they what they may, *and they remain until he becomes self-repetitive.* The poor drunkard, who leaves the Earth-sphere with the desire of indulging in that which had already hastened the dissevering of the Spirit, enters the sphere of those in the same plane of mental advancement, retaining the same

mental desire for that stimulant; and *may often be found in sympathy with those on Earth, that like himself are carousing* — cultivating a taste, which it takes time to remove. *He meets with them, and receives his supply, by inhaling the influence, peculiar or in proportion to his sympathies.* Yet it is not satisfying. Unlike the experience of the mind in the body, which drinks until nature no longer be a sharer, and falls to sleep; the Spirit out of the form, not satisfied in this state of mind, attempts to get in sympathy with others of the same grade; and if it fails, continues to seek and operate upon other minds in the body, until it influences them to indulge in the intoxicating beverage. The whole mind of such Spirits is concentrated in this desire — to satisfy the appetite — and they never obtain the satisfaction. Consequently, you can at once perceive how difficult it is for those who move in a higher circle to attract them, even for an instant, to seek elsewhere for the remedy. I have been informed that some, who now move in this lower sphere, *have been for ages seeking for that which they crave to satisfy them*, and have not found it. How much longer they may remain depends entirely upon themselves.

“When you are asked, if your new faith teaches you that *all are happy*, you can answer: *Yes, in as much happiness as their Spirits are capable of enjoying*; and yet millions are miserable.”

The same Spirit, speaking through the entranced Medium, said:

“To that end do we labor to enlighten the mind, to advance it to that plane, where laws upon parchment will become unnecessary; where all will know and have the law developed within; where they will have no mourning — *no mourning*, when a dear friend takes his departure from his body for the higher state of existence; when we shall see our friends enjoying the change with us; and instead of the dark mantle covering their bodies, see them wearing, as usual, clothing *not to suit the fashion*, but their own convenience. The mental looking-glass can very readily be understood. It is the mirror which each individual manufactures for himself. There is no avoiding looking into it, after physical separation, though all may at times shade it from their minds while they live on Earth. Consider: — When you sit calmly, and trace back your past life, and gradually have presented each act and thought, you can well understand how necessary it is to have that mirror one which will reflect back nothing which you might not desire to have seen by others. Now, Truth will overcome Error; and if in the course of their earthly pilgrimage men and women step in the by-path, there is no necessity for that portion of their earthly existence to remain visible, although it is a part of the construction; for by overcoming evil with Truth, though the error did occur, Truth being the most permanent, prevails, *and so covers the spot over*. Every good thought, practically carried out, is a spoke to the ladder which leads you upward. Men who have never been the instruments of benefiting their

fellow-men; whose whole life, during the growth of the Spirit, consisted in gratifying their appetites at the expense or misery of others; who, instead of expanding their Spirit, nearly annihilated it in the development of the animal; they are those of whom I spoke last. *Yet there is a hope for them*, because they are subjected to the same law as all are — UNIVERSAL PROGRESSION. That beautiful law, which, when once realized, is the great medium (?) between the soul and grief. Hence a dear friend on Earth may err, and yet give no *grief* to the friend in Heaven, because *this* one will perceive that *he* did all that he could to prevent the error; yet the dear one did commit it, and for the time being must be content to receive the consequence.”

The communication was resumed, when the Spirit spoke as follows: —

“We all assemble to commune with you, with joyful feelings. We live in light; and while I know from your minds, that darkness pervades this portion of your earth, with me it is always light. The spirit does not recognize the light of the material sun, any more than it does the absence of that light. We tread the atmosphere, the same as you tread the earth, with the exception of velocity. We enjoy social conversation, and consultations, upon various topics, as you do.

“We visit different nations, and often find among the most ignorant — as thought by the ‘Christian World — bright illuminated interiors.

“When you ask a question, if I am not able to convey back an impression, sufficiently sensible to cause you to feel my answer, — others come with me, and *by the concentration of each force, we cause you to understand*. The mission of those who move in the sphere with myself, is to promulgate general truth as we understand it. While all have their especial earthly charges, who have many wants to be supplied; at the same time we employ ourselves in administering general ideas to all minds capable of receiving them. I have been careful that you should have a clear understanding of all impressions conveyed, and I am pleased that my labors have not been fruitless. I have also endeavored to counsel you by impressions, in many undertakings, with as much interest as if I still inhabited the body with you. I have also tried to individualize in all that I have said, as much as possible,” [through other Mediums.] “You should not faint in your hopes of physical development. There has been no cessation on our part. Others have, and do often assist me in refining the principle, surrounding the physical organization, in order that we may equalize it with ours, to produce sounds.

“A knowledge of music can be acquired here with less difficulty than while in the form; for this reason — *we vibrate upon each note by will-power*. It was a combination of forces which produced the music, as in all cases, where physical manifestations are produced.” [Questions had been asked, as to the identity of the Spirit, which had produced music from the piano, in the

presence of a Medium, without the intervention of human hands.] “Not that an individual Spirit cannot make an individual sound, after the battery has become operative, but they cannot form an individual battery sufficiently powerful to operate intelligently to their earthly friends.”

One of my guardian, or more frequently communicating spirits, in accounting for difficulties of clear communication, has said:

“It is a deplorable reality, that Mediums, through whom we are sounding forth the glad tidings of man’s immortality, do so permit the ignorant influences out of the form to prevail, that we are oftentimes compelled to retire, and behold our friends — those whom we have designated among Earth’s excellent — regret with exceeding sadness their disappointments. To remedy this gross error, is not the work of a moment; and in many cases I have, as an individual intelligence, been compelled to cease in my efforts to develop or convey through the Medium the least intelligence.”

This purported to come from THOMAS PAINE; but, as has been explained, may have been given by any one, or by all who are united on his plane of thought and life. In my experience as a Medium I have had most to do with individual identities, for such proof of spirit influence is always required by the new investigator. In most cases, where individual communications are made, I find no reason to distrust their origin. Names are of little moment — individualities of no great importance; but when a spirit calls himself GEORGE FOX, or THOMAS PAINE, and persists in claiming such designation, and his communications are characteristic, I see no cause for doubting that he is the one he pretends to be, until there is some proof to the contrary. We may well take a spirit’s evidence of his identity, unless we can impeach his testimony by other and more reliable witnesses.

In some cases, where I have been led to distrust, I have found that it was without sufficient reason. For example, one evening, at a private circle, at Cincinnati, where there were several persons, strangers to me, a communication was written by my hand, of a very genial and friendly character, and signed “HENRY CLAY.” I remarked, on reading it, that I did not think much of these signatures of distinguished men, but learned afterward that the gentleman to whom it was addressed had been from boyhood in intimacy with Mr. Clay and his family, and that there was no person in the spirit world more likely to address him thus kindly and familiarly.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Cincinnati), July 1856: The editorial introduction to this issue says, "The Life of a Medium approaches its conclusion. The recent chapters have given much satisfaction to our spiritual readers, and the coming ones are full of instructional interest. This also will be ready for the press this fall, and will be published, neatly done up in cloth, at seventy-five cents."]

CHAPTER XVIII.¹⁹⁶

FREE CIRCLES.

The first accusation against spiritual mediums, was that they had contrived a scheme of deception, to make money. It is the first thought that occurs to all sordid persons. The man who makes such an accusation has large acquisitiveness, and judges out of his own nature. He says, money is the chief good. If I could deceive people, and so excite their curiosity, as to get them to give me money, I would soon get rich; and he naturally and inevitably judges that others will do as he knows he would. When you hear one say, "it is a speculation," be sure that the organ of acquisitiveness is active, and that he would like to speculate.

It is true that many mediums, who give their life to this work, with no means of living, and incurring often heavy expenses, rent in cities, or expenses in travelling, have taken money; but much less than is generally supposed, while hundreds have given much time to this work without any compensation. Had it been a money-making deception, some would have got rich. Where are the Barnums of Spiritualism? Great singers and actors lay up thousands, and even hundreds of thousands; but I have yet to learn of the first medium, who has done more than to get daily bread. Nearly all have depended upon other resources, or upon the voluntary contributions of those who have known their needs. In nearly all cases, there has been, at first, a great repugnance to receiving money; and when it has become a necessity to do so, the amounts received have much oftener fallen short than exceeded actual necessities.

The Fox sisters, the first or among the first known mediums, in the more recent and general manifestations, were at first annoyed, terrified and persecuted. Their house was stoned; their friends deserted them, and they

¹⁹⁶ The original text mistakenly has "XXVIII."

were often driven almost to despair; but as often as they closed their doors, and refused to admit visitors, the manifestations compelled them to open them again, until they were driven into the work, and made to become the mediums of spirit manifestations, first in Rochester and then in other places, yet, I know the fact, that when they were supposed to be receiving large sums of money, from throngs of curious visitors, they did not actually have enough to pay their bills, and were relieved by the contributions of benevolent spiritualists.

Taking money of visitors who come to sit for communications, was always repugnant to me; but it was a simple necessity. It took up my whole time, and left me no means of support. Poor, with a family, I had no other means of living. Hard as it was, therefore, to fix a price for such service, I was compelled reluctantly to do so. But my guardian spirits, after a time, wished me to open free circles, that the poor might have this gospel preached to them, and that the sordid and suspicious might not have the excuse of believing it a money-making speculation, I was willing to give myself to the work, but could not see how it was to be sustained. I said, if I do this, who will pay my heavy rents, and support my family? My guardian spirits promised that they would see to this, but my faith was weak, and I waited and wavered. I barely lived as it was, and did not see how I could live, if I got no fixed compensation; for I had seen that most persons would give money for evils much sooner than for goods. I knew that men and women would pay dollars for rum, tobacco, useless luxuries; finery, or amusements, before they would give sixpences to any good cause. I resisted and delayed, until the spirits threatened to take away my power, if I refused to do their work.

As I dreaded this more than anything else, and as I knew by many experiences that such medial power or condition could be removed or suspended, I consented to give free circles, as soon as proper arrangements could be made for that purpose. I therefore, with the aid of some friends, hired the dwelling part of the house, 154 Canal Street, in the lower part of the city, and near all the great thoroughfares, and advertised free circles, morning and afternoon, reserving my evenings for private circles, with compensation. The spirits promised that I should be sustained, as well as I had been, but I did not see how it was to be done. Hundreds came and filled my rooms; receiving communications of a most satisfactory character to all who could understand the nature of a test, or were impressible to spirit influence — for this impression is often better than any intellectual test. But of these great numbers, very few thought it necessary to make any contribution. I think much the greater number thought that they were doing me a favor, in coming to investigate, and had the air of patrons, who expected gratitude for their

countenance and support. With many it was thoughtlessness. They were interested in the subject, glad to have the opportunity of conversing with departed friends, but did not think of cost. The circles were free and they were very glad they were so; but they did not consider that those who had ability ought to contribute, in order to make them free to others. I trembled for the result; but my fears proved to be groundless, and the promises of my guardian spirits were kept to me, as they have ever been.

Though the great mass of my visitors gave nothing, there were a few who contributed liberally. Some were thoughtful enough to give more, for the very reason that they saw so many go away without giving anything; and the private circles paid, perhaps, more readily and liberally, so that at the end of the week, I found the united sums much the same as formerly. The work was harder; but I had the satisfaction of being of greater use, and as soon as I could trust in being sustained, I was very glad that I had opened my doors to the poor and unbelieving, and invited them to "partake of the waters of life freely."

I was very efficiently aided in this work by many personal friends and devoted spiritualists, particularly Mr. M. A. Curran, who projected the publication of a monthly paper, intended to give publicity, and if successful, pecuniary support to the free circles. The PUBLIC CIRCLE was published one year, nearly printed, and edited by Mr. Curran, with singular good taste and ability, and though not a source of pecuniary profit, as it was hoped it might be, I know that it did a good work in the cause of spiritualism. Many of the facts contained in this narrative were preserved in that paper from which I have copied them, hoping to give them by this means a more permanent form and a wider circulation. If the records of this year of the free circles, from May, 1866, until May, 1856, had been kept, and its history written, it would have filled a large volume. I can only give results. I can not even give, except by estimate, the number of visitors during this period, who either received themselves, or saw others receive spiritual communications. If there were fifty a day, for three hundred days, which is a moderate average estimate, I had fifteen thousand visitors. Of these, more than half, and probably two thirds or ten thousand, were not citizens of New York, but strangers from every part of the country and world.

These, you will say, had money to spend, and could pay. True; but would they have done so? Strangers meet at a hotel in New York, and one says to the other, "What is going on worth seeing?" "Suppose we go and see what the spirits will say to us," suggests the other. In most cases the ready answer would be, "Oh, I shall not give my money to such a humbug as that!" "But," replies the other, "how are you to be sure it is a humbug?" "Sure enough. The

city is full of schemes to make money. I'd rather give my quarter to Barnum, who professes to be a humbug." "But here is a medium," says the other, "who opens his circles for every body, without asking pay of any."

This alters the case, and probably induces the man to visit the free circles, and he becomes first interested, and then convinced, and probably goes home a confirmed spiritualist, and a better and happier man.

Better! Yes. No man can believe in the existence of spirits, and that they are hovering around us, sorrowing for our evils, and rejoicing in our good, without being made better. The man who has convincing evidence that a dear father or mother, brother or sister, or child, in the spirit world, watches over him, must be influenced in his conduct by this assurance. It must be a restraint from evil, and an incentive to good. O the blindness of those who ask, "what is the use of spiritualism?" and do not see how much better it must make all who believe in its realities.

Better and happier! To be better brings with its consciousness this result; but the assurance of immortality; the knowledge that those who were dear to us in the earth life, still live, and are still dear; and that when these outward scenes are over, we shall assuredly join them in a life of ceaseless progression and ever increasing joys — is not this enough to give us perpetual happiness? On how many have I seen this light from the spirit world dawn for the first time, with the effulgence of an assured knowledge! In hundreds, I may say thousands of minds I have seen this absolute knowledge take the place of a dim, doubting, mystical religious faith, which is seldom or never a real, earnest belief. I believed, perhaps, in my early days of methodism, as earnestly as any one; but it was very different from my present state.

And the happiness of the two beliefs, were they equally assured to us; what a difference is here! The evangelical Christian believes in a hell of eternal tortures for a large proportion of all the souls who have lived and who live upon this planet. I think a real, earnest belief in this would drive any mind to insanity. I cannot see how it is consistent with the happiness of any being, — God, angel, or man. It has been said, that if but one soul were struggling in the hopeless torments of an eternal hell, all the hosts of heaven would hang over its battlements in sorrowing woe, and weep such tears of pitying agony over the lost soul, as would extinguish the everlasting burnings, wash out the slain of sin, and float the redeemed one up to paradise. It is not possible for men to be truly happy, with the idea of hell remaining in the mind, even as a possibility for any being.

But when there comes to the mind the assurance of eternal progression for every spirit in the universe, the idea is full of love and joy — love of the Infinite Love, and joy in the Infinite Joy in the universe of spirits.

Beyond all other considerations to me, is that of having been the instrument of such an inestimable good to so many of my fellow beings. Were my toils much harder, and my sacrifices much greater, I should feel repaid a thousand fold; and now, as a humble medium of often undeveloped spirits, I prize my work beyond any earthly magnificence.

In the announcement of the free circles, the poor were invited to attend, and especially those who were grieving for the loss of relations and near friends. My table has often, almost daily, been surrounded by groups of mourners, whose mourning has been turned into joy, by the unmistakable and overwhelming evidence of spirit presence and identity. Wives, parted from husbands, and husbands from wives, have met them here, and interchanging their greetings. Many who came to laugh, have remained to weep; and skeptics, full of proud scorn at tippings and rappings, have been convinced that the departed "still live."

In some cases these scenes have been very affecting. In such calamities as the loss of the *Arctic*, friends and relations have met at my table those, whose deaths they feared, but of whose fate they were still uncertain.¹⁹⁷ I remember a lady, whose husband had been an under officer on that vessel. Most of his relations had given him up for lost, but she clung to the hope that he might yet return to her. In this state of mind her brother brought her to my room; soon a message was spelled out to her, by the alphabet, and the name of her husband given. Her first feeling was that of poignant grief; but she soon became calm, and was soothed by an affectionate communication, which assured her that her husband lived, and loved her still, in a world to which she could henceforth look forward with a joyful assurance.

The free circles became known over the whole country, and were to thousands the first step in spiritual progress, and the knowledge of immortality. Those who got their first tests of me, were not satisfied with this; they generally visited other mediums, and were favored with various manifestations. Among the most convincing of these are those of the rapping mediums, as the "Fox girls." Mrs. Brown, the eldest of these sisters, has been one of the most favored mediums of these manifestations. The "raps" made in her presence and vicinity, are clear, loud, vibrating, and varying in character with each individual spirit. They sound as if made with a heavy mallet. There is no darkening of the room, in the usual circles, and no possibility of deception. All is fair and open. Messages are spelled out with great rapidity;

¹⁹⁷ The American paddle steamer *Arctic* was lost off the Grand Banks, September 27, 1854, on a run from Liverpool to New York, after it collided with the French screw schooner *Vesta*. A few of its passengers and crew survived, but as many as 350 did not.

and when the circle is favorable, persons are touched with spirit hands, bells rung, and other physical manifestations had.

I have said little of other mediums, as my time for years has been so taken up with my own work, that I have had little opportunity of knowing personally of them. Some professed mediums, I do not question are deceivers, and some are themselves deceived. Some have seemed to me to be in a mixed condition, sometimes the instruments of genuine communications, and at others either deceiving, or themselves deceived. I have been, myself, in many instances, the medium of false communications; it may be from my own fault, or from some discordance in the persons seeking communications, and so, I presume, it must be with other mediums.

The work of the free circles was for a season. Whether it is to be again taken up and continued, by me or others, I cannot say. After a year of steady toil, without change or relaxation, during which I had been sustained better than I feared, having received just enough to meet my expenses, I had a monition to vary the scene by travel, and visiting different places; so in the spring of 1856, I left New York, and visited Buffalo, Cleaveland, and Cincinnati, making shorter stops at intermediate points of lesser importance. Of this journey, I will give some account in another chapter. As I look back over the work of this year, in which I was brought into contact with so many persons, the time seems very brief and marked by so few incidents, that I can scarcely give any other account than that given by the ancient medium — “the poor have the gospel preached unto them.” In all the future I shall be glad that I have done this work, or rather that I was found a suitable instrument for it to be done through. By its means the facts and principles of spiritualism have found a wider diffusion than they could have done, probably by any other means. I ask no higher reward.

[*Nichols' Monthly* (Yellow Springs), August 1856]

CHAPTER XIX.¹⁹⁸

A WESTERN TOUR.

Leaving New York, the scene of long, arduous, and I am happy to believe,

¹⁹⁸ Original text mistakenly has “XXIX.”

useful labors, I went up, through the grand scenery of the Hudson, to Albany, and thence westward to Syracuse, where I made my first stop. Here I found some earnest spiritualists, and received many visitors. After two days of almost constant test giving to curious, and often anxious inquiries, I went to Rochester.

This flourishing city, one of the principle in Western New York, celebrated for its flouring mills, was the scene of the commencement of the spiritual excitement, now spread over the most advanced portions of the world. Here the "Fox Girls" were first developed as mediums, and met with bitter persecution and much success. But "a prophet hath no honor in his own city." Spiritualism prevails less in Rochester than in many less favored localities. It is related of Jesus, that the people where he resided during his early years, when they heard of his miracles and teachings, were quite incredulous, and said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Do we not know his parents, brothers and sisters?" Of course there could be nothing wonderful about a man who had grown up among them; who had been to the same village school; played at the same games, and earned his living by a common handicraft.

It is true that many of the most enlightened citizens of Rochester gave the phenomena of spirit communications a candid investigation. Committees appointed by large meetings of citizens, after a patient and faithful examination, made such reports as satisfied many of the absence of trick or imposture. Still, to a great extent, spiritualism in Rochester justifies the adage, "familiarity breeds contempt." I found less interest there than in many other places. Church Phariseeism, or fashionable religion, has a strong hold in the community, who are not inclined to reverence revelations which were not made either long ago, or at a great distance. But as all revelations must be made at some time, and in some place, the position of such persons is not very philosophical.

At Buffalo, I found a much greater interest, and here I remained for several days, and was visited by a large number of persons. The "Age of Progress," a spirited as well as spiritual paper, is published here, and the cause moves forward with much energy.¹⁹⁹ Some of the most remarkable physical manifestations ever known, have taken place at Buffalo; particularly in the families of Mr. Davenport and Mr. Brooks, Suspicion has been thrown upon the manifestations in the Davenport family, from the alleged fact that the mediums, two boys, have sometimes appeared to join the mischievousness incident to their age, to the manifestations; but the genuine

¹⁹⁹ Published by Stephen Albro (1788-1866).

character of the marvels done here, has been attested by too many unimpeachable and clear-minded witnesses to permit me to discredit the manifestations.²⁰⁰

In the case of Miss [Sarah] Brooks, there seems to be no doubt that spirits play upon the pianoforte, without the intervention of human hands, in a very wonderful manner. Many mediums have been impressed to play; or their hands have been used to produce music they were utterly incapable of playing without such aid; but the playing on instruments by spirit hands, or spirit power alone, though more common, perhaps, seems more marvelous.

At Buffalo, I was visited by a gentleman, who was affected with palsy, so that one side of his body was nearly useless. One arm had hung at his side, without power of motion, for years. Though not a healing medium, I was strongly impressed to benefit this man, and taking hold of his palsied arm, I raised it up, and became the medium of an invigorating power, which enabled him to move it by his own volition. I had thus, in my own experience, a demonstration of this spiritual power of healing, and see no reason to doubt that it has been exercised to some extent in all ages. In animal magnetism we have an example of a spirit in the form, acting upon another so fit to produce paralysis, somnolence, and clairvoyance, to quiet pain, and cure disease. Why may not spirits, out of the form, have as great or greater power over those who are susceptible to each influence? Then is abundant evidence that spirits do act upon the human nerve system, both directly and through mediums. It may be questioned, in the above mentioned case, whether the spirits magnetized and so cured the paralytic, through me, or influenced, and impelled me to magnetize him; but in many cases, the spirits do themselves magnetize and cure the sick. Such patients must, however, be impressible, and might probably be developed as mediums.

Leaving Buffalo, after a week of interesting work, in which I enjoyed the society of many friendly and excellent persons, I went to Cleveland, which is also a headquarters of spiritualism, and has its weekly paper, the "Spiritual Universe," devoted to the cause of immortality, which has enlisted here, men of wealth and social influence, as well as many intelligent and earnest reformers.²⁰¹ The spiritualists of Cleveland have a hall set apart specially for lectures on spiritualism, and here Mr. Pardee, who was the pleasant companion of my tour, addressed the public, in the trance state, so much to the general satisfaction, that he was engaged to return, after our visit to Cincinnati, and minister to them in spiritual things.

²⁰⁰ Ira Erastus Davenport (1839-1911) and William Henry Davenport (1841-1877).

²⁰¹ Its editor was Linus Smith Everett.

Cincinnati was the western terminus of this tour, and the place to which I seemed to have been specially sent. I had become acquainted in New York with Dr. T. L. Nichols, and Mrs. Mary S. Gove Nichols, who are widely known by their medical, reformatory and spiritual writings. Through them I had also become acquainted with some of the most worthwhile spiritualists in Cincinnati; and it was partly owing to their solicitation that I wished to visit Cincinnati at this time: but to my own personal wish was added the impelling influence of my guardian spirits. These friends, it is known, have taken the high ground of the freedom of the affections, as the necessary condition of true relations, spiritual and material. They have been denounced as Free Lovers by those who have not read their works, or are incapable of understanding their meaning. They were therefore met at Cincinnati by a virulent opposition, on the part of those who understood the freedom of love to mean an unrestrained licentiousness. Dr. Nichols met this opposition by giving, by impression, and under remarkable circumstances, a lecture entitled "Free Love a Doctrine of Spiritualism — a lecture so satisfactory that its publication was demanded."²⁰² This was followed by the introduction into the Spiritual Conference of a resolution denouncing Free Love, and denying that it was a doctrine of spiritualism. Dr. Nichols met his opponents in debate, before crowded audiences, for four successive Sundays, when it was brought to a close, and the resolution lost by a decided majority.

This occurred a short time previous to my visits. At each of these debates Dr. Nichols had announced that I was coming. When I arrived, he welcomed me to his residence, on Broadway, where I met at private circles many highly intelligent investigators. My friends had taken a room for me on Eighth street, over Mr. Pease's Book-store; my coming had been well advertised, and orderly arrangements made, so that I was soon crowded with visitors. One of the first of them happened to be a lawyer of the highest standing at the bar of Cincinnati — a gentleman free from prejudice, and of much intellectual courage. The tests of spirit presence and identity, given him, were so startling, that he related them to the lawyers and judges of the courts then in session, and the consequence was that for two weeks my room was constantly visited by members of the legal profession. I have never come in contact with minds so fitted for investigation, or who so well understood the weight of evidence. Never were the tests more clear and satisfactory — less marred by discord — than with these gentlemen who had made it their business to search for truth

²⁰² Thomas Nichols' lecture, "Free Love, a Doctrine of Spiritualism," delivered in Foster Hall in Cincinnati, on December 22, 1855, then printed as a pamphlet (Cincinnati: F. Bly, 1856) and excerpted in many newspapers, created a sensation within the spiritualist community as well as with the public at large.

and detect error.

During my stay in Cincinnati, I had some hundreds of visitors, mostly of the most intellectual and worthful class, living with friends, and rent and advertising being freely given me, I was at no expense, and received enough to pay the debt of borrowed money, which I have mentioned in a former chapter, and place my family in a comfortable home. It was a pleasant, and in many ways, a profitable season.

Among the friends of spiritualism in Cincinnati, who have given labor, and made sacrifice for the cause, is Dr. Edward Meade, a physician of the insane, who has established a large and well-edited weekly paper, entitled the *Spiritual Messenger*. To its candid and faithful notices, often in the leading editorials, I am much indebted for my success.

Cincinnati is an intellectual and artistic city, to a considerable extent, but still a city of heartiness and liberality of feeling and sentiment. It is remarkable for geniality. A perfect stranger there talks to you like an old acquaintance. People you never saw before seem interested in your business, and will go out of their way to do you a favor. In dealing with them, if you ask for less than five cents' worth of any article, they give it to you, refusing any compensation. Pennies are scarcely used at all, except at the post-office. These are little things; but evidences of a magnanimity, which is more characteristic of Southern and Western, than of Northern and Eastern cities. There may be more intellect in the East, but I have found more heart in the West.

Leaving my friends in Cincinnati, I returned to New York to arrange my business, so as to be free to make another visit to the West, which I did a few weeks after, stopping at several of the same points, and also visiting new ones. One of the most interesting of these was Yellow Springs, Ohio, a beautiful and romantic village, about seventy miles north-east of Cincinnati. To this place I was invited by a few prominent citizens, and though I could spend but two days here, much good, I believe, was accomplished.

Yellow Springs is the site of Antioch College, founded by the "Christian" denomination; but intended to be liberal, and tolerant of all creeds and opinions. It is under the Presidency of Hon. Horace Mann, whose labors in the cause of education have given him a world wide celebrity.

Antioch College is intended to be the great liberal college of the West and its professions of unsectarian toleration have attracted to it liberal and progressive students from most of the Western States. Many have come from Oberlin, where the religious discipline of Presbyterianism is maintained with such severity, as to drive away those who are too far advanced to be bound by creeds. It is the boast of Oberlin, that no young student comes there and remains six months without being converted. There are exceptions; but it is

true that the machinery put in motion for the purpose, does succeed in psychologizing most of those who are susceptible to such impressions.

Yellow Springs at the time of my visit was, and still more, had been the scene of a violent excitement, which spiritualism did much to allay. The friends, whose guest I had been in Cincinnati — Dr. and Mrs. Nichols, — had leased the extensive Water Cure, near the village, intending to open it for its original purpose, and also as a school for intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. It is a lovely place; a romantic glen, deep shaded, with springs of living waters, and a mill stream near the house, which is spacious and beautiful, having accommodations for about one hundred persons.

When it was known at Yellow Springs that Dr. Nichols had leased the place, a violent opposition sprung up, headed by Mr. Mann and the Faculty of the College, who feared that the proximity of so noted a champion of “Free Love” and Spiritualism would be an injury to the College. Mr. Mann was especially violent in his denunciations. Public meetings were called, at which he made exciting speeches, and this excitement, threats of violence, and some difficulty on the part of the proprietor in getting possession, had prevented the Nichols from establishing their institution. This difficulty, spiritualism was destined to overcome. Nearly all the friends of the Nichols were, like themselves, spiritualists, and those who were converted, consequently ceased their opposition.

When therefore the manifestations made during my visit had converted, or, at least, confounded most of the prominent citizens of the place, and several members of the College Faculty, there remained no obstacle to them taking possession of their property, as soon as legal possession could be given. On visiting Cincinnati, after leaving Yellow Springs, I told them they could go at any time — that the battle had been fought by the spirits and the victory won. When the excitement first began, the spirits told Dr. and Mrs. Nichols that the battle would be fought and the victory gained, almost without their striking a blow. They removed to Yellow Springs early in July, and established the Memnonia Institute, a school of health and life, without any active opposition, and to the great satisfaction of many who were interested in their success. Mr. Mann, almost alone, persists in considering their doctrines dangerous, and in asserting that they are insane or corrupt. But he will find few to sustain him in theory, or in the violence to which he seemed confident at first, that it would lead. The time is well past when rights can be set at naught and people persecuted for opinions' sake. Such bigotry, intolerance, and proscription belong to a darker age. The students of Antioch belong to a mere advanced era, than that of the Inquisition, and I venture to predict, that from this time forward it will be no discredit there, for one to be

a spiritualist, or to believe that all men and all women should be free to live the truest life, and enjoy the greatest good of which they are capable.

My western journeys seem to have had two great objects, combined, of course, with many lesser ones. The first was to give the evidences of spiritualism to many of the leading minds of the West, by my visits to Cincinnati, Cleveland, and other points; the other, the work I have described at Yellow Springs and Antioch College.

I would gladly visit every similar institution of learning in the United States. The students, I doubt not, would joyfully welcome the opportunity of investigating spiritualism; but the greater portion of them are under the rule of sectarian bigotry to such an extent, that no access could be had to the minds of the students. But the time is coming when these prejudices must give way, and when immortality and the spiritual life will be considered as important subjects of study as Greek or Algebra.

I may mention here some facts relating to the Memnonia Institute, interesting to me, as spiritual phenomena. Mrs. Nichols is a medium of high and varied capacity. Afflicted with a severe illness, she was taken in charge by her spirit friends, and guided to a cure under circumstances which would have been fatal in nine cases out of ten. Under this spirit direction, a series of abscesses in the lungs were treated and cured. Her principal physician was the spirit of Hahnemann, the founder of Homoeopathy. There could, be no better test, for neither she nor Dr. Nichols had any faith in Homoeopathy, nor any knowledge of its medicines.

The spirit of Hahnemann would appear to her, and prescribe a medicine suited to some new condition; this she tested by going to a homoeopathic physician, Dr. Ehrmann, of Cincinnati, and asking him the symptoms to which such a medicine were suited. In all cases she found that the spirit had prescribed the medicine suited to the case, according to the Homoeopathic practice, and the result predicted never failed. Being also spiritually clairvoyant, she was enabled to look into her lung and examine the size, position, and condition of the abscesses as they formed, opened, and discharged their contents into the air-tubes. This course, combined with a course of water cure, resulted in a perfect recovery, although the case was dangerous, and with most persons would have been fatal. It would be interesting to know how much of the insight into disease and skill in treatment for which Mrs. Nichols has gained a wide celebrity, are due to the aid of guardian spirits, and the higher range of clairvoyance, which seems to come from their influence.

CHAPTER XX.

FREE LOVE.

There is much controversy now about what is termed Free Love. Many spiritualists have declared that Freedom of the affections is not a Doctrine of Spiritualism, or is only taught by low and undeveloped spirits. I have been led to inquire in my interior Life, where the Law and the Testimony are given by my guardian spirits about this Doctrine.

The answer to me has been, "Those who say that freedom to believe what is true, and to love what is lovely, is not of the Heavens, or is not a Doctrine of spiritualism, either know not what they affirm, or they speak falsely."

The facts seem to be that men and women, who are partially developed, misunderstand the word Freedom. There can be no Freedom, but in order. No man is free to do what is wrong. He has liberty, but if he chooses to do wrong, he is not free, but enslaved. Again, people do not know what is meant by Love. Many who are gross and animal in their life, think that Love means amative excitement. This is the lowest definition of Love, that a human being can make. A law within, continually cries out against the freedom of lust. When men have no love, but animal desire, the strong principle of restraint must hold them in check, to protect their fellow beings against them. Such natures have caused the vile definition of Free Love that now obtains, wherever there is not clearness of understanding, or purity of Life. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God — that is, they shall see the True and the Good, and know that Free Love means, that every faculty of man should be free to have its proper, and orderly development. A wise man has said, "there is no regeneration but in Freedom." We know that men have been generated badly, in disease, moral and physical. In order to regeneration, or orderly development, every faculty must have its Loves respected — must be free to follow its attraction, or love. The love of music, of art, of the various branches of industry, must be free. No faculty should have its Love crucified. The man who loves order, neatness, cleanliness, sweetness, beauty and use, should be free to love them, and to create all the use and beauty he can, and to associate with those whose help will be most useful, elevating, and improving to him. The alimentive faculty should be free to seek its loves in food. We know that this faculty is enslaved, and depraved now; that men eat pork and tobacco,

and love them, so great is the slavery of this faculty. "The truth shall make you free." The great dietetic truth has been preached, till men have paused to think and feel; to see that they are not free when they are enslaved by a love for poisonous food and stimulants.

As every faculty should be free, surely the amative faculty should be elevated into this freedom. It is now more degraded than any faculty, except the alimentive; and it is protected in its degradation by law and custom. Legalized sensualism is destroying its millions in the church and the world. The few faculties that are developed in us, are much in bondage. Reverence is debauched to revere a God and a religion false as the food we take. The tobacco we chew, and the pork we eat, are very fair correspondences of our revengeful God, and our bigoted and persecuting religion. Again, Caution, instead of being used legitimately to protect us against evils, is made to horrify us with the fear and dread of a burning Hell, that the aforesaid God has ordained us to, or not saved us from, although it is said that he is Almighty and all Good.

Acquisitiveness, instead of acquiring all goods and truths, is set to get money, that it may be spent in the lowest uses of life. I might pursue this analysis, and show much more fully how the faculties of man are enslaved and debauched. But the philosophical mind will finish the work that I have begun, very readily, and those who can see nothing in freedom of the affections but lust, can't be helped by my reasoning. I mean to be distinctly understood on this question, by all who can understand me. I have been made a useful instrument in demonstrating individual immortality. I have heard the reproach of Free Love, meaning free lust, cast upon the most advanced spiritualists of the age by those who are either ignorant or wicked. Now I, once for all, declare that I am a free lover, as much as I am a free believer. I am as free to love the good, as I am to believe the true. Love is to me the sum total of the attractions of all the faculties to their true uses, and their consequent happiness.

I believe the amative faculty should be free for its use, as much as any other faculty. Its use is reproduction, and not selfish and lustful gratification. I believe in the Law of Progression in Harmony, given from a Heavenly Society, for whose members I have been four years a medium, viz: sexual union is only to be had when the wisdom of the Harmony, that is, the best and highest wisdom of those who love, demands a child. This law not only cuts up by the root illegal license, but the legalized sensuality of marriage. So far as it is obeyed, power will come into us to develop our faculties. Few children will be born of those who are sufficiently elevated to live according to this law, and those few will not be hung for crimes, or die of the weakness and disease of

an inherited licentiousness. I am one of those free lovers who take their stand on this eternal law of progression; who seek to emancipate men from the domination of sensual appetites and passions, and to free the whole man, and leave each faculty subject to the interior law of development.

Men may say that such principles are impracticable; and they may say this truly for themselves, but they cannot assert this of me, or of others. They may as well say that I have not the power given me to move tables by spiritual influence, or that I am not a medium for the manifestations detailed in this book, because they are not. Because freedom means sensuality to the low and undeveloped mind of man, it by no means proves that it has such signification to those who are seeking to have their lives unfolded in the order of truth and purity.

Whatever enslaves me, body or spirit, and hinders me from living according to the law of my life, the light within, whether it be a church creed, or discipline, a marriage ceremony, or the fear of a false public opinion and custom, is evil, and is to be expurgated as fast as is consistent with the greatest good of my own existence and those to whom I am related.

I do not say that we should not remain in bonds, even when much evil results from them. We must, if the good to be gained is greater than could otherwise be done. I would not remove fetters from my limbs, if by so doing I must break the limbs and spoil my life and its uses. I would even wait for the bonds to rust off, if enough of good were to be thus accomplished. I do not war against the institution of slavery, or of marriage. Both are for the immature man; for protection and care. But when those who are in bonds grow too strong and too wise to be bound, they will make war for themselves, and I will bid them God speed.

What I have to do is to iterate and reiterate the great truth, taught by spiritualism, which is, that man is only a man — a true and happy being, as he is faithful to the Law of Right written in his heart. Whatever hinders this fidelity is evil, and only evil continually, whether we can escape it or not. Freedom is man's birthright or heritage. Man's life is love, and if he is not free in his love nature, he is a slave. Just so far as he is not free to follow his highest love, free to do the highest right that is shown to him, just so far he falls short of the true manhood.

Those who are conscious that their love is evil, and that they would be vile if they were at liberty, should put on the manacles of law and custom, just as a man who knows that he is too weak and diseased to refrain from drunkenness, would do well to go and get himself shut up in an insane hospital, or in some other prison, that his diseased appetite may have the

benefit of a strait waistcoat.

Those persons who have accused me and others, of licentiousness, because we believe in freedom of the affections, have in several instances been proved to be guilty of the same crimes that they declared that I, and others wished to commit. I have facts of seduction and abortion against the persons who have been most active and bitter in condemning Free Love, and was only sensualism.

Set a rogue to catch a rogue, is an old and sensible proverb — men show what their own ruling loves are by the judgment they form of others. The reputation of the most advanced spiritualists, who receive the Law of Progression, which limits the sexual union to a wise reproduction, has been manufactured from the evil and impure lives of their traducers — the scribes and pharisees of the present day.

It has been well said that a man's character is in his own keeping; but that men do what they will with his reputation. It is enough for me, that I hold myself amenable to the law of life, given in my interior by my guardian angels, and that those who believe in the great and redeeming truths of freedom, do the same. Let men spoil our reputation if they can; they cannot hurt our character, or injure the peace that comes from obedience.

The time is near at hand when the disgrace and obloquy that is cast upon those who would "break *every* yoke, and let the oppressed go free," will seem as dark a stain upon the annals of civilized man, as the persecutions and murders for freedom of belief are now seen to be by all who have what is called common sense. But the masses are being awakened and instructed by the contest now raging on this subject; they are coming to see and know that they can no more feel according to law, than they can think, or believe according to church prescription.

It becomes spiritualists, who believe in life according to an interior law, and who see the corruptions of the church and the world, to live honestly according to their convictions. They should obey their highest sense of right, instead of asking, "What will others think of my actions? Will this, or that, be popular?" There is only one safe ground whereon the human spirit can rest, in this, or any world. That is, honesty, fidelity to the light within; the law written in the human heart and constitution.

The more truly we live, the more clearly we can see our duty. "He that will do his will shall know of the doctrine." Persons who are driven along by animal impulse, without bringing their motives to the light within, and allowing conscience to make its stern decision, may call themselves free, but they will find soon that their so-called freedom is a base bondage. Persons who change one sensual mate for another, under the name of FREE LOVE, are

as much in bondage, perhaps more, than those who are stagnating in a false married life. Like the sick man, they change the place, but keep the pain. The part of wisdom is to live above the tyranny of the senses, and to accumulate power to overcome difficulties, and to see duties clearly. All is not gold that glitters, and much that is called freedom is abject slavery.

Spiritual emancipation must begin at the basis of life. We should be emancipated from a debasing and destroying sensualism, in marriage and out of it. We should be freed from an impure, stimulating and diseasing diet, of deceased animals, and from condiments; from tea, coffee, and all other drugs; — especially, and above all, we should be emancipated from tobacco, the poison of all the health, the bane of all true love. We should have our spirits baptised with truth, and our bodies washed with pure water daily. All our surroundings should be clean and pure. When we have done all this, we have a true standing on the earth, and a right to live from the heavenly interior, which will continually flow into our spirits.

Reader, let us pray continually in heart and work, for this pure and holy life, in which alone we can be true disciples, or able apostles of FREE LOVE.

SPIRIT-RAPPING

IN

GLASGOW IN 1864.

A TRUE NARRATIVE

BY

ONE OF THOSE PRESENT

"I can call spirits from the vasty deep!"

"Who, so can I, or so can any man—

But, will they come, when you do call for them?"

HENRY IV.

"Aye! There's the rub!"

HAMLET.

GLASGOW:
THOMAS MURRAY & SON.
1864.

PREFACE.

THE facts narrated in the few following pages were written immediately after each *Séance*, and are correct.

For the opinions expressed in the introduction and elsewhere, the various remarks made, and explanations given, the Author is alone responsible. Those of the other gentlemen present at the *Séances*, who may see this pamphlet, and readers in general, must judge for themselves as to their probability or otherwise.

The details of the final *Séance* are, in every particular, unadorned truth. The questions and the written Spirit-answers are in the possession of

THE AUTHOR.

SPIRIT-RAPPING.

WHAT is Spirit Rapping? Its claims are lofty — it lifts the veil of Isis — opens the Portals of the Tomb — levels that dread barrier before which all men in all ages have hitherto knelt in vain. By it is the seal of silence broken, and the living have converse with the dead. It pries into Eternity; fathoms the secrets of the unknown; all highest reach of Philosophy left far behind — finds the sternest difficulties simple — the unsolved enigmas of the wise easy, even as a child's puzzle.

All this, and much more, it does, not by some transcendent discovery, authoritative revelation of Religion, or voice even as of God's — but by means of that exceedingly commonplace piece of household furniture, a wooden table! Yes! verily! the Spirits of the dead; the souls that in unutterable joy or woe have looked face to face on their Maker, who have solved the great mystery — On whom the inexpressible awfulness of Eternity has passed — return; to tilt tables, to make odd noises, to break china, to deliver equivocal oracles, to wait the call of questionable mediums, to answer trivial inquiries; and, generally, to do all these things in so purposeless, uncertain and blundering a manner, that even the stoutest believers must often doubt and stumble.

For ourselves, we refuse to credit this. *We believe that the dead are holy and may NOT be meddled with.* Or, if in truth, they may be summoned from that solemn other world, apprehend that their coming would be as that of Samuel's when he spake, "why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" and Saul "bowed himself unto the ground and was sore afraid."

Spirit Rapping then, independently of the teachings of Religion and Philosophy, assumes to settle —

1st, That men live after death.

2nd, That the dead do not rest until a general resurrection, but at once enter on a Spirit life.

3rd, That remaining at large, being cognisant of what is going on in this world, and having full possession of their active powers, they can, of their own free will, or at the bidding of others, return to earth — be their abode heaven or hell.

4th, That they in a manner attain to omniscience, notwithstanding which they are constantly in error; and, in their communications with the living, make the most melancholy exhibitions of themselves.

5th, That the Spirits manifest themselves physically by various noises, such as rappings, creakings, sounding of footfalls, ringing of bells, hammering, sawing, &c., have a general disposition to smash crockery, and in an especial manner take possession of the tables which they rap on, tilt, turn; and, it is said, even suspend in the air. Now these manifestations, though ridiculous, and to our minds utterly beneath the dignity of any, the least respectable of Spirits, are, *if true*, not the less extremely important — as they introduce us to *effect* without *cause*, unless we believe that the invisible Spirits move the tables; and this again involves the assumption that disembodied Spirit, otherwise than through *matter*, *can* physically affect matter. It is evident that the tables could be easily moved by the feet, knees or hands of the Mediums, and even involuntarily (this Faraday has proved) by the hands of the performing circle. It may even be that the hands, after long pressure on the table, acquire some electric or yet unknown power capable of causing motion; and before we resort to Spirits, we would go the length of assuming that the circle of performers might charge the table, like an electric receiver, with, say, “animal magnetism;” or even, if driven to extremity, with a positive brain force, giving *power of volition* to the table.

Until all these modes of movement, down even to the last preposterous one, are eliminated, we are *not justified* in presuming supernatural interference. At all events, effect without cause is impossible, at least impossible to be conceived by finite minds.

We now proceed to details of the various *Séances* held in 9 West Regent Street, Glasgow, under the surveillance of some sixteen gentlemen, who, failing to procure the “Marshall Mediums,” had engaged from London a Mr. C — kl — n, warranted by the aforesaid Mediums to be even more highly favored in spiritual matters than themselves — a Medium of thirteen years’ standing — an intimate of Mr. Home’s, and a powerful contributor to the spiritual press.

1st *Séance*. Twelve present. Medium, seized by the afflatus, wrote a communication purporting to be from his guardian Spirit, (George Fox, the Quaker), to the effect that “he, the Medium, was not in a favorable physical condition for manifestations that evening, and must not perform.”

Medium did not, however, object to our trying for ourselves, which we did, fruitlessly, for about an hour, (don’t laugh, please!) entering into conversation with him from time to time, and hearing some very marvellous stories, of which we only recollect that he, the Medium, “had been carried through the air, seventy-five feet in a straight line, and then

dropped undamaged;" also, "that recently in Washington, whilst senators and soldiers, secretaries and under secretaries were waiting, dozens deep, for audience with Abe Lincoln," no sooner did that great man hear the name of the still greater C — kl — n, than at once, &c., &c. Medium relating how he had a two hours' "Spiritual conversation with the President, and gave him much important information," which does not seem as yet to have borne any fruit.

Now, as regards the Medium's unfavorable *physical* condition, a sceptic would object that it was an unfavorable *mental* one. That, before commencing operations, he, the Medium, wished some opportunity of taking *mental stock* of the company; at least, we twice caught his eye fixed on ourselves, and noticed others undergoing a like scrutiny.

The communication was also written backwards (so that we had to read it by the reflection of a mirror), for what reason we know not, unless to add some affectation of mystery, and to have *more the appearance* of coming from the Guardian Spirit than from the Medium. It is by no means difficult to learn to write backwards, whilst it has this advantage for a Medium, that it exercises him in *reading the questions* put, which he will generally see reversed, if allowed to see them at all, when in process of writing by his questioners.

2nd *Séance*. After slight tilting of table, Medium requested one of the party to write three relationships on three separate slips of paper, such as:

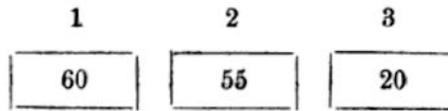
1	2	3
Father.	Mother.	Sister.

and to fold them one by one, and put them in centre of table. Medium then, with a violent trembling and agitation of the hand, with the help of a pencil put one of the three aside. He then requested the three names of the three relationships, thus: —

1	2	3
John.	Mary.	Jane.

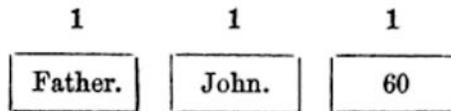
to be treated in same manner, he also putting one of the three aside.

The same manipulation takes place with the three ages: —



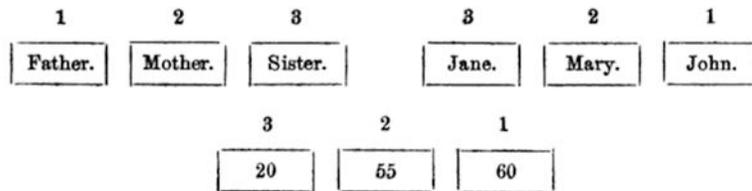
and when the three papers put aside by the Medium, containing respectively a relationship, a name, and an age are examined, they allude, or ought to allude, to the same party.

Now it requires no Spirits, and very little conjuring, to do this exceedingly simple trick. The questioner does not shake the papers together, (at least did not do so in this instance), and in all *probability* has written all the particulars of say "Father," *on the first of each of three series of slips*, thus: —



In this case, Medium having picked up first of first series, will also take first of the two remaining series, and is of course correct.

The questioner may, however, seek to puzzle the Medium, and write papers in this arrangement: —



If, now, Medium takes first or third of each series, he is right in two and wrong in one. Should he, however, take second of each series he is still correct in all three; and, were we a Medium, we should generally fix on second of each series, as being least likely to be disarranged. At the worst, if each series of three slips is shaken up and disarranged in every possible way, the chances are in favor of their being right in two out of three of the particulars; and, in both cases tried at this Séance, the Medium was only right in two out of three.

By this process Mr. Z., being informed that his sister was present, was requested to ask a question. Mr. Z., without shading his hand or hiding motion of pencil, wrote, "Are you happy?" Two of the gentlemen near him objected "that this question was too easy," "too usually put as a first question;" and, moreover, that it was quite possible for the Medium, (who sat opposite), from the motion of hand and pencil, to make an easy guess at what was written. Another question was therefore substituted, hand and pencil being carefully concealed from the Medium. The question was, "Is Spirit Rapping untrue?" After considerable hesitation, Spirit seized the Medium, and he wrote backwards a sheetful of paper, the contents being an indignant epistle from Mr. Z.'s Spirit sister, to the effect that she, his sister, "*would not* answer the second question, but *the first*; that she had *inspired* him to ask that first question, and was *astonished* that her brother should consider any other question *more important* than one concerning her happiness, and ending, 'I am happy.'" Now, this was certainly clever; but although Mr. Z., after so merited a scolding, refused to proceed further, it was a cleverness not calculated to convince a sceptic. It was evident the performer had taken advantage of his knowledge of the first question to conceal his ignorance of the second, and had further seized the opportunity of making an impression, by introducing "the scolding sister." It is also to be observed that "the scolding sister" assumes, though she will not answer it, that she *knows* the second question, stating the first to be *more important*. Now it was *not* so, as the answer to the second question involved the possibility of there being any *answer at all* given to the first.

After this, several questions were written by Dr. Y. and other parties, so that Medium could see nothing, and in *no* case was any correct answer given. Medium now abruptly said, "Let us try some physical manifestations;" but nothing whatever took place, the table being a large and heavy one.

3rd Séance. On entering, we were informed that decided tilting had taken place, and were requested aloud to watch the Medium. The table

had been changed, and was now a light somewhat rickety piece of goods on four legs, having projecting flaps supported by brackets. (See plate 1.) The Medium sat towards corner marked with 1/x, his legs immediately under the brackets. The table had been tilted *from* the Medium. Watched the Medium attentively, sitting on his right hand at a little distance from table, so that we could observe his hands and legs perfectly. Noticed a strong muscular movement of outer fleshy part of right hand, which rested a little on side of table at 2/x, tending slightly to move the table round. Called Medium's attention to this, and no further motion took place with hands.

Now watched the legs for some time, nothing taking place. Medium complained, and requested us to join the circle. We did so, but still watched; and, observing inclination on the part of the table to rise, suddenly looked under and found Medium's legs crossed, and knee of crossed leg resting against the bracket. Protested against what we saw; and, bringing on a dispute, were deposed from office of watcher. '

The table now showing considerable liveliness, Dr. X. sat down under it, at once stopping the manifestations. After some slight pause, the Medium got impatient and requested Dr. X. to rise. Dr. X. (feeling it necessary not to exhibit distrust) protested his "*entire confidence*" in the Medium's honesty, but at same time declared that he could have no faith unless he remained under the table. It was, however, soon evident that if *any scepticism* was annoying, "*entire confidence under the table*" was most of all *peculiarly* disagreeable to the Spirits.

The Medium declared himself quite upset, persisting " that the Séance could have no results," " that the Spirits required faith," "that certain conditions must be observed, &c., &c.;" and finally declined to proceed any further that evening.

Here, it must be remarked, that when the Spirits require faith, and at the same time, insist upon conditions which make it *impossible* to have that faith, the Spirits are unreasonable, demanding what they themselves would not have granted in their lifetime; further, when the *principal condition* which is required, seems to be "do not watch the Medium," it is, to say the least, unfortunate.

The only written manifestation this evening was the Medium writing a Spirit letter to Mr. L. Now, Mr. L. having had that forenoon a private Séance, acknowledges having left in Medium's possession three slips containing the names of two deceased brothers, and also of his mother. One of these brothers had been drowned. Mr. L. cannot, however, recollect whether he did or did not mention this fact to the Medium. On the

assumption that he had not mentioned it — Mr. L. having taken considerable interest in the Séances — it is quite possible that the Medium may have made some enquiries, and gathered some, more or less, correct information concerning Mr. L. and his family.

The letter (of which we give a fac-simile in frontispiece), purported to be from the drowned brother, and stated —

“It is pleasant to die, I am here with mother and brother, am as alive as ever I was on earth, &c.,” and after entering into usual statement that death by drowning was rather agreeable than otherwise, was finally signed “Allen.” Now, Allan was the name of one of the two deceased brothers, but “Allan” was not the name of drowned brother. We must, therefore, suppose that the one deceased brother had not only forgotten his own name, but had appropriated ‘that of his other deceased brother; so *crucial a mistake* as this, unless we are to consider it only an extreme instance of the Christian virtue of “having all things in common,” evidently stamped the whole letter a forgery.

We must here guard ourselves against the suspicion of prejudice. In common with the other gentlemen, our object was to arrive at the truth. We had heard much, and read more; were not unwilling to believe, but had never had any personal contact with Mediums. It was only when, by this personal contact, the absurd discrepancy between the means and the end first dawned upon us, and the charlatanism of the Medium became ever more and more apparent, that we settled down into decided hostility. We now proceed to

4th Séance. Six present. Only Medium’s hands on the table, which displayed considerable tilting; the tilting always in *one* direction *from the Medium*.

Medium sat as in Plate 2.²⁰³

The extreme lower edge of hands at junction with wrist resting on edge of table, hands not quite flat, but slightly arched; elbows slightly depressed and coat cuffs always maintaining a curious nearness to the hands, so that it would have been difficult to detect any firm matter, such as a steel rod slipped under the table; even the cuffs themselves, if lined with metal and attached to elbow or shoulder, if pressed against the edge of the table, would tilt it. Do not, however, consider any such complications necessary, the hands alone being quite sufficient, the extreme lower edge of hands *not resting* with remainder of hands on top of table, but on its side (of one

²⁰³ No such plate was included in the pamphlet.

inch in depth). It is manifest that can Medium preserve the appearance of his hands lying flat, and at same time press with slight upward motion on edge of table, table will then tilt *from* him.

Tried this on Medium's table, but could not do it without slightly raising the fingers. Tried at home on a still lighter table, and succeeded; and think, with some little practice, could do it easily on any table of description used by Medium.

Watched Medium's hands narrowly, and *never* in any instance saw the tilting *from* Medium take place, except when hands exactly in position described. Medium at this Séance made no use of his legs, and he now began his performances by Spiritual selection of papers having relationships, names, &c., of which we have described the "Modus operandi" in 2nd Séance. He began with ourselves, and although table uncommonly violent, and Medium's nervous agitation extreme, leading us to expect something more than usual — having taken care to write the slips in no regular order — result an entire failure.

Medium then tried Mr. W., with curious result of all, of five papers being different (whilst they ought all to have agreed). This, on principle of extremes meet, might be considered almost a success.

Dr. X. now sat down and gave — 1st, Relationships; 2nd, Names ; 3rd, Ages ; 4th, Causes of Death; 5th, Where died; and, in the easiest manner to himself, wrote them so that the various particulars of first party would be written on the first of each of the five separate series of slips, and all of second on second, and so on. Medium had taken first of first series, first of second, and so on, but blundered at fifth, consequently four particulars right and only one wrong. Medium seemed to consider this very fair Spirit work, to which we object. That when Medium asserts that he does not *himself choose*, but is simply the material agent of unerring Spirits, gifted with clairvoyance, supernatural power, &c. &c., the selection ought to be entirely correct, and this not only in *all particulars of any one case*, but in *all particulars of all similar cases*, otherwise either there are no Spirits in the case, or the Medium is no Medium.

Dr. X. was now considered in communication with his father, and wrote a question, and was much perplexed by the answer, stating it to be correct, and that it also contained a colloquial expression of his father's, of which colloquialism it was impossible that Medium could have had any knowledge. The answer was, "I have, my son." The expression, "My son," Dr. X. afterwards told us was usual with his father, who would say, "Yes, my son," "No, my son," "I will, my son," or, as in this case, "I have, my son."

Now it must be confessed as *the first words of first communication* from presumed Spirit of his father to Dr. X., that these words should be the exact phrase customary to that father, was sufficiently startling.

Dr. X. was questioned afterwards if any biography published of his Father, or if any writings could have been seen by Medium, from which he could have appropriated the phrase; but no solution could be arrived at, and matters looked decidedly Spiritual.

We mention this case particularly, as analogous cases which are unsolved, if *all particulars known* might, as this case in point eventually was, be found ' equally easy of solution.

That solution was very simple. Whilst debating over it, Mr. O. joined, and at once said I had exactly same answer to question I put to my Father, "I have, my Son." Therefore the "My Son," was simply habitually used by the Medium as an *intensive*. "I have, my Son," being more impressive than "I have," alone.

The Spirits then wrote a communication stating that they wished each of us to have a separate Séance with Medium, and arrangements were made to that effect.

Separate Séances. 1st. Mr. O. reports many of the answers correct, or presumably so, and that finally having asked, "Have you seen — , and is he happy?" Medium became fearfully excited, went into a trance, and giving name (which Mr. O. does not know how Medium came to knowledge of), spoke, " He is happy; but that a barrier existed that day preventing further communication, and that Mr. O. must persevere, and soon the flood-gates of full knowledge would be opened to him." Mr. O. somewhat impressed by Séance.

2nd. Dr. X. reports answers, "Some few passable, most very far wrong." During devination by names, &c., noticed Medium spread out three of the slips on his knee and read them; also noticed distinct movements of hands, legs and feet. Séance unsatisfactory.

3rd. Our own. Séance commenced with bitter complaint on part of Medium that his landlady wanted to charge extra for coal and candle; referred him to Mr. K. We then said our friend Andrew was to communicate with us to-day (having received the night before a Spirit letter to that effect). Medium replied, begin as usual with names, &c. Wrote three relationships and three names — first guess wrong. Wrote others — this time correct, the two slips chosen being — Sister and Jessie.

Spirit then seized Medium, and he wrote, "Dear Brother, your friend Andrew and myself are present; you must wait till Thursday, at *five o'clock*, when we will freely converse with you. I am, JESSIE."

Remark — Five o'clock has always been the hour we have given as most convenient to us, and it was *at least considerate* of the Spirits to make their time to suit ours.

Medium now asked, "Is Jessie a deceased sister?" Replied "Yes;" and Medium at once sprung up, said, "I am going into a trance," seized our hand, drew us to a sofa, shut his eyes, and in name of deceased sister discharged at us a sermon of five minutes length, exceedingly profane, and meaning nothing; but ending, "I will now give you a sign that I am indeed your sister Jessie." At this we pricked up our ears; but if we may be allowed the expression, as rapidly dropped them, on finding the sign to be, that out of four papers on floor Medium would guide our hand first to one containing "Jessie," and next to "Andrew," which he did.

1st Remark. These four papers were four of first set of six which Medium had pulled towards him, whilst we were writing second set (first set having failed).

2nd Remark. Our sister died before she was ten, and was the companion of our early boyhood, and could have no knowledge of, or sympathy with "Andrew," the friend of a few years of our mature manhood. Also, the wording of trance was that of a quite grown woman, and sounded curiously false to one who only recollected his sister as an innocent child.

The Séance was now happily over, and we gave Medium a gratuity of 10/, which generosity at once produced an important sympathetic revolution of . Spiritual feeling on the part of Medium towards us, as will be related in next Séance.

4th. Private Séance. We understand that Mr. W. has sent two dozen ale to Medium, so presume he has had favourable news of his friends and relations. Have since seen Mr. W., who says "nearly every guess wrong," and that "pity sent the ale, and not belief."

We pass over 5th Public Séance, it being very short, and an entire failure, and proceed with details of 6th, having pleasure in being at length able to announce an astounding success! table triumphant! and *much laughter!* For it is curious that the more violently the Spirits manifest themselves, the less are we disposed to solemnity, and ever the more strongly experience a comic sense of Spiritual absurdity. The hilarity may be in part owing to the Spirits being *always happy*, or in *very bad* cases, *sufficiently comfortable*, which, though satisfactory, is, on Calvinistic data, impossible; and even to believers in any broadest of broad churches, somewhat too latitudinarian.

At this Séance, ten present, sitting in close circle round the table (no outsiders), and Medium's legs were left entirely to his own sense of honour.

After preliminary creaking, said by Medium to be the Spirits charging table with electric or other force, table commenced moving, turning, tilting, heaving, jerking, etc., and finally became unmanageable, stood up on two of its legs, deluging us with a shower of papers, and, to repeated requests that it would rise up bodily, performed a violent spring, complicated with a twist round — something like a buck-jumping horse — highly creditable either to the Spirits or the Medium; all this being accompanied by a sharp fire of written interrogatories from Mr. O. (who was in Spiritual communication), answered by an equally brisk cannonade of raps on the floor, from legs of table. Three raps being "yes;" one, "no."

Now, in reference to answers of this description, chances to begin with are equal; but, in general, the questions will agree best with an affirmative answer. One does not ask, Is my Father, Brother, &c., *unhappy*? Is my friend so and so in hell? but are so and so happy? so and so in heaven? The Medium, therefore, as a general rule, will reply "yes" to first questions. There is also a large class of questions which admit of either answer, as for instance, "Will there be a European war?" answered, "yes;" "Will the South gain its independence?" answered, "no." Still the Medium ought *not* to be always correct, neither is he. For instance, Mr. O's Spirit friend, after writing that "He was in heaven, and happy as it was possible to be" — rapped out "yes," to the question "Do you wish to return to earth?" and, therefore, could not be as happy in heaven as it was possible to be.

One singular answer given. Mr. O. wrote "will ship Vestalinden, forty days out from — , arrive?" Medium this time wrote answer — "Spirits will reply in five minutes." On expiry of time — "Will be in Channel to-night." Was then asked — "Do you know how many here present?" Answered — "By the 1st of May." An enigmatical reply; but easily solved by supposing that the Medium having got "ship into the Channel," and noticing some part of "Do you know," had calculated the next question to be "Do you know when it will get into port?" And considered (this being 20th April) by the 1st of May to leave him a very safe margin.

As regards two first answers, should they even turn out correct, though it might confirm believers, as any irrefragable proof of the truth of Spirit Rapping, they *are worthless*. As, if not at bottom of the sea, a vessel long over-due and anxiously expected home, might happen — without *any very extraordinary coincidence* — to be in some part of Channel on night in question.

As regards violent physical manifestations, the table was surrounded by the circle, and the Medium was not watched, it being from the number at table difficult to do so; and, moreover, to have so done would certainly have stopped an amusing performance.

Medium, at this Séance, changed his position; first sitting at X, marked three (plate 1), having complete command of the interior of two of the legs, and also by slightly raising his knees to the drawer, of the bottom of table. He sat well under, and being on this occasion unwatched, could of course (with thirteen years' practice) perform some puzzling motions. When table tilted up, so as nearly to fall over, he sat in his usual position, and we think under 4th Séance we have shown that it would not be difficult to do what was done.

Though not watched at this Séance, Dr. X. did once look sharply under the table, and saw knees distinctly lowering themselves, and feet stretching themselves downwards. Dr. X. also remarked, that all the more violent manifestations occurred when circle's attention was distracted by some singular question or answer. Séance, with ever-increasing hilarity, lasted till ½ past 9, by which time Medium, thoroughly exhausted, (and no wonder), wrote Spirit message of dismissal for the evening.

7th (and we believe) final Séance. *Catastrophe, and utter rout of the Spirits.*

Having remarked that, notwithstanding many attempts, we had not yet had an opportunity of putting any question to Spirits, received, as we expected, (our 10s. of previous day having, as we have said, created an important sympathetic Spiritual revolution), a communication, purporting to be from our father, warranting us in trying divination by names, &c. Tried this half-a-dozen times, with only three relationships and three names, and though we honestly did our best to help Medium, his awkwardness not intentional) in selecting wrong names was almost provoking. Finally, got father and correct name chosen.

Table tilting considerably, to intimate it was now at length "all serene."

Purposely displayed considerable nervousness; muttered something about its being a solemn thing to summon the Spirit of a Father — and so indeed it would be to any one believing that he was really doing so — and, having at Medium's request, seated ourselves opposite to him, wrote *our first question.*

Now, we had long before come to the conclusion that Medium answered principally by his skill in reading, reversed, some part of question, or failing to do this, by watching movements of hand or of head

of pencil (which is a long one); and, therefore, allowing him to have some idea of the "Are you," and an excellent glimpse of the motions for h and y, wrote

"Are you *"hungry?"*"

Now, the *first question usually put* by any impressed party being almost invariably, "Are you happy?" the great similarity of "Are you hungry?" would at once guide Medium to his answer. We were therefore not surprised to receive in reply a boldly written "I AM." Did not read question or answer but put them solemnly aside together; and, allowing same opportunities to the Medium, wrote very seriously our second question.

"Have you seen my mother, and is she hungry?" eliciting an immediate

"I have, and she is."

- Put these two also solemnly aside, and wrote,
-
- "Are all then hungry in heaven?"
-

Answer — "Yes."

Then allowing the "is" (which in questions relating to heavenly matters, generally requires an affirmative answer) to be seen, but carefully concealing all the rest, wrote,

"Is the medium a gross humbug?"

To this question the table rapped out an impatient "yes," before we had got any further than the fatal "is." To our objection, "You cannot know our unwritten question," Medium replied almost scornfully, "The spirits read your intention."

For mark, unlucky man! he was triumphing. Notwithstanding our extra 10s. he owed us a grudge. We had not concealed our scepticism so well as others had done; and now seeing us, as he believed, walking blindly as the meekest of neophytes into the usual trap, he scarce cared to hide his contempt for so easy and possibly unexpected a victory.

Alas, poor medium! not *this time* was he the *trapper* but the *trapped*,

and we were pitiless. Not yet content, we declared the last question to be a most important one, demanded further confirmation from the Spirits, and received again another, and a still more emphatic "YES."

Enough, we dropped our nervousness; took up the three first questions and answers, and read out aloud, how Father and Mother and everybody else in heaven were all alike "Hungry." At 4th, stopped, telling Medium it referred unpleasantly to himself, but he said "Read," and every one said "Read," and we *did* read, and this time the tables were turned indeed, and laughter was inextinguishable.

For, in truth, the dilemma was unexceptionably delicious. If Spirits were *truly* present, they had — in the most emphatic manner by an answer, and a confirmation of that answer — pronounced Medium "*a gross humbug*;" and if *no* Spirits were present, Medium was *equally* "*a gross humbug*."

And, now, if any consider that we were cruel to a very poor and unhappy-looking grey-haired man, we *may* own to a little remorse, for in truth his eyes were ever melancholy exceedingly. But we cannot forget that, holding our unwilling hand, this charlatan, in a mock trance, with mock solemnity, in the name of our innocent and long since dead Sister, inflicted on us a mock sermon, in which amidst much other profanation of all things holy, he made that Sister speak, — "Dear Brother, I have BIN commanded from on high, (aye! even by the Deity), to tell thee, &c., &c."

Surely such a profession as this is a perilous one! If true, it deals in *sacrilege*; if false, in *blasphemy*.

We have stood by the dying beds of those nearest and dearest to us, and feel that death is a solemn and a sacred thing, and that those who thus miserably pretend to tamper with its mystery, have no claim on our forbearance, nor plea to urge for any man's mercy.

Again, should it be 'said, "Why trouble yourself with so manifest an imposture?" We reply, thousands believe, and tens of thousands know not what to think of it. And granted that this man is a sorry trickster, (though it took long patience to convict him), we have strong suspicion that his more famous brethren differ from him but in degree; that, tracked with a like patience, and met with, of course, a subtilty proportionate to their own, their inflated pretensions would collapse, even as this man's did, and vanish amidst a like laughter.

F I N I S.

DIGGING FOR CAPTAIN KYDD'S TREASURE;
A STARTLING NARRATIVE,
BY ONE OF THE PARTY.

NEW YORK: J. B. CONKLIN,
54 GREAT JONES STREET.
1859.

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DIGGING FOR MONEY.

BY
ONE OF THE PARTY.

“Put money in thy Purse.” — Iago.

CHAPTER I.

Oh thou immortal bard, did ever man utter suggestion more important? Well did'st thou know, oh! king of poets, that future generations would adhere to thy saying, and “put money in their purse.” The king, the beggar, the infidel the christian, all, all alike are struggling to “put money in their purses.” Thy memory, oh! master of the quill, will be handed down as it has been, from generation to generation, for thy many utterances of advice, none of which are more universally observed than is this, “Put money in thy purse.”

All men are anxious to obtain money. And why should they not? Money is man's God, his assertion to the contrary notwithstanding. Man will leave no means untried to fill his purse honestly, and many will “put money in their purse” dishonestly — but of this no matter. I believe that men are as honest as they can be under the circumstances, and their organizations; therefore I will at once to my story.

During the summer of 1855, at the request of a friend, I visited a spirit-medium for the purpose of witnessing some of the wonderful manifestations which he told me he had seen, and which he said he firmly believed were made by departed spirits.

Accordingly one evening in the month of August, my friend and I started and soon reached the medium's domicile on Canal street. We found several intelligent men, and some pretty women, seated around the table with the medium, who, as soon as he saw my friend, nodded knowingly, and invited us to take seats at the table, which we immediately did, my friend sitting beside the medium, and I between two fair damsels. Soon it came my turn to ask questions of the spirits, and I took a pencil and wrote: — “Are there any

spirits who will communicate with me?" Rap, rap, rap, which being interpreted meant yes.

I then wrote, "who are you?" The medium seized a pencil and wrote with the rapidity of lightning.

"I am captain Robert Kydd": and he shoved the paper over to me.

"Captain Kydd!" I exclaimed, "well captain, what have you to say? come let me learn, I am all attention!"

The medium then wrote, "You are an honest man."

"Thank you, captain, that's more than most mortals are: but, captain, how do you know that; are you acquainted with me?"

The medium then wrote, "Yes, I have been seeking four honest men, and you now make up the number, and if you will consent to do as I shall direct, I will put you in a way to obtain a large amount of treasure; but, I must see you alone with the medium, I can say no more to night. Remember I want to see you in private with THIS medium."

Just at this moment I cast my eyes around the room and saw hanging on the wall the following notice: —

Terms. — For 15 minutes, 50 cts.; for half an hour, \$1,00; 1 hour, \$2,00.

"Oh! oh!" I mentally said, "here's the key, see me alone with the medium, eh! well, we will consider about that."

I then replied aloud, "Well captain, I'll consider — my engagements are very pressing just now — but I will try and have a private interview with you to-morrow or next day; and here the medium's large, blue eyes fairly glistened, no doubt at the prospect of getting two or perhaps four dollars from me — but of that anon, he like all men, wanted to "put money in his purse."

Nothing of interest took place during the balance of the evening, other than one of the fair damsels seated beside me, and who, should she ever read this, will please pardon me for looking at her questions as she wrote them, but the truth was she had prettier hands than face, and besides, her fingers were decorated with massive diamonds, (at least they appeared to be such,) and I could not avoid reading, as she wrote: —

"Does Charley love me? Will he marry me? How soon? &c., &c. All of which she told the company were satisfactorily answered.

About 10 o'clock the circle was pronounced closed by the medium, and my friend and I, bidding Charley's delighted intended and the rest good night departed for our homes.

"Now, what do you think of Spiritualism?"

"That it is all a Humbug," I replied.

"A what!" he said in surprise.

“A Humbug — HUMBUG, the word is plain enough, is it not?”

“But how do you account for the tipping, of the table, the writing, the rapping, and above all, the correct answers which were given to the questions?”

“Oh easily enough; the medium did it all.”

By this time we had reached the corner of Broadway and Canal sts., and my friend and I separated, each going to our respective home. He, no doubt thinking that I was unjust in my scepticism while I pitied him, for I knew him to be a good, honest, truthful man, though too apt to be over credulous.

I thought no more of spiritualism nor of captain Kydd for several days. My first visit to a medium had fully established the conviction in my mind, that it was all a delusion and that the mediums were all impostors.

One morning, about ten days after my visit to the medium, as I was on my way to my place of business, I met captain Smith, a well known business man, one who had passed twenty-five years of his life at sea; as soon as he saw me he grasped my hand and said: “Mr. H — I am delighted to see you, I was on my way up to your Residence — come I have a project, in view, which if successful will be a fortune to you and I, come me want you to go with me at once and see the medium, I have been directed by — but no matter who at present, to bring you to him, come — and he fairly pulled me along.

“Why captain Smith, what’s the matter? — where do you want me to go with you? This is my business hour, and I must hasten to my store — I can’t go anywhere with you this morning unless it be to my place of business.”

“But you must, H. you must, I tell you I have received directions from — from — but I can not tell you yet, come, do come I will explain all to you when we get there.”

“Get where?” I asked.

“At the mediums’, the spirit-mediums’.”

“Nonsense captain, I shall do no such thing, do you mean the medium or *professed* medium on Canal street?”

“Yes, the same, come, come you shall not be detained more than half an hour, but you must so don’t say no.”

Seeing the excited state the captain was laboring under and not wishing to expose him or myself longer to the already occasional suspicious glances of the passers by, I concluded to go with him and see what would take place — and off we started down Canal street, and soon reached the medium’s — the same that I had previously visited.

We found him disengaged, and captain S. informed him that we should like to engage the present hour to hold conversation with the spirits, if agreeable, this he readily consented to and in a few moments we were seated

at the table: when the medium observed: "You are a medium! and at the same moment he took a pencil and wrote: "Yes and to prove it I will now entrance him, and make him speak." Robert Kydd.

"Entrance who?" I asked.

"You, sir, the spirit refers to, I presume," replied the medium.

"Entrance me!" I exclaimed, "Pshaw!"

"Well let us sit quietly a few moments, said captain Smith, and see what will be done."

This I reluctantly consented to, and during the next five or ten-minutes, not a word was spoken by either of us.

Presently, I began to feel a drowsy sensation and my entire system seemed to be paralyzed. I tried to shake off the feeling, but found to my utter astonishment that I had no power to speak or move. I remembered hearing the medium say, "captain he is passing into a trance — should he speak can you write fast enough to record what he may say?" I remembered no more, the next half-hour must ever remain a blank in my life's-book, and yet if I am to credit the word of my friend, during the half hour that I was unconscious I was busily engaged revealing the locality of some of captain Kydd's reputed hidden treasures — but as I have the communication which I uttered, or was said to uttered, and which I firmly believe, I did deliver while under that singular and as I now believe spiritual influence, I will give it verbatim as it will be necessary, that the reader may understand the cause of my doing what I afterwards did.

"Friends I thank you for this opportunity — for this privilege — God only knows how long I have desired to reveal what I shall to you.

History has handed down to you many of my dark deeds, alas too many, and my name is blasted with crime, and used to frighten children to obedience — my hands are red with the hearts-blood of my fellow creatures — all this is true, (and here the medium wept like a penitent sinner) true — true — oh the horrors of the blood-stained — damned. But, I have been told that there is yet hope, and the way has been pointed out to me, by those who live in a higher sphere, one of whom is my mother: I am informed that to progress out of this dismal state, it is necessary that I should reveal to honest men on earth, the place where lies buried some of the illgotten treasures; which I obtained through gores of human blood, while living in my earthly form, and that they must apply it to the relief of suffering humanity; I saw your friend (meaning the medium through whom he was speaking) here a few evenings ago and reading his mind I discovered that he was an honest man, and would with the other persons that I have selected, act justly, and

appropriate the treasure as it must be after it is in the possession of mortals. But one is absent, I would that all were present, as it is I will proceed: First, to the condition which each of you must pledge yourselves to sacredly carry out. It is this: —

As soon as you have secured the treasure you must deposit it in some responsible Bank until such time as you can purchase a suitable piece of ground, on which you are to erect a building — to be called the ‘Poor Man’s Home.’ You are each to have enough out of the principal reserved to support yourselves and family comfortably during your earthly life and no more; the remainder must be reserved for the poor and needy. With this declaration on my part, are you now ready to proceed?”

Here the medium and captain S — h gave their affirmation, and the spirit proceeded!

I am warned that to retain a longer control at present would prove detrimental to this medium’s health, I will therefore withdraw from him, with a request that you will all meet me here on Wednesday evening next, and you will please notify friend B — h to this effect. You *must* all be present then. Now, good bye. Friends — brothers, good bye. Pity and remember poor unhappy. Captain
Kydd.”

When I returned to external consciousness I listened in amazement, to what my friend read to me, and could scarcely credit him when he told me that I had spoken the identical words which he read to me, but on being assured by him that he had written, and read precisely what I had uttered, while unconscious I was compelled to believe him, for notwithstanding his credulity, I knew him to be a man of unquestionable veracity.

Nothing more could be received from the spirit of Kydd or any other, and after repeated attempts to get further communications, we concluded to leave, and captain S — h handed the medium two dollars as payment for the time occupied, but no sooner did he reach out his hand to take it, than it was instantly, and violently agitated and he took a pencil and wrote: —

“No he must not take any money from you for any services rendered: each must labor freely and gratuitously in this affair.”

I confess, that this had much to do towards strengthening the conviction that the man was honest in his mediumship — more so than anything that could have been done at that time. For where can you find a dishonest man who would refuse, after professionally earning, to “Put money in his purse,” and I cannot pass over this part of my narrative without suggesting to many, particularly to those who would make us believe that they have a mortgage on the public’s spiritual welfare, and who are too apt to preach, and denounce

all mediums as knaves and impostors, to endeavor to pattern after this one act of his, and not strive at all hazards, and on all occasions to accumulate the filthy, yet necessary lucre — but I will back to my story. After the medium had written the above he said: Well gentlemen, from this I am to understand that we are to meet again on Wednesday night; do you feel disposed to comply? If so, captain S — h will you see friend B — h and inform him? At what hour shall we meet?"

"At any hour that may be convenient," replied captain S — h, "nine or ten o'clock."

This I consented to and Captain S — h and I departed.

On reaching my store the first person I met was friend B — h, who taking me by the hand said: — "Good morning H — , so you have been holding more conversation with the spirits, I learn?"

"Conversation with the spirits, how do you know that?" I asked, somewhat surprised that he knew that I had been to the medium.

"How do I know it? why bless your soul I have the best authority, the spirits."

"The spirits," I asked, "why, have you been in communication with them?"

"Yes I have, do you not know that I am a medium, and have been for some time; but let us go into your back office a few moments, I wish to say a few words to you in private."

CHAPTER II.

"It is now some six or seven months," commenced friend B — h after we had seated ourselves in my private office "since I first discovered that I was a medium, I was told so by the spirit of my sister, at the medium's, the one you visited this morning, "How do you know that I have been there?" I asked.

"Don't interrupt me H., it is enough for you to know at present, that I *do know* you have been communicating with the spirits — with Captain Kydd, and more — that you have been entranced. You need not deny it, for it is useless, I know all about it, but, as I was saying, my sister said I was a writing medium, and that she would that night, meet me in my room, and influence me to write; well, to make a long story short, I did that night set alone in my bedroom, and in a few moments I felt a curious nervous-twitching in my right arm and presently it began to move and my hand wrote: — 'My Dear Brother — I am here with you, I love you; there is no death; I am happy; Mary.' You may imagine my delight after reading the lines I had written, and I continued to sit with a heart overflowing with love and gratitude, but I could write no

more that night. The next evening I sat again, and my sister wrote more, and from that time to this I have been in daily communication with the spirit-world.

“This morning, while at breakfast, I felt a strong influence upon me, indicating that my sister wanted to say something to me, and as soon as I could conveniently leave the table, I did so, and went up to my room and seated myself, with pencil and paper all ready. After sitting a few moments, my hand began to move and wrote independent of my own mind, this communication which I will now read to you:

‘My Dear Brother — my mission to you this morning is of a humane character, and urgent, had it not been, I should not have disturbed you while at your meal; I was fearful that you would be surrounded by repelling influences, after you mixed with the business world, and I should then have no opportunity to tell you what I want to. Your friend H. and Captain Smith will visit a Medium this morning, and it is designed that the spirit of Kydd shall entrance him and make him speak. This will be done in order to convince him that spirits do communicate with mortals; but he is very much embarrassed in his pecuniary circumstances, and has a note to pay to day and has not the money to pay it — now brother, you have the means, and I want you to go to his place of business and loan him enough (two hundred dollars) and tell him to be of good cheer. It is necessary that his mind should be kept free from worldly trouble as much as possible, as he will be the principal medium through whom directions will be given to procure Kydd’s treasure. Do as I request, brother, and you will increase the happiness of many, among whom is your sister
Mary.’”

“Well, this is very considerate on the part of your sister Mary,” I replied, “she is right, I have a note to pay this day, and it is true, I am short of funds, and it has caused me some anxiety of mind.”

“Well, say no more,” said B — h, “here’s the amount, take it, and pay me when it may be convenient.”

“Thank you B — h or perhaps I should say your spirit-sister?”

“Either, or both,” he replied. “Now what do you think of spiritualism?”

“That it is all very strange,” I answered, “and a subject worthy the investigation of every person. I then told him all that had transpired at the medium’s that morning, and after some further conversation he left, and I went to the Bank, took up my note, and felt quite happy the balance of the day.

That evening at tea I mentioned the subject to my wife for the first time, and told her that I was almost persuaded to believe in the truth of

Spiritualism, and asked her whether she would like to see some of the manifestations:

“Oh! dear no” she exclaimed, “I would not visit a medium for the world, and I hope you will not again, — it is all the Devil’s doings. Brother Davis our minister, told me so last evening.” “My minister, not our minister, you know Mary that I do not belong to the church.”

“I know you do not, but soon will, I know you will, the Lord will yet answer my prayers and make you see the error of your ways and unite with the Church.”

“Perhaps I shall, Mary, and when I do, I will be as zealous in advocating the peculiar doctrines of John Calvin, as I have been hitherto in denouncing them, but, Mary, listen to me, we have now been married twelve years, and during that time we have lived happily together. I have allowed you to think and believe as you pleased about religious matters, while I have looked upon death as the end of man’s existence, and religion as a farce. I have been honest in my belief, as I believe you have. This morning I witnessed that which has changed my opinions. I now believe that I have an immortal soul — in fact, Mary, I am a Spiritualist, and this is not all, I am a medium!”

“Dear me, William,” replied my wife, “I hope you are not so silly as to believe that spirits communicate with us, or if they do, that they are good spirits. What will the world say — you will ruin yourself and family and I fear lose your soul.”

“Mary, I left home this morning a confirmed Atheist — I now believe that there is a God and a life beyond the Grave. What can the world say to such a belief? I am a SPIRITUALIST!”

“Oh dear! Oh dear! my poor, poor deluded husband, you will bring disgrace and ruin upon yourself and family;” and here she wept as if her very heart would break. While she was giving vent to her tears the front door bell rang, and I went to see who was there, on opening the door I found it to be Mary’s minister. I invited him into the parlor: and then informed Mary that her clergyman was in the next room and I presumed he had called to see her.

“Brother Davis here!” she exclaimed, “Oh Lord, I thank you — he has been sent here to talk with you — come, William, you will go in with me and listen to his Heavenly wisdom, will you not?”

“Certainly, Mary, I will, if it will do you any good,” and I went with her.

“Good evening, brother Davis,” said my wife, and I at the same time extended to him my hand, and the conversation commenced.

“I called,” said the minister, “to solicit aid from you, to relieve the absolute needs of a poor widow, a member of our church who is suffering from sickness, and who is on the eve of being turned out of doors by her

landlord because she has not the means to pay her rent, I have received nearly the amount from Brothers Jones, Clark and Williams, and being in your neighborhood, I thought, perhaps you would contribute a little towards assisting to make up the amount."

"Certainly, Mr. Davis, certainly I will render what aid I can," and I handed him as much as I could well afford, remarking: "Though not a member of your church, still I feel called upon to help the poor and needy whenever I can." This matter being settled, I then said: "Mr. Davis, my wife informs me that you know something about Spiritualism — that you have satisfied yourself that it is demoniac — Is this so?"

"I have not personally investigated the subject," he replied, "but I am informed by some of my clerical brethren who have, that the phenomena really exist, and that it is spiritual but evil in its source; and I feel it my duty as a servant of the Lord to warn all to have nothing to do with it. I intend to preach upon it next Sabbath, and trust that you will accompany your wife to church, and then hear what I may say."

"Do I understand you to say," I asked, "that you have never investigated the subject yourself, but have formed your opinion from what your clerical brethren have told you?"

"You do," he replied; "I know nothing about it, from personal experience, yet, I am satisfied, that spiritual manifestations really occur, but they are produced by evil spirits."

I then said, "How would you like me to judge your actions by the same rule?"

"What do you mean by the question: have I done ought to call forth your criticism?"

"Not exactly," I replied, "but on my way home this evening I overheard a conversation between two persons, who in a rather subdued voice, were evidently desirous of being very secret, in their conversation, but, hearing your name mentioned my curiosity was excited and I was guilty of that mean act of listening, and feel now that it is my duty to be still more so by repeating it — believing that the intention is right and the motive good. One of the persons — I don't like to mention names, was remarking as I came up: — "Have you seen Brother Davis, our minister to day?" "No," answered the other — "why do you ask?"

"I called upon your friend the philanthropist, as he is called, and in the course of our conversation, he asked whether I knew a certain Landlord; I answered I did — that I had only a few moments previously seen and conversed with him. We were talking about the hard-times, and of the condition of the poor. He said that it was difficult to collect his rents — that

his sympathy was often called out — that he had once been placed in straightened circumstances himself, but now he had enough — that when his tenants were honest and willing to pay, but not able, he did not distress them — this very day, said he, “I gave Mrs Collins a receipt in full. Your philanthropic friend expressed surprise, and went with me immediately and asked if the woman was in distress, she answered, no, she was very comfortable, the Lord had always provided for her, and she was willing to trust him.

“‘Well,’ says the gentleman who began the first conversation, ‘it is strange, for I know the minister is now out collecting money for this very widow, for the purpose of paying her rent — he must have been deceived — or else intends to pocket the money.’ I then left your friends, my dear sir, and now by the rule that you are judging spiritualism, I am bound to suppose you are, at least, guilty of false pretenses.

“Oh! husband, now that is going too far, to call brother Davis, a minister of God, a swindler,” said my wife.

“I do not, Mary, I am only applying Mr. Davis’ rule to himself — I have no doubt, but that his humanitarian effort in this instance, has been actuated by pure and God-like motives. He probably had been informed that this widow was in distressed circumstances.”

“I was informed by sister Hardenbrook,” said the minister, “that sister Collins was in a destitute condition, and would be turned out of doors tomorrow if her rent was not forth-coming. This information sister H. gave me last Sabbath, and with a view to relieve her, I started this morning to raise a subscription for that purpose.”

“You only heard it,” I remarked, “and that last Sabbath — just as you learned that Spiritualism was demoniac. If you had, as it was your duty to have done in both instances, made the examination yourself, you would undoubtedly have found that your information was false. There is nothing, my dear sir, that displays a man’s ignorance so much as an explanation of that which he confesses to know nothing about. No, sir, your clerical brethren, and the entire Priesthood may denounce Spiritualism as demoniac, it would not cause me to believe it, until I had personally, and from experience found the teachings of the spirits to be demoralizing and evil in their tendency.”

“I grant the power of your remarks,” replied he, “but you know as well as I do the weakness of the human mind, and what power the evil one has over a large portion of mankind — how plausible all this species of logic is to the uncultivated experience. This subject, my young friend, has already been looked into by the learned men of the day, and by many of my clerical brethren, who unite generally in concluding (and wisely to,) that it is a

dangerous thing, calculated to subvert all our present ideas concerning the future destiny of man, and his hope of salvation. No, my friend, the whole thing is a preposterous evil, and should be avoided. Take the advice of one of more matured years — of one who has given the religion of our blessed Lord a quarter of a century's trial, and who has never for one moment during that time felt that there was any need of other light, than he has found in God's Holy Word: *The Sacred Scriptures.*"

Perceiving that it would be useless to argue further with him, and as he manifested a desire to depart, I said no more upon the subject, and in a few moments after, he left.

"Mary," said I after the minister had gone, "I did not tell you all that occurred this morning while I was at the medium's; would you like to hear it?"

"Oh no, I don't want to hear anything more about spiritualism, and I do hope that you will take the advice of good brother Davis, and go no more among the spiritualists." "Well, Mary, to please you I will not mention the subject again in your presence, unless you desire it, but, I assure you that I shall not desist from investigating it farther, at every opportunity that offers, irrespectively of the advice of your clergyman." I then commenced reading a book, and she took a newspaper, the peculiar organ of the Baptist church, (the Examiner, I believe) and I was soon absorbed in the midst of 'Cooper's Pioneers.'

After a while Mary said, "Here is something in the paper about spiritualism, shall I read it to you?" "Yes, do," I replied, glad to hear her mention the subject. She then commenced and read: — "More Spiritual Humbuggery.' We copy the following from one of the spiritual so-called papers, and present it to our readers that they may see its absurdity:

"REMARKABLE VISION."

"Mr. Editor — As you have solicited facts from your readers, I have been induced to send to you this remarkable account of a spirit appearing to a man, and revealing to him the way to obtain that which he had long and earnestly prayed for; namely: peace of mind and a hope of Heaven. I do not feel at liberty to give the full name, as he has many descendants still living — and who might object to having the account published in a Spiritual publication. I will therefore only give his initials.

Mr. C — was an earnest man, and was much perplexed about the future state of existence — he could not find that evidence which would satisfy him, from any of the religious doctrines of that day, and he made it a practice to pray every day to the Lord, that he might have revealed to him, directly, some evidence that would remove his doubts, and enable him to have that lively

hope of his immortality, which he so earnestly desired. Mr. C was not only a man of prayer, but deeds, for I am informed that he gave much and often to the poor.

One day about nine o'clock, while Mr. C- was alone in earnest devotion, there suddenly appeared before him a Spirit. He ceased praying and looked tremblingly at it, and said: — "What is it?"

The Spirit replied: — "Brother C — , thy many good deeds, and earnest prayers have been heard and witnessed by thy Heavenly Father, and I am sent, to put thee in the way to possess that which thy heart desires."

He then told him to send to a certain place some eighty miles distance, and go to the house of a Mr. Simon, who lived near the side of the water, and inquire at that house for a man named Mr. S. Peter, a medium, through whom would be told him, what he must further do. As soon as the Spirit had spoken this it vanished.

Mr. C — immediately called those of his family and hired men, who were near, and told them what he had seen and heard. So strong was the impression that the Spirit had told him the truth, that he decided to send at once to the city named by the Spirit, to learn whether such persons did live there. And accordingly he dispatched three trusty men that very day.

They arrived at the city, during the next day and on inquiry, learned that there was such a man living there, and also that there was a man stopping with Mr. Simon, who pretended to hold communication with the Spirit-world, or in other words, was a medium. The men went to the house and knocked at the door, and inquired whether Mr. S. Peter was there.

While they were at the door, Mr. Peter, who had been in the upper part of the house, and having just been in a trance, was told while in that state, that men would call for him — to go with them to a certain place, and that he must go — doubting nothing; for it seems that Mr. Peter, like many other mediums, had become rather selfish, and a little vain — so much so, that when told by his Spirit guides who the men were, and where they wanted him to go, he rebelled and said: — "No, I do not feel willing to associate or mix with such characters. But his Spirit friends showed him the folly of such an objection, and he at last consented — and when the men reached the door and inquired for him he heard them and went down and said: — "Come in, gentlemen, I am the man you seek. What do you want?"

They then told him their errand and that Mr. C — , their employer, desired them to bring him to his house. As it was late in the day, and the men were tired he told them that it would be best to remain over night, which they consented to do. Early the next morning they started and some of the more zealous, believers in Mr. Peter's mediumship and the doctrines he taught,

concluded to accompany him. They all reached in safety the house of Mr. C — the next day, and when he saw them coming he came out to meet Mr. Peter and embraced him, saying, "It is well that you have come." He then took them into the house, and the medium was controlled and spoke such words, that Mr. C — was convinced — and he and his entire house-hold became believers in Spiritualism."

Fraternally yours:

CREDULITY.

"I shall have to differ a little with the editor of the Baptist paper, Mary, I can see nothing absurd in the account you have just read," I remarked when she had concluded reading.

"Why William," replied she, "You do not believe that it is true surely?"

"Certainly, I believe it, why should I not? I believe that spirits have communicated with me, and I can see no reason why a spirit should not appear to the man mentioned."

"Oh I forgot, William, you are a Spiritualist," said Mary in a jocosely way "and Spiritualists will believe anything, no matter how absurd it may be."

"Of course, Mary, you don't believe it, do you?"

"No, indeed I do not, I am not so foolish as to believe any such nonsense."

"Still, Mary, you believe that the big fish swallowed Jonah; and that Joshua knocked down the walls of Jericho, by blowing on rams horns; that he commanded the Sun and Moon to stand still, and they did so. That Lot got drunk and then ravished his daughters. You find no difficulty to believe these, do you?"

"The Bible tells us so, William, and the Bible is the word of God — and God permitted these things to be done for a wise purpose. Yes, William, I believe in my Bible, and oh how I do wish that you also believed it."

"Mary," said I, "you do not believe the Bible; if you did, you would not disbelieve the account you have just read to me — no Mary, to prove to you that you, like a thousand other Bible-believers, do not know what you do believe, I will now read to you the Tenth Chapter of Acts" — which I did, and request the reader to do likewise.

On the Wednesday evening appointed by the spirit of Kydd, we all met at the medium's, and after we had formed a circle around the table, we asked if the spirit of Captain Kydd was present, and if so, whether he would communicate. The question was answered by three loud and distinct raps — indicating yes.

"Now, Captain," said B — h, "we are all here and at your service; do you wish to write or speak what you have to say?"

It was then written by the medium:

"I will control the medium I last spoke thro'. All of you sit quiet, and join hands. Kydd."

We then joined hands and after sitting ten or fifteen minutes, I began to feel the same drowsy sensation I previously had experienced and in a few moments afterwards I was in the trance state. As I have a copy of the communication Kydd spoke through me on that occasion, I will give it here:

"Good evening, friends. I am pleased that you are all present — I will now briefly give you the directions, so that you can proceed as soon as you choose, and unearth this, one of the many magnets which draw and keep me near earth. It is but three miles distant from where you now are, and the place is easy of access. It is guarded by the spirit of the man I slew at the time I buried it — he is unwilling to give it up, and will do all in his power to prevent you from getting it; but if you will follow my directions, and keep brave hearts and strong nerves, he cannot prevent or harm you.

"Captain Smith, I want you to get a small pocket compass; and to-morrow all be ready to follow the medium through whom I am now speaking. I shall control him and guide you to the spot, but you must have a compass, that you may take the bearings. I shall retain control of him until you nearly reach the treasure, when it will be necessary that I withdraw my influence from him, in order to keep off the spirit of the man guarding it; as he is determined not to yield up what he considers his rights. I have done all I could to persuade him to leave the place and progress out of his present condition — but he will not listen to me; and as my power to command men ceased with my earthly life, I have no alternative — no help, but such as I can obtain from you.

"Meet me here again to-morrow morning at 7 o'clock, and I will join you and guide you through this man (meaning the medium through whom he was speaking) to the spot.

"Good night, and may God bless you all, is the prayer of

Captain

Kydd."

"Captain Kydd," said Mr. C., the medium, "Why not give the full directions at this sitting, why procrastinate?"

While he was asking the question his hand began to move, and wrote as follows:

"Friend C., through your own lips I will give the full directions to-morrow morning, and also a conclusive test that I am Kydd."

"There now, C., what more do you want?" remarked friend B — h. "Captain Kydd," asked he, "Can you bring, as a test that this is really you, a Cockle shell, fresh from its ocean-bed?"

"I will try," was written, "but I must leave you now — again, good night, Capt. Kydd."

"That's all very well, friend B — h, but my experience with the spirits, has caused me to observe caution, and require pretty strong proof of identity. I can't see the consistency in this putting off until to-morrow what might as well be done to night. Why, if this is in reality the spirit of Captain Kydd, can't he tell us in a few words, where the treasure is?"

"Conditions, friend C., Conditions, perhaps are not favorable to night," replied B — h, "keep cool and patient until to-morrow!"

"Well," responded Mr. C, "let it be as Kydd desires — to-morrow morning then, and we all decided to go to Taylor's and get some oysters — which we did, and after satisfying the animal man, in that way, we each departed for our home.

CHAPTER III.

At 7 o'clock next morning we all again were seated, in circle at the table, friend C. still retaining grave doubts of the spirit communicating, being the notorious personage alluded to.

"Are you present Kydd?" asked B — h, and no sooner had he spoken than there dropped upon the table, in the centre of the circle, apparently coming from the ceiling, a Cockle shell which bounded off on the floor.

What's that! we all exclaimed in the same breath, and instantly Mr. C. became entranced and rising upon his feet, with a solemn tone, and commanding attitude, said, pointing, to the shell — "THERE is a symbol of the mighty deep, to prove my identity. Captain Smith," continued he, "you will wear this shell attached to a string around your neck, which shall prove to you through life a safe-guard,²⁰⁴ against all danger as long as you retain it." The medium then picked it up and handed it to him — then resumed his seat still entranced.

We each then examined the shell and all remarked its dampness and strong sea-water odor. "This shell will require purgation, to enable you, captain Smith to wear it around your neck," I observed whereupon the medium, in the same tone as before, said:

"You have all examined the emblem I have just brought here, and none have seen the hole for the string."

²⁰⁴ The philosophy connected with this talisman is not clear to us, but it may be that the shell being magnetized by the spirit, would act as a magnet to attract him at any moment of danger to the person to whom it was given.

We then examined it more closely and strange to say, the shell *actually* had the hole requisite and precisely in the place that would have been selected. Captain Smith wears it to this day and thus far it has proved to him a safe-guard.

The dubious reader will ask: how did the shell get there; did Kydd really bring it from its ocean-bed? My only answer is that, I *know* the shell was not thrown upon the table by either of the persons comprising the circle, as all our hands were joined, and the shell was seen by all, to descend from the ceiling. No human person could have done it without detection, as it was clear daylight, and the door locked, and neither of the windows were up.

If Kydd or some other spirit did not bring it there, who did?

I did question the propriety at first, of mentioning this occurrence in my narrative, but upon more mature reflection, I concluded that as the recent "Bone Story" had been received as an actual occurrence, by many of the Spiritualists — that peradventure, those who believed that the ignorant Negro, Cornelius, had power and did bring, a distance of 65 or 70 miles, his entire skeleton, and deliver it bone by bone, in the presence of individuals — that they would not require any extraordinary stretch of credulity, to believe that a more intelligent spirit could bring and deliver a small Cockel shell, a distance of 25 miles. To the decided skeptic I can only say, as some one was reputed to have said to the rich man in torment: "They would not believe, even did one arise from the dead."

But I will not wander from my narrative.

After the lapse of about ten minutes, Mr. C. still remaining entranced — Kydd commenced, in accordance to his promise, made the evening previous, and spoke the following directions through the medium:

"You, my friends, have congregated to receive instructions from an invisible intelligence concerning the locality of my buried treasure and the mode or means of obtaining it. I will not lacerate my soul anew by depicting, or congeal your blood by reciting, how I obtained it. You will proceed from here and procure the compass, which will be selected by Captain Smith, and then all take the 'Old Hudson Ferry' to Hoboken. After arriving there, you will go directly West two blocks, and by examining your compass, you will find that the street runs due North and South. Follow this street four furlongs, or just half a mile, and then, by examining your compass, you will find that the road leads you North-west by West half West; follow this road one furlong, and then strike off West, toward the base of the hill, where you will find — ²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ As the writer yet believes that the treasure is buried there, he does not feel at liberty to give the exact course and distance further.

again examine your compass, and go — until you arrive at a rock the exact shape of a Coffin. Upon the top of this rock you will find a Cross; thirty paces — lies three and a half feet below the surface, a flat stone three feet long and two and a half feet wide and six inches thick. On the top of this stone also is a Cross. Under this lies buried in 12 iron-pots, *Two Millions of Dollars!*

You must be prepared to summon all your nerves, for you will surely meet face to face, the powerful and cold-blooded miser, that I slew and buried near the treasure. He it is for years has prevented me from communicating this intelligence to mortals: being suddenly and unexpectedly stricken down while his whole mind and soul were absorbed in the illgotten gains; his spirit is so material in its nature, that he can, and will appear to you, apparently as material to mortal vision as ever he appeared in life. You will therefore not be frightened, for he cannot harm you. Myself, as well as some of my companions, have vainly striven to obtain sufficient control of some medium, whereby we could communicate intelligently the exact locality of this hidden treasure, which, alas, has dragged and kept us down to the lowest possible degradation, misery and mental torment. Thanks to a merciful God! Spiritualism has developed mediums through whom spirits can make known their desires. It is through this medium, and the assistance of his controlling spirit-friends, that I am able now to speak to you, and relieve my soul of the load that drags it down and prevents my progression.

When you reflect upon the awful price this treasure has cost humanity — the widowed homes, and the fatherless children that have been deprived of protection and support, as well as the innocent, helpless, victims that were wantonly sacrificed to prevent disclosure of my villainy, I trust my friends, that you will justly appreciate the weighty responsibility the discovery of this treasure entails upon you.

The penniless beggar, the homeless widow, the ragged orphan — all, alike have a claim to your sympathies and support. Every friendly appropriation to the relief of suffering humanity will help to relieve my soul from the awful load of guilt that has so long weighed me down in darkness and despair.

This is all now. All go with captain Smith to procure the compass, and I will go with you. Friend H., keep passive, and yield to me, I shall control you as soon as I see it necessary. Go now with cheerful, hopeful hearts, and I will lead you to the spot.”

We then all started with captain Smith, to procure the compass.

CHAPTER IV.

Our sitting had occupied nearly an hour, so that when we reached the place where captain S. told us good compasses could be procured, it was about half-past eight o'clock. We found only the Porter there, who was busy sweeping out the store. Captain Smith told him what we wanted, and he informed us that the salesman had not yet come but he expected him every moment; we therefore seated ourselves, and I soon felt that same peculiar sensation come over me, and ere I could speak I was once more lost to the external. It seemed that I had been only a few moments in this state, when the salesman arrived, and in obedience to captain Smith's request, showed him several small pocket-compasses. Just as he was about to examine them, I was brought to the counter, and picking up one of the yet unopened compasses, I said: "Here is as good a compass as there is in this store;" and then turning round I said, to a person who at that moment entered: "This is as good a compass as there is in this store? you know sir, as you made it." He took it, and examined it, and said; —

"Yes, this compass is one of my make, and is as good a one as you could select out of a thousand; yes sir, that is a perfect compass." and he handed it back to me. Captain Smith then bought it, and we all departed for the ferry. I will here state that during the entire journey from the place where the compass was bought, until we arrived within five or six rods of the spot designated by Kydd, a distance of three miles, I was kept in the trance state; or in other words, I was Captain Kydd. My eyes were open, and to the casual observer, as much myself as any man could be: I will therefore in speaking of myself, use the name of Kydd.

"Captain Smith," said Kydd, "You keep that compass in your hand closed, and do not open it until I give you orders."

"Aye aye sir," said he, "Which way now, Captain Kydd?"

"To the Old Hudson Ferry," replied Kydd, "come give me your arm"; and he locked arms with Captain Smith, and B — h and C — n also walked together behind them.

"Where is the Old Hudson Ferry, Mr. C.?" asked B — h.

"I don't know, ask Kydd," he replied.

"Captain Kydd, where is the Old Hudson Ferry?"

"At the foot of Barclay street; come on, I will lead the way," he answered.

We soon reached the Ferry, and as there was no boat in the slip, B — h purchased some cigars, and handed one to Mr. C. and Captain Smith, and then asked Kydd whether he would like to smoke.

"No, thank you," replied Kydd, "I don't smoke."

"Captain Kydd," asked Mr. C, "how is it, do some spirits chew tobacco, smoke cigars and drink liquor? I have been informed that some spirits do so."

“Wait until we get on board of the boat, I will then answer your question.”

As the boat was then entering the slip we prepared to go through the Ferry gate.

“Kydd,” asked Mr. C, “have you any money to pay your passage?”

“No,” said he laughingly, “but this medium has; I will borrow a little, and you can charge it to the account of the Treasure.” And he took from the pocket a quarter of a dollar, and handed it to the man at the gate saying, “take out for four.”

By the time we had got on the bridge, the boat was in the slip, and just as we were about to step on board, intending to go into the gentleman’s cabin, Kydd turning round said: —

“Heave your cigars away and go into the Ladies Cabin, we shall be more quiet there, and as I mean to answer Mr. C.’s question, I don’t wish to be disturbed.”

As soon as we were seated in the cabin, Captain Kydd, turning to Mr. C, commenced and said:

“Now, friend C., I will answer your question. Every individual has two guardian spirits: one corresponding to his Spiritual or interior man, and the other corresponding to his Animal or exterior man, both of whom are always with him. It is not necessary that a spirit should be in a room, or by his side, in order to be with him. If the sympathy is strong enough to attract the spirit to the physical at all, that sympathy can be extended, for ought I know, infinitely, and is the Telegraph, over which every thought, desire and action, travel with the speed of lightning, making known to the spirits in connection with such, their whereabouts, conditions, and needs.”

“Why,” said Mr. C., “am I to infer from what you say, Captain, that some mortals have not sufficient sympathy to attract a spirit to them? — you say, ‘If the sympathy is strong enough at all &c.’”

“There are thousands so material in their nature,” he answered, “that they have but very little spirituality developed, and such appear to the spirits as a dark mass, with but a small glimmering spark of light in the center — New York is full of just such apologies of organized humanity — (Wall street and the Fifth Avenue in particular.)

There are spirits who drink rum (and that of an inferior quality) and chew tobacco, smoke cigars, and indulge in every kind of stimulants. Perhaps I cannot better give you the idea I wish to, than by relating one or two incidents of my own experience during the early part of my spirit-life.”

“Yes do, do so,” said B — h, who had become intensely interested.

“On first discovering that my spirit had separated itself from its corporeal body, which I did not until two days after my execution, I learned that *appetite* was still a part of man.

“Many of my crew had gathered around me, rejoicing that I had arrived.

“‘I say, Captain,’ said one, who had been one of my sailors during the last voyage that I had made and whose brains I had blown out for some mutinous remark that he had made when about to take the Treasure on shore to bury it. ‘I say, Captain, that was a damned mean act of yours, and now I intend to have satisfaction’; and he advanced towards where I stood. My first impulse was to take a pistol and shoot him dead; and I felt for one, but soon discovered that I was not only without pistols, but clothing. It may appear strange to you that I had not made this discovery before, but I am relating now, what occurred immediately after consciousness was restored. ‘Villain,’ I exclaimed, as he grasped me by the throat, ‘I’ll teach you, to use such language to me,’ and I seized him by the neck and hurled him from me. Immediately a great shout of laughter filled the air. And, ‘Hit him again Cap.!’ ‘Go at him again, Ben., — damn his eyes, show him that he can’t command or bully over us here.’

“Such noise and confusion as then followed, no language can convey the least idea of. I had, during my earthly career, witnessed many uproarious scenes, and much confusion, but nothing approximated to what I experienced on that occasion.

“The crew were about equally divided in favor of both: but I noticed that those who sided with me, inwardly chuckled over my humiliation, for I need not say that I was humiliated; the thought of placing myself on a level with one of my own crew, or of receiving a back word from him, was indeed humiliating; however, there was no alternative; to fight or be whipped was inevitable, and we went at it. After a few rounds, Ben. cried for quarter, which I did not feel inclined to give, and I continued to hit him right and left, until five or six rushed upon me, and forced me off.

“‘That will do Captain,’ said one, ‘Ben. has cried quarter, and you must not strike him again; come now, shake hands and be friends.’ Noticing that I frowned with contempt at his familiar remarks, he continued and said: —

“‘Come, Captain, no putting on airs here, you don’t command this crew any more; and as for your considering yourself any better than we are — why,’ said he with a sarcastic smile, ‘you will soon learn different.’ He then, turning to the rest, said: ‘Come on Boys, let’s go and get a drink, and let the Captain seek some more congenial companions; he’ll soon find them, I’ve no doubt,’ and away they all started, filling the air with their hideous noise.

I was alone, and memory, that part of man that never dies, was at work; I seemed then first to realize that I was a spirit. All my horrid deeds of earth-

life, were vividly brought to mind, and I placed my hands over my eyes and shed tears of penitence. Suddenly, I felt a light and gentle touch upon my shoulder, which sent a pleading thrill throughout all my system, and a sweet voice spake and said: —

“Robert, look up.’

“I started, and exclaimed, ‘Who speaks!’

“Looking round I saw standing near me, with a smile upon her angelic countenance, my mother. ‘Mother! dear mother,’ I exclaimed, ‘Is this indeed you?’ — and I extended my arms to embrace her, when she began to recede from me, pointing with her hand upwards, and said: —

“‘Robert my son, joy and peace are yet for you. Progress, my child, and join your mother.’ Swiftly, yet distinctly, did she recede from me, fast disappearing amidst a halo of light, the brightness of which dazzled my sight.

“Sweet memories of my childish days possessed me, and ‘Mother, dear mother, I will, I will,’ I involuntarily tittered. At last she had disappeared entirely, and I was once more alone.

“Oh God! the bitter anguish of that moment; no pen can write it; no mind save the Infinite describe it.

“‘Hallo! Captain Kydd, you weeping here? What’s the matter with you? Well it’s time you did. MURDERER!’ said a horrid voice close to my ear. I looked, but could see no person, and I was in the act of speaking when voices all about me commenced repeating ‘Murderer!’ ‘Murderer,’ ‘Murderer,’ ‘Ha! Ha! Ha! Slayer of men. Pirate; ROBBER!’ Maddened by my feelings and the horrid yells that surrounded me, I rushed from the place, not knowing whither I went. On, on, with the speed of thought I moved, until I suddenly found myself in the midst of men, who were singing, shouting and dancing, over what seemed to me to be a dark cloud, dotted here and there with sparks of light. I joined them, and said:

“‘Friends, what are you doing?’

“‘Raising the devil on earth,’ replied one: — ‘come, don’t you want to have some sport? Ah, I see,’ said he, ‘you are a stranger here, just come from earth, eh,’ and he advanced to me, and, looking me in the face, said, ‘Why if it a’nt Kydd, Hurrah! Boys, here’s the Captain, now, what say, shall we choose him as Captain here?’ ‘Yes,’ was the unanimous shout, ‘He’s our man. Hurrah for Captain Kydd,’ and they rent the air with their shouts.

“‘Jones,’ said I to the man who spoke to me first, and who I now recognized as one of my gunners, ‘it is indeed I your Captain; tell me what does all this mean? — what is that dark mass before us?’

“That,’ replied he, ‘is London, and we are going to have a regular spree, — but Captain, I see you don’t know the ropes yet; well, I did’nt either, when I first came here, but I’ll pilot you Captain if you will come.’

“Lead on Jones, I will follow anywhere, to free myself from my present horrible state of mind;” and taking Jones by the arm, we passed into the dark mass. Suddenly I began to see streets and houses, and all appeared as plain and earthly as before my execution.

“We walked on until we came to a celebrated Club House, and Jones proposed that he and I should enter it, to which I agreed. We then passed through the open door into the back room, where we saw some twenty or thirty men, some sitting at tables playing cards — some playing billiards, and others sitting quietly smoking or sipping punch.

“Here we are, Captain,’ said Jones; ‘now choose your man, and I will mine, and we can drink, play or smoke; in fact, do just as they do.’

“I do not understand you, Jones — what do you mean by choosing your man?’

“I’ll show you, Captain. Let’s go up to that young man smoking the cigar, that’s my Lord D.’s eldest son, he is a good fellow — likes good punch and cigars. I’ve had many drinks and puffs with him; come I’ll show you how,’ and we went up to him.

“Now, Captain make him drink.’

“Make him drink! Why, how can I make him drink?’

“Do you not see his mind?’

“Yes, he is now saying, ‘Waiter, a glass of punch and a cigar.’

“No, Captain, he is only thinking that, but you can make him give the order aloud, if you want to, just whisper into his mind these words: “a glass of punch and a cigar, waiter,” and I’ll go round to that other man, and do likewise.’

“I approached close to the young man, and placing my mouth to his head, said, ‘A glass of punch and a cigar.’ Instantly I saw my words take form, and connect with his mind, and he gave the order to the waiter, who soon placed the beverage before him, which the young man commenced to drink. Instantly I began to feel all the sensations one experiences after taking a good glass of punch, and I found no difficulty while I remained in sympathy with him, in inhaling the essence of whatever kind of stimulants he called for.”

The ringing of the Pilot’s bell, to slacken speed, arrested Kydd’s interesting narration.

“Now my friends,” said Kydd, “remember your previous instructions, as it will not do for me to control the medium sufficiently to give them again, as it might attract attention, and thereby jeopardize the whole undertaking. I

will control his movements, simply without speaking — in other words, he will be your Pilot, all follow him in silence.”

At this moment, the boat was made fast to the bridge, when we all took up our march in the order laid down by Kydd; He and Smith, first, B — h and C — n second. We soon arrived at the corner of the second block, when the compass was examined, and we found the street running in the direction desired, and precisely as before stated. We had proceeded a distance of about four furlongs, when Kydd spoke, and, pointing to a mound of earth, said B — , “There is the spot where you stood, when you were testing the qualities of Graham’s patent buck-loading Rifle; that tree in the distance was your target.”

“My God! exclaimed B — as he grasped C — by the shoulder, “that is true to the letter. I was so intent in carrying out instructions that I quite forgot the occurrence, though it took place but three or four weeks since.”

“No more talking,” said Kydd, “come on, I will give you further evidence that I am Kydd. I alluded to the subject to renew your assurance of my presence and power, and thereby increase your faith; we will now proceed.”

On arriving at the angle of the road, we examined the compass, and found that it had the exact bearing before described by Kydd. We followed this road according to directions, when Kydd suddenly cried Halt! and said:

“Do you see that tree standing alone, near the road-side? When you get abreast of that tree, you will hear the report of a gun; fear not, but follow on in silence. On reaching the tree, sure enough, Bang, went what appeared to us to be a cannon, and so near to us, that we were nearly deafened by the noise; no smoke could be seen anywhere. After proceeding a few hundred yards further, Kydd halted again, and pointing to another object ahead (a log), said: “As soon as you are up with that log, another gun will be heard, and when, abreast of that large rock on the left hand, two more guns will be heard; after that you will hear no more cannons, while in this locality. My gunner Jones, with some of his party, are with us and these salutes are given, as evidence to you that I am Kydd.”

Agreeably to Kydd’s prediction, as soon as we came to the log, the report of another cannon was heard and when we reached the other places named previously by Kydd, the same salute was made, and he informed us that no more cannon reports would be heard, which proved true.

After proceeding some distance in silence, Kydd again cried, Halt! and directed us to examine the compass, which then, as previously, corresponded with our former information.

We now proceeded — one furlong, and then — some distance, towards the base of the Hill. Seeing that our course would compel us to pass over a large portion of wet ground and noticing, that by our going about a quarter of

a mile farther north, we could go through a lane which led from the main road, through a barn yard to the woods, and thus avoid the marshy ground, Mr. C — n suggested to Kydd the propriety of doing so. "Very well," said Kydd smilingly "do so, you and Mr. B — h take the lead."

B — h and C — n, in obedience to Kydd's request, started on arm in arm, towards the gate which opened in the lane, and Kydd and Smith followed after. In a few moments, they were several yards in advance of us, and Captain S — told Kydd, that he would have to increase his speed, otherwise they would soon be out of hailing distance, and he thought that it would be best that they all should keep together.

"Don't be alarmed Captain Smith, they will not pass through the barn-yard gate until we get up to them."

"Why?" asked Smith.

"Wait, you will see," he replied.

By this time they had passed through the first gate, and Mr. C. beckoned to us to hurry up, which Kydd did not seem inclined to do. In a few moments, they reached the barn-yard gate, when Bow, wow, wow, said 'a big dog,' whose savage barks and growls, warned them to desist from entering.

"Get out, you brute!" said Mr. C.

"Bow, wow, wow," was the answer.

"Damn the dog," said B — h, and he picked up a stone and threw it at him. This only excited the dog's ferocity, and he made an attempt to jump over the gate, which he failed to accomplish, and at the same instant, B — h and C. started and ran back to us.

"What is the matter?" asked Smith.

"Oh nothing of any moment, only a slight obstruction at the gate yonder."

"A dog, eh!" remarked Kydd, "Come on, I will lead the way. I told you, Captain Smith, that they would not pass through that gate until we came up.

Kydd then took the lead, and we each followed in Indian file. As we neared the gate, the dog commenced his attack again, and seemed to be more furious than before. Just as Kydd reached the gate, a man from the house, which was only a few yards distant, hallowed, and said: —

"Don't go through that gate, that dog is very cross! Thank you sir, for your warning, answered Kydd, but our course lies direct through your barn-yard and pass through it we must"; and as he finished speaking, he placed his hand upon the gate and said: —

"Come on, and have no fear. He opened the gate, when we expected to see the dog bound out and fly at us, but no sooner was the gate opened than Kydd, raising his hand at the dog, and pointing to the kennel said, —

“Go lie down sir,” and instantly the dog cowered down, put his tail between his legs, sneaked off; and went into his kennel. “Now, come on,” said Captain Kydd, and we passed through the yard, without further annoyance from the dog, and as soon as we reached the wood-side, Kydd hailed, and said, — “Externally I leave now; follow directions, and fear nothing.” As he said this, I passed out of the trance, and was again myself. “Why! where are we?” I exclaimed?

“On foreign ground — in New Jersey; but all’s right, come on,” said Mr. C.

CHAPTER V.

“My God!” I exclaimed. “Can it be possible that I have been brought from New York to Hoboken, and that while unconscious?”

“It is really the case,” replied Mr. C. “You have been controlled by Captain Kydd, and have entertained, if not instructed us. Have you any idea what you have been talking about?”

“Not the slightest,” I replied. “How very strange, I can scarcely credit ray own senses.”

“Oh, that is not at all strange,” remarked Mr. C. “Nine-tenths of the world are apt to doubt the evidence of their own senses; but, Mr. H., do you believe in spirit Parasites?”

“I believe in human Parasites,” I replied. “Why do you ask?”

“Simply because Kydd, in his conversation through you, impressed me with the idea, that we all have more or less of these spirit gormandizers with us. At all events, be that as it may, I shall hereafter observe a little caution, especially in using tobacco, lest I may be chewing the weed for some spirit parasite’s gratification. But which way shall we go now?”

After consulting, we decided to go back to where we had deviated from our course, in order to avoid crossing over the marsh, when we halted, and examined the compass, and then struck off — to find the rock resembling the “Coffin.” In a little while we came to it, and found it to be a perfect resemblance of that narrow house in which the mortal part of man decays, and which, notwithstanding that our christian friends tell us it is not the home of the sleeping dead, still to them it is, if we are to judge from the many gorgeous tombstones, and great care taken to keep out intruders, held by them as such. Thank heaven, Spiritualism, has taught me to look upon death, and the grave, without gloom or fear. I want no tombstone, to mark the place of my body’s decay — no mummering Priest, or mock ceremony over it, at its burial. I would have my friends, look upon my lifeless mortal part as they

would upon a worn-out garment, and I am perfectly willing, that it should be the subject for the dissecting knife of a liberal Medical Fraternity.

"Here we are gentlemen," said B — h, "and thus far the work goes bravely on; all is true as described by Kydd to the letter; only think friend C." — and he slapped him on the shoulder, "we now stand within thirty paces of *Two Million Dollars!* and he walked about manifesting the greatest ecstasy of joy.

The spot on which we stood was wild and picturesque and well calculated to impress with the idea that dark deeds could be committed there with impunity.

We then shaped our course by compass and Captain Smith commenced to pace off thirty paces, leaving the rest of us seated on the grave. As soon as he reached the spot, he hailed us, and we all started and went to him.

"This is the spot," said Captain Smith, "now what's to be done; we have no further directions given us by Kydd?"

"Kydd, Kydd, Kydd!" said a voice apparently at the place we had just left.

"Who is that speaking?" asked Mr. C — . "Some person in the woods," I observed, "had we best go and see who it is?" "Yes," we all replied. "Let us go at once; keep Mum," said B. We had gone but a few steps, Captain Smith being ahead, when we saw standing in front of us, a most singular looking man apparently about forty years of age, dressed in an old fashioned military suit, resting upon a musket, and looking menacing at us. We halted in double quick time, when Captain Smith addressed the man, and said: —

"Well sir, what do you want?" Instantly the man raised his musket and pointing it at Smith said: —

"Away! from this place THIEVES!"

"Heavens!" said B — h, and he trembled with fear, grasped Mr. C. by the arm, who also manifested evident signs of alarm, "That is the spirit of the man guarding the treasure; and he shrank back, pulling Mr. C. with him.

"Don't be alarmed," said Captain S., "he cannot harm us," and then, addressing the man who still remained in the same place looking savagely at us, said: — "My friend, you are mistaken, we are not *Thieves*, we are *Honest* men, and have come here to ascertain the spot where Captain Kydd buried certain treasure; we have his permission and intend to carry out our purpose; therefore, it is useless for you to interfere, as you have not the power to prevent us. We are your friends, and our desire is to benefit you, so stand aside, or I will walk right through you," and as he concluded speaking he moved forward a few steps towards the man, who immediately disappeared.

"Thank Heaven, he is gone," said Mr. B. "Positively, I never was more alarmed during the whole course of my life."

“May he not appear again?” enquired Mr. C. “To tell the truth gentlemen, I never was more frightened — I am as nervous as a man can be.”

We then held a council (not of war but of action), and came to the conclusion that we would retire a little from that spot and then form a circle, and see whether we could get any communication from Captain Kydd, who, we all felt strongly impressed, had not deserted us.

We then walked up the hill a few yards and coming to a large flat rock we each took hold of hands and formed a circle, and remained perfectly silent for a few moments, when friend C’s hand became violently agitated, and paper and pencil were placed on the rock before him and his hand wrote: —

“You, Captain Smith, stood over the treasure; all return home and meet me again next Wednesday evening, until then farewell. Kydd.”

We then went back to the spot where the treasure was said to be buried, and took certain bearings so that we should have no difficulty in finding it again either by day or night; after which we returned to New York, and separated with the understanding that we should all meet at Mr. C.’s room on the Wednesday evening following.

CHAPTER VI.

Agreeably to Mr. Davis’ request, and the repeated solicitations of Mary, we both started Sunday morning for church, to hear Mr. Davis’ sermon against Spiritualism. On our way we met Mr. Barker and his wife, who were also wending their way to the Lord’s house of worship. The reader will pardon me if I wander a little from my narrative, but, friend Barker is an important personage, a very strict churchgoing man and with all exceedingly self-righteous; makes very long prayers, groans frequently during service, and is always ready to say a word in Prayer Meetings. When I first knew friend B. he was what the non-religionist call a straight-back Presbyterian, but from some difficulty or misunderstanding with the pastor of his church, he withdrew from the Presbyterians and united with the Methodist. Here friend Barker soon became a class-leader and also one of the stewards. In class, none were more active or zealous, and in prayer meeting, why, friend Barker had but few equals. However, some three years ago Mr. B. took a dislike to the newly appointed dominie, and the result was he demanded a certificate of withdrawal; which was readily granted and he joined friend Davis’ congregation, and had, by his indomitable will and “Holy Piety,” attained the position of Deacon of the church. Somehow Mr. Barker always succeeded in church-elevation, and the love of God never appeared to flow more warmly into his soul than it did when the brethren asked his opinion on some matter

of church discipline or called upon him to take charge of the exercises, and never did he appear more lukewarm than when deprived of the privilege of making a long public prayer or exhortation, which very often occurred when brethren from adjoining churches were present. The truth was friend B.'s religion consisted in a love to be heard for his much speaking, and a desire to lead. But we will not speak further at present concerning friend Barker, we may have an experience to relate in a future narrative, when we shall enter more into the particulars.

"Good morning sister H. Ah! Mr. H., glad to see you accompanying your wife to church," said Mr. Barker as we walked up to them.

"Good morning Mr. Barker — beautiful morning," I replied.

"Yes, bless the Lord," said he, and he commenced humming over the words: —

Sweet is the day of sacred rest
No mortal care shall fill my breast."

"You appear to feel quite happy this morning," I remarked.

"Yes my soul is full of glory, the Lord has been good to me, friend H. Prosperous in business, and a daily out-pouring of his spirit. Why should I not feel happy? and he again commenced: —

"I'll praise my God while he gives me breath
And when my voice is lost in death," &c.

We soon reached the church, when happy Mr. Barker insisted that Mary and I should occupy seats in his pew, which I reluctantly consented to. The choir were just singing, and as I took a seat the words:

"Hark from the tomb a doleful sound,"

fell heavily on my ears.

After the hymn was concluded, Mr. Davis offered up a solemn invocation to God in which the Lord was requested to bless our Country, the President and all holding office under him, the saint, the sinner, the church, and especially the one we were in; concluding with these words, which I noted in my memorandum book, and insert verbatim.

"And Oh Lord, we pray Thee, to hasten the day when Thy Holy Sabbath, will be universally observed, throughout this entire land, and particularly this city. Fill the hearts of the wicked conductors of the Sunday News-Papers, with fear, that they may no longer issue their Infidel Sheets on Thy Holy Sabbath Day. Help, Oh Lord God, the Mayor and Common Council of this City, to rigidly enforce such laws as have been enacted for the good of the people, especially such as compel men to observe the Holy Sabbath Day. Hasten the period, Lord, when Thy People shall no more be annoyed by the sacrilegious sound of the car-bells — when the poor unfortunate misguided youths will cease to

disturb and distract Thy worshipers with the cries of their unholy traffic. When the solemn chimes of Thy Sanctuaries will be obeyed and all come into Thy temples of worship. These mercies and blessings we humbly ask, for Christ Our Lord and Redeemer's sake, Amen."

The prayer concluded, Mr. Davis commenced and said: —

"Brethren, my text for this morning can be found in the first epistle of John IVth Chapter, and 1st Verse.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.'

"Brethren, I earnestly solicit your attention and prayers on this occasion and may the Lord help me to speak with the spirit, and with power. (A loud, sharp, quick, Amen, from Mr. Barker.)

John the beloved disciple of our blessed Lord, perceiving as he did with prophetic eye into the future, saw that in the latter days, some would depart from the faith, giving head to seducing spirits and the doctrines of devils and he warned the brethren not to believe all teachers who boast of the spirit, but to try them by the rule of the Catholic faith; by the Catholic faith, I do not mean the faith of the Romish Church, but the faith of our blessed Lord. The term Catholic means universal or general, the Catholic epistles of the apostle are addressed to all the faithful, and not to a particular Church — hence the Catholic faith implies the faith of the true church, which is the church of God."

Mr. Davis then went on to speak about the evil effects of spiritualism, admitting the fact. He denounced, as only ministers generally do, all those who believe in its teachings, as Infidels and Free-lovers. He portrayed in vivid language the horrors of the damned, warning his flock to avoid having anything to do with spiritualists, or the spirits, quoting text after text to prove that, "In the latter days some should depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits," and ever and anon, calling upon the Lord vehemently to check its progress, to stay and circumscribe Satan's influence, to have mercy and save those who had been led astray and make them come back to the house of Israel at once, or if such was not in accordance with His divine will, to cut them off immediately, that they might no more induce, or lead others astray, the Mediums particularly he requested the Lord to remove out of the way, "If they will not hearken unto Thee, Lord, withdraw Thy Spirit from them — Remove them, Lord, out of the way, that Thy house may be filled, and Thy Holy name be blasphemed no more."

Pious Mr. Barker would now and then utter a loud "Amen," or "Glory to God," or an awful groan, and roll up his eyes with holy horror whenever his minister would emphasize his remarks. Evidently, friend Barker shouted without fully comprehending what his clergyman was saying, as on one

occasion after a somewhat lengthy narration of the deplorable case of a man who had been led on step by step, by the communications which he had received through mediums, until he had finally become insane, and had to be conveyed to the Asylum, leaving an invalid wife and five small children destitute. "Oh, my hearers," said he, "think of it, here was a man, once a good and useful member of society, a loving husband, a kind father, suddenly deprived of his reason, his family left destitute, and he sent to the Mad-house, all in consequence of giving heed to these seducing spirits."

"Glory to God," said Mr. Barker, loud enough to be heard all over the house.

But I will not tire the reader with any further quotation of what I heard on that occasion, suffice it to say, that an hour and a half listening to the demonizing remarks of Mr. Davis tended to develop the devilish condition of mind, which, at times, all are subject to, and when Mary, on our way home, asked me what I thought of Mr. Davis' sermon, I for the first time since our marriage, gave her a short and snappish answer.

On Wednesday evening, agreeably to the communication written by Kydd, we all met at the Medium's room on Canal street, and as before, we remained quiet until the spirits commenced manifesting by moving the table. As usual, friend B. was the first to question, and he asked whether Kydd was present, and, if so, how, and through whom he desired to communicate. We were informed by the table that it was his intention to control Captain Smith, this time, and that he would give us further and final directions. We then all joined hands and at the suggestion of Mr. C. we sang a few lines to a lively tune, to produce harmony. We all knew that Captain Smith was a Medium, I say we knew, not from any evidence we had had, that he was, other than his word, as he had told us that on several occasions he had been entranced by the spirits, and we believed him. We sat nearly half an hour before the spirit could get control of him, which after several efforts it at last succeeded in doing, and spoke as follows: —

"The top of the morning tu ye surs — or I should say the tail of the evening, as it is now nare midnight."

"Why! who are you?" we asked.

"Who am I, is it? Be jabbers, I am meself and meself only, who the divil should I be but me own swate self, Billy O'Roke."

"Well Billy, what under the sun has brought you here to-night?" I asked.

"Under the sun, is it? By the pipers that played before Moses, but it is not under the sun, that I am a tal a tal, the divil, a bit of up or down is there here sur, but, it's not trifling that I'll be, I have come to talk sense sure, to ye, and that's a hape more than ye hered last Lent-Sunday and so 'tis."

“Who do you mean, Billy?” I asked.

“Who do I mane is it? Well then sur, it’s your own beautiful self, that I mane, sure, and was ye not at the church, and did not ye sit quietly and listen to the Praist, prach, and a prach it was, sure enough, by the bogs of Ould Ireland, and that’s the spot that I grew at, a bigger pack of lies, it was never me luck to hear spake from the mouth of a Praist, Houly Vargin, but he looks at the butter-side of his bread close enough sure.”

“Billy, Billy,” I said, “you must not be too severe upon the minister,” for I concluded that he referred to Mr. Davis’ discourse against Spiritualism.

“Bad luck to the man that would concoct such lies, and prach them to the pape — sure and did’t he say, that the spirits were all divils and so he did, and am I not a spirit? Oche and sure, was he faninst me, now I’d bate the divil out of him, and so I would.” And here the medium squared himself in a regular scientific, pugilistic attitude.

“Billy, we don’t think that you or any spirit is a devil, we have a better opinion of the inhabitants of the spirit-world,” said Mr. C.

“Well be me sowl now, I like that, it’s a gintleman that ye are, and so it is, if the Praists do say that ye’re a Humbug. But I’ll tell my errand here and be done with it. Well then to begin, it’s not dead that I am tho’ Winnie thinks that I’m dead, and the Praist, Heaven bless him for he belaves what he says, tells her when she goes to confession, that I’m well through Purgatory. But I’ll not be spaking of what I am, but what I’ve come here for. Well, then I’m here to say a word for the good of all. It’s money ye’re after, but, ye’s must dig for it, and so ye’s must — can ye’s handle the spade, boss? (addressing Mr. C.) Sure you ne’nt answer, it’s meself that knows ye can, for wasn’t I wid ye, the night ye used the spade so handy — thinking ye would get the money the wench²⁰⁶ tould ye was buried near the school-house, but I see ye don’t want me to spake about that — Can ye handle a pick sur? (addressing B.) Faith I know ye can’t, but that is no fault of yours, it’s owing to ye’s bra’ing up — well the man that drives the pen is as nadeful as the man that drives the pick. Captain Kydd tould me to come and spake to ye’s and get acquainted with ye’s, so that when ye’s was diggin I might help ye’s — there now I’m done, so I’ll lave.”

“Wait Billy, wait,” said Mr. C. “I would like to ask you one or two questions.”

“O be aisy now boss, it’s not the like’s of me that’s capable of enlightening ye’s, but go on now, I’ll do the best I can for ye’s.”

“Billy, when did you die?”

²⁰⁶ Mr. C. and a party did dig by direction, of the spirit, of a negro woman, for treasure said to have been buried by a party of Hessians, during the Revolutionary War.

“Faith, I’ve yet to learn that I am dead.”

“I know that Billy, but I mean when did your spirit leave its earthly body?”

“What year is it now?”

“This is 1856, Billy.”

“It is indade, well then it’s twenty-five years since I was drowned — but I’ll tell ye’s all about it. It was this wise. Winnie, that’s me wife, that was but she has another man now, and me was coming till Amereky, and one day at say, Winnie said to me, said she, ‘Billy, the mate says I can hang me clothes up in the fore riggin to dry and I want you to be after taking them up there and hangin them up.’ So I took them and went up the riggin, and was tying them to the ratlin, when Tom Duffy, that’s one of the sailors, was coming down from above and stepped on me hand that I was howldin on by, and it hurtted me so that I let go me hold not thinking, and fell off into the wather. ‘Murther,’ I hallowed, as I struck the wather I’m kilt, and as the say closed over me, I crossed meself. I had on me big brogans, so that I went well down, but I soon came up again to the top, and as I did, I struck me head against the side of the ship, and that’s all I knew ‘till I found myself on the deck again. Winnie was crying to kill herself, and I said ‘Winnie, be aisy and don’t cry, I’m not kilt,’ but she did not mind me, and I took hold on her and shook her, but she didn’t same to notice me. I said, ‘Poor sowl, she thinks me kilt and has gone mad,’ so I left her and went up to the mate, and said — ‘Mr. Mate, and sure my woman has gone crazy,’ but he took no notice of me aither, then I went up to Tom Duffy, and said, ‘Tom, that was a mane trick ye did sure’ — but he neather seemed to know that I was nare him. Just then I heard the Captain give an order to fill-away. ‘The man’s drowned by this time,’ said he, and then Winnie screamed and fell down on the deck, and Bridget Connolly and another woman took her up and carried her below. ‘Bridget,’ said I, ‘I’m not drowned, is Winnie dead?’ But she, like the others, did’nt same to know that I was spaking. I then said to me-self — ‘sure they’ve all gone mad,’ and I went again on deck, but it was all dark there, and I couldn’t see anything and I said to me-self, I wish I was back again in Ould Ireland, and soon as I said it, then I was there. Faith I thought I was draming. Then I met Father Ward, the Praist, that I once used to know but who was dead these ten years and more, and I said, ‘Houly Father, whin did ye’s come to life again?’ ‘Billy,’ said he, ‘you are in the spirit world now, do you know it?’ ‘Faith no,’ I said, ‘I’m not in the spirit world — sure I’m in Ould Ireland.’ ‘I know it,’ says he, ‘the spirit world is in Ireland, and every part of the Earth. Billy, you are now dead to the world.’ ‘Oh! Murther,’ I said, ‘am I dead? — Where’s Purgatory? Oh Father, houly Father Ward,’ I said, and I fell down on my knase and prayed and crossed meself, ‘don’t let me be

put into a very hot place, you know, houly Father, that I was not a very bad man, I confessed regularly, and did penance every day.'

"'Billy,' said he, 'it is left to you to choose. Purgatory is the state of the mind — and not a place, you can select just such a part of Purgatory as you like.'

"'Is that so?' I said.

"'It is,' said he.

"'Faith then I'll not go nare it.'

"'Have ye seen the Houly Vargin and all the blessed saints?' I asked.

"'I have,' he said.

"'Have ye seen the Divil?' I asked.

"'No,' said he, 'the Divil is a myth, but Billy, you will soon progress. There comes your Father, Billy, he will talk with you,' and with that he went off; but I'll not Bother ye further, now ye's will remember me, and when ye's digging for the money, I'll be with ye's; think of that now," and Billy left.

"Well really, Billy is a new character, and to me a very interesting one," I remarked.

"Yes," replied Mr. C., "the spirit-world seems to be peopled with as great a diversity of minds as the physical-world. Billy has never visited a circle, where I was sitting before, and it is strange that he should have come this evening, especially as this meeting was expressly designed for Captain Kydd. I wonder whether Kydd is present," continued he, and as he asked the question, I was entranced and the following communication was spoken.

"You no doubt, felt somewhat surprised my friends to receive a communication from the source you just have, but it was at my request that he came. Neither of you have an over-abundance of physical strength, and as the spirit Billy readily consented to render such assistance as he could, after learning my object in revealing to you the treasure, I deemed it best that he should be placed in sympathy with the circle this evening, which I am happy to see he has succeeded in doing.

Captain Smith, I was much gratified to witness your courage on the occasion of the man appearing; your positiveness repelled him from you. I was apprehensive that when the testing time arrived, you might, like our brave friends here, Mr. B — h and Mr. C — n, be found wanting. No offence gentlemen, I do not censure you, a man cannot at all times act the man; you did the best you could, and that is all that could be expected. I will now state what you must do further, and then you must act.

Prepare yourselves with the necessary implements, and be on the ground precisely at midnight. Let the night be Wednesday next, and do not fail to be punctual, nor allow inclement weather, should it be such, to prevent you

from making the effort on that night. The man who guards the spot will continue to annoy you as much as possible, but do not fear him; as I have said before, he cannot harm you. You will find one of the pots to contain,

63 ounces of Gold-Dust,
4 packages of gold-rings and precious stones,
2 “ “ Agates,
8 Bars of Gold,
10 “ “ Silver,
1 Can containing Spanish-Doobloons.

It will require more strength than you could command to raise either of the iron pots, consequently you will appreciate the assistance of my Irish friend Billy. The remaining eleven Iron Pots, contain Gold-Dust, Gold and Silver bars. Gold and Silver coins, precious Stones, Magnets, Jewelry, and other valuables. The pot you will first come to is the one I have given the contents of; and should you not be able to take more than one away the first night. I should advise you to take that one; and previous to a second attempt, consult me here. Do not either of you call for me to communicate upon this subject, unless all are present. Should you either be in communication with the spirit world, when others are present, and I desire to say anything upon this subject, I will voluntarily do so. Now you have your final instructions, and as it is time that you retire, I will leave. God bless you all.”

“One moment, Captain, if you please, the narration of your early experience in spirit-life, you remember, was suddenly prevented from being continued by the boat reaching Hoboken. Will you please continue it now? It was very interesting to me, and I know that each person present would be happy to have you remain and learn more of your experience?” said Mr. C.

“Yes, please do,” was the unanimous request.

“Well, as you wish,” said he. You remember I was at the Club-house in London with Jones, my gunner, and I was drinking punch through my Lord D’s eldest son. I continued to influence him to drink and smoke, until he became so intoxicated that he had to be carried from the room, placed in his carriage and conveyed home perfectly insensible. I was still in close sympathy with him, so much so, that I began to feel symptoms of reaction, as the stimulants he had drank began to lose its exhilarating effects. I endeavored to withdraw myself from him, but found to my surprise, that my attraction towards him was greater than my desire to withdraw — consequently, I was compelled, to remain in sympathy with him, and in a great degree, feel as he did. On reaching his residence, the servants conveyed him to his room, undressed him and put him to bed, and he was soon left alone. He lay very restless, and would now and then mutter to himself, ‘What an ass I have been, oh, my head,

how it does ache; I'll not indulge with punch again.' And in this way he talked to himself, until finally, I saw him rise up and stand beside me. I was somewhat surprised to perceive that he recognized that I was in the room with him, and I was still more surprised when I saw that his body yet lay upon the bed. I spoke to him and said: — 'I am glad to see that you have come to yourself.'

"'Why! who are you?' said he. 'I am Captain Kydd, and have been with you all the evening.' I then held a long conversation with him, at the conclusion of which, he as suddenly returned to his body, and I saw him get up and dress himself. It was now morning.

I saw from his mind that he had no remembrance of what had transpired in his dream, for I have since learned that what is termed dream is an actuality, and a consciousness, at the time, of the spirit-life, though it very rarely occurs that impressions of these visits are retained after waking, or if they are, but indistinctly. While a person is dreaming, the spirit leaves the body, and holds conversation with spirits; of course there is not an entire separation, for in such a case it would be impossible for the spirit to re-enter its body again. When the spirit disconnects itself temporarily, as in dreams, it is still connected to it by sympathy, and only when that sympathy ceases to exist, can the body decay. Thus you will perceive that when you enter spirit-life, you will not be absolute strangers in a strange land, as each of you have made frequent visits here, while in that state known to you as dreaming.

"Pardon me Captain, for interrupting you, but how did it happen, that you seemed to be an entire stranger, and in a strange place, when consciousness was first restored? — Surely, you must have had dreams at some time during your earth-life," asked Mr. C.

"Certainly, my friend, I had dreams, but it does not necessarily follow that I should have recognized the place I was in at that time. You cannot explore the entire spirit-world in dreams.

"I have since recognized many persons and scenes that I had seen while in the dream-state. I remained with the young man the most of that day, unable to free myself from him. Suddenly I thought of Jones, and said, 'I wonder where Jones can be,' when almost instantly, he stood before me, and said: — 'Why Captain, still in sympathy with my Lord D's son? How have you enjoyed yourself? I had a glorious time, I got my man three sheets in the wind, and myself shivering. After you left I influenced my man to play a game of all-fours with Dick the Minister's son, and as I had such a good sympathetic control with him, I enjoyed the game much. We beat the Minister's son every game and won some two hundred pounds from him. This made him mad, and he called my man a cheat. I told Ned to floor him, this he did not want to do,

but I felt that the clergyman's son had insulted me as well, so I kept saying, floor him, don't be a fool or called a cheat. At last I made him draw off and fetch him one right between his night-head, and he keeled over in a jiffy. Well you may be sure there was a row then, and I stood by enjoying the sport. At last some officers rushed in and arrested the young man, and he is now locked up. I left him a little while ago and was about to go join the boys, when I heard you call me, and here I am.'

"I did not call you, Jones.'

"Yes Captain, you did; thoughts are things, here, and your thought was for me, and I knew it though at the time I was with the young man in Prison.'

"The young man you say is in Prison. I should like to visit him. It is not long since I was in such a place myself, suppose we go to him — Why! where are we,' I exclaimed. 'Where is the man I have been with? Why, this is not my Lord D's residence, this is a Prison!' 'All is right Captain, here is the man I have just been telling you about, see how uncomfortable he feels; what say Captain, let's cheer him up.'

"It seemed that I had no sooner expressed a desire to be with the man in prison, than I lost sight of the young man I had been so long in sympathy with, as well as the house we were in. In fact the desire to be with another was the means by which I freed myself from him.

"Well Jones, how can we cheer him? I am willing, and ready to lend a hand.'

"I'll show you, Captain, now come let's go close up to him, and you say as I do, 'The man you struck has died — you will certainly be tried for Murder, and be hung.'" 'Now, Captain, now,' said Jones, and we both said aloud. 'The man is dead, you will certainly be tried for Murder, and be hung.' Immediately the young man began to say to himself, 'Oh! suppose that man should die, I shall be a murderer,' and he commenced to weep, and pull his hair, and walk about the cell.

"Why, Jones, that makes him feel more miserable,' I said, 'see how he cries.'

"I shall not be able to control the medium longer now. At some future time, I will with pleasure continue. Once more good night. Do not fail to be punctual next Wednesday night."

Kydd then left us and we closed the sitting, with the understanding that we should meet again the next Wednesday evening, at Mr. C.'s room at nine o'clock.

CHAPTER VII.

Agreeably to the arrangement we all met at the rooms of Mr. C. on the Wednesday evening following, and after a few moments consultation, we started for the "El Dorado."

"Well, gentlemen, what will be the best mode of procedure — shall we take an omnibus to the ferry, and then walk from Hoboken up to the place, or shall we hire a hack here?" asked B. after we got out in the street.

"Hire a hack here by all means," said Mr. C. "How could we get the Treasure away, after we have it in our possession if we have no conveyance?"

"True, true," responded B. "That will be best," and we accordingly walked up to the corner of Broadway and Canal streets, when seeing a hack standing there we engaged the driver of it, to take us to Hoboken and back for three dollars per hour. In a few moments we were rattling up town towards the Christopher street ferry, intending to take that ferry in preference to the Barclay street.

There said B., "We have no pick or lantern. What will we do?"

"I know where we can procure both," replied Mr. C. and he hailed the driver, telling him to drive down to Jackson's Hotel at the foot of Spring street, where he said the pick and lantern could be procured. On reaching the hotel, Mr. C. and I went in, and finding Mr. Jackson at home, we soon had the necessary implements in our possession.

"Mr. C., which way to night, so late?" asked Mr. Jackson.

"Oh, only on a spiritual expedition," he answered. "I am not at liberty to say now, but I will tell you to-morrow."

"All's right I suppose, success attend you," said he.

The driver looked suspiciously at us as we stepped into the carriage, and ventured to ask what we were going to do with the pick, spade and lantern.

"All's on the square, coachee," said B., "drive on," which he did with a hurra, for it did not seem to be but a few moments before we arrived at the ferry, and as good luck would have it, the boat was just about ready to start, and in a moment after we were on our way across the Hudson.

"Gentlemen may I ask what ye's going to do at Hoboken, faith, I am fearful that I'll get in a scrape."

"Keep cool, driver, keep cool, you will not be harmed," said Captain Smith.

This seemed to satisfy him, as he questioned no farther, but I have no doubt he thought a "heap," as our southern friends would say. On reaching Hoboken, Captain Smith took an outside birth alongside of the driver to act as Pilot, and we moved on at a rapid rate towards the place.

"Friend C.," said I, "what is your candid opinion; do you really think that we shall succeed and get the treasure to night?"

"I do," he replied. "Some one has written that, 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at its flood leads on to fortune.' And I believe this is the young flood which is to fill our pockets with the needful, and I really trust that it is the case, for my purse is almost daily at low-ebb."

"Hilloa! What's the matter, Captain Smith?"

This question was called forth by the sudden stopping of the carriage.

"Don't know, balky horses I suppose, they have come to a sudden and dead stand," which in fact was the case, neither the driver's voice or his whip would make them go one step.

We all got out and I took one of the horses by the head, and Mr. C. the other, while Capt. Smith and B — h each took hold of a wheel, and we pulled and pushed, the driver at the same time laying on the whip with all his strength, but to no purpose; they would not go one inch. After ten minutes labor in this way we all ceased our endeavors to make them go, and being somewhat exhausted Mr. C. and I sat down on a log near by the carriage to rest.

"Driver, why did you not tell us that your horses were balky?" asked Captain Smith.

"They are not balky sur, they niver done the likes of this before, and I've drove them this twelve month — faith, they say something, and its skared they are."

"See something, fudge, tell that to the marines, they are balky horses and if they belonged to me, I would knock them in the head," said Captain Smith.

"Sure sur, I tell you they are not balky, a fraer tame niver was hitched together — they say something — what's that sur!" and he pointed with his whip ahead of the horses.

"Howly Mother it's a soger wid a gun, get out of that you blackguard," and he brought the whip down with a will and a get ep, but it was no go, the horses would not budge an inch.

"What do you see driver?" asked Mr. C., who at the same time caught hold of my arm and tremblingly said, "I fear that it is the spirit of the man guarding the treasure!" "I see a man standing before the horse's heads, he must be drunk," said he.

Captain Smith and I then walked around in front of the horses, but we could see no person there, and we asked the driver whether he still saw the man. He told us that the man had started and run up the road just as we reached the horses' heads, and asked if we saw him.

"No," said Captain Smith, "we have seen no man. Now start your horses," continued he, and the driver gave the reins a jerk in a true Hibernian style and said, "Go on ye bastes," and they started off on a brisk trot without further

urging. We ran up and got into the carriage, and were troubled no more with balky horses during the rest of the ride. We reached the road-side of the woods at about half-past eleven o'clock, and there we stopped, and told the driver to wait at that spot until we returned — telling him we should probably be gone an hour and a half, or perhaps two hours, but under no consideration to leave the place until one of us returned. To this he consented, and we shouldered our tools and started. The path from the road through the woods was unbroken and a "hard road to travel," and before I had gone twenty paces, I had scratched my hands and face and tore my coat in several places by the briers and underbrush. At one time I actually despaired of ever being able to reach the spot, but as everything in this world has an end, or I should say a change, so had our passage through the briers. We arrived at the grave and looking at our watch, found it to be just fifteen minutes to twelve o'clock. We therefore lost no time in pacing off the thirty paces and finding the spot.

"Here we are gentlemen," said Capt. Smith. "Now let us go to work with a will, and we shall soon know for a certainty whether there is any treasure buried here." He then took the pick and commenced to loosen the earth while I followed after with the spade, and during the next five or ten minutes, the most expert Corkonian could not have made a larger hole in the same time than I did. It was agreed that we would spell each other, and as soon as Captain Smith and I had worked until we felt like resting, B. and C. took hold and picked and dug with equal alacrity and speed.

We found it pretty hard digging as the spot was full of small stones and roots, so that our progress the first two feet was slow, and laborious.

While they were at work, Captain Smith and I sat some few feet from them upon a log watching them dig, and we were both positive that we saw a third person in the hole who was busy throwing the dirt back as Mr. C. shoveled it out. We deemed it wise to say nothing to them, fearful they might become frightened and leave, for notwithstanding both Mr. C. and B — h love money as every man does, I do not think that either of them would have remained there one minute had they seen what we did. The weather was very sultry, and the mosquitoes were as thick and hungry as starved wolves, and equally as ferocious.

"Captain Smith," said I in a low tone of voice so that they could not hear me, "do you see that man in the hole with C. and B.?"

"Yes, I have noticed that a third person was there, since they commenced, but I thought as you said nothing, perhaps you did not see him. I am glad to see you take it so coolly. I see you do not fear him."

As the night was excessively hot, we were compelled to relieve each other frequently, and notwithstanding we kept both pick and spade constantly in motion, at two o'clock we had only excavated a hole four feet square and two feet deep.

"Hard work," said Mr. C. as he handed me the spade, after about ten minutes digging.

"Yes, but every spadeful makes one the less to throw out," I answered, and I commenced with renewed vigor; and they went to the log and seated themselves to recruit. We then dug on in silence a few minutes, when Mr. C. spoke in a low tone, "Captain Smith, you and Mr. H. come here quick! Some person is coming this way!" We instantly dropped our tools and hurried up to them, when they both positively declared that they heard a voice coming down the hill. We immediately put out our lantern and, laying down behind the log, waited in breathless suspense. After remaining in this concealed position for some minutes, and hearing nothing, Captain Smith rose and cautiously moved off to reconnoiter, while we remained concealed behind the log.

In a few minutes he returned, and told us that he could not see or hear any person, and that he thought friends B — h and C. had been deceived, and fancied they had heard something.

"Look there! look there!" said Mr. C. "There is a man in the hole! My heavens, this is more than mortal eyes can endure. We'll never get it, I am sure we never will," and he manifested the strongest desire to leave.

"Don't be too sure of that," said Smith, "he is only a spirit, and cannot, if so inclined, harm us; why, friend C., I am surprised that you have no more courage; come, man, what are you afraid of — I wish Billy, or some other spirit would control you," continued he.

"Oh! for heaven's sake Smith, don't express any such desire, it may attract some evil spirit to control me," said he.

"Why, I thought you did not believe that there were evil spirits?" asked Smith.

"I do not; by evil I mean undeveloped spirits."

"Here friend C.," said I, "take some of this Lager Bier, it will strengthen your physical system, and also create a little 'dutch courage,' and I handed to him a bottle which we had brought along with us, containing some of that beverage. He took the bottle and raised it to his mouth, when his hand began to shake violently, and he threw it into the bushes and immediately was entranced and said: —

"It's the likes of that he should'nt be after drinking, wather is better for him; come on now me boys, faith I towl'd ye's I'd be wid ye's, and now that I

have controwl, I'll tache ye's how to handle the spade, come now sur, I can't be after staying long. Take the pick, boss B — h and I'll follow after ye's wid the spade."

"Good evening Billy, we are glad that you have kept your word," I said.

"Yes," said Captain Smith, "I am thankful that you have controlled friend C. He is a great coward, don't you think he is, Billy?"

"Oh faith, it's himself that can't help it; but come on now, it's better to make the pick hould a bit of conversation wid the dirt that's on the top of the treasure than to be spaking about the faults of the madium," saying which Billy jumped into the hole, and I after him.

After we had been about ten minutes at work during which time we had deepened the hole some ten inches, Billy suddenly laid the spade down and said: —

"I must lave the madium now, but I'll not lave ye's," and Mr. C. came out of the trance.

Captain Smith then took Mr. C.'s place, and he and I continued the work until we had struck the stone, when B — h and C. relieved us. We kept alternately relieving each other until about three o'clock, when B — h, who was shoveling out the dirt, suddenly cried out: —

"Hold the light here, quick! I have the dirt all off the stone!" and feeling with his hand over its surface, said: —

"I feel indentations where the cross ought to be; quick with the light, quick!"

As soon as we could get the lantern lighted, for we had at our first alarm extinguished it, I handed it to B — h, but no sooner was it in his hand than it went out. I lighted it again and passed it to him, but the second attempt to get into the hole lighted was as unsuccessful as the first. There was not a breath of air stirring, nor was there anything the matter with the lamp, as it burned well enough while out of the hole. Several more efforts were made to get it into the hole lighted without success, when Captain Smith said somewhat impatiently, "Come out of the hole, and let me try."

He then took the lantern and jumped into the hole, and after seven trials at last succeeded in keeping the lamp lighted long enough to see that there *really was a cross apparently chiseled out on the top of the flat stone.*

"Another and further confirmation," said B — h, rubbing his hands, and manifesting the greatest delight. "I felt positive that we should find it all as told us; who can doubt now?"

We were all highly elated; even our insect friends, the mosquitoes, seemed to participate in the joy, as they sang about our ears, and kissed our hands and faces with an extra degree of affection and force.

Just at this moment a man's voice startled us. We ceased our talking and heard it again. We soon found that it was a man belonging to the farm house near by, and within sight, who was out at that early hour feeding his horses.

"What time is it," whispered Captain Smith to me. I looked at my watch by the light and found it to be half-past three o'clock.

"What shall we do," I said, "daylight will be upon us in a few minutes, and then we shall be in full view of all who may happen to pass along the road."

"We must fill up the hole as quick as we can, it will not do to be seen here," said Captain Smith. "We must take another night for it — come, let us commence at once, day-light is breaking."

We immediately set about shoveling back the dirt, and just as the eastern horizon began to make distant objects visible we had completed, and so arranged the place that a casual observer would not suppose the spot had been molested by "The Diggers." We gathered up our tools and made all haste for the carriage. Arriving at the place where we had left it, we were somewhat surprised to find it gone. We then hurried on to the ferry, concealing the tools as well as we could with our handkerchiefs.

We passed but few persons on our way to the ferry, and reached it just as the five o'clock boat was about starting. We found our driver and his carriage on board and learned from him that he had waited until half-past three o'clock, and then concluded that he had been "sold," or that we were "body catchers," and had been caught in the act of disinterring, and prevented from returning. He consequently decided that the best thing he could do was to mount his box and go home.

We arrived at C.'s room at six o'clock, tired and worn out by our night's "digging for money."

The reader will no doubt ask, "Well, is this all? — did you not dig again? — if not, why?"

Stop, reader, if such are your questions; we are not yet prepared to answer you; but we will in time.

Circumstances beyond our control prevented us from making a second attempt the next night, and much to my surprise, I learned the following morning that Captain Smith had been appointed to the command of the barque "Island of Cuba," and was to sail that day for the coast of Africa. This information I learned from B — h, who was waiting for me at my store.

We immediately hastened to the vessel and found the Captain on board, who told us that his appointment to the command of the barque had been pending for several days, and that he had that morning received notice to take charge, and sail with the next ebb tide, which he was compelled to do, for the coast of Africa.

Wishing the Captain a pleasant voyage and a speedy return, we bade him good bye, and hastened to Mr. C.'s room. Here we had an interview with the spirit of Kydd, and learned from him that it would be impossible for us to get the treasure unless Captain Smith was with us; and that it would be useless to try. We reluctantly consented to give up the undertaking until after Captain Smith returned, which did not occur till the month of February, 1859, when he called upon the writer and reported himself ready for a second trial at digging for Captain Kydd's treasure, but alas! B — h had sailed, a few weeks previous, for England, and was not expected back until April. Here was another disappointment, but we have since arranged to dig again, as soon as we can effect a lease of the ground on which is said to lie buried TWO MILLION DOLLARS.

[*Crossed out:* Before separating we decided to make another effort that night, should nothing transpire to prevent, and with this understanding I went home.]

Appendix: Conklin Communication from the Lincoln Papers

The enclosed communication
was given through the
medium J. B. Conklin
599 Broadway N.Y. This
P.M. with a request that
it be forwarded to his
Excellency A. Lincoln.
New York Dec 28/61

Dec 28 1861
My friend will you please have
this conveyed to his Excellency the
President.

My esteemed and best earthly friend,
You will no doubt be surprised

to receive this from me, but I like
perhaps of other disembodied spirits feel
a desire to convey expressions of gratitude
and hope to earthly friends. I am not
deaf, I still live, a conscious individual,
with hope, aspirations and interest
in the Union still alive.

I experienced a happy reality—a
glorious change, by the process termed
"death."

I would communicate with you
personally, if not now, after the
close of your official term.

I will be with you in spirit and with
many others impress and strengthen your
Man lives on Earth, to live elsewhere and that
elsewhere is ever present. Heaven and Hell are
conditions, not localities. E. Baker.

13375

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is expected to
know. Many were
not to be seen
at the time.

~~Handwritten scribbles~~

Edward E

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