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TABLE-TURNING AND TABLE-TALKING

CONSIDERED,

IN CONNECTION WITH THE DICTATES OF

REASON AND COMMON SENSE.

“We explain mysteries by mysteries.”

TUPPER.

BATH:

SAMUEL GIBBS, 5, UNION STREET.

LONDON:

ARTHUR HALL, VIRTUE, AND CO., PATERNOSTER ROW.

1853.



PREFACE.

A few days ago a little book, published by a clergyman of Bath, was put in my hands by a lady, who asked my opinion of it, and it was this circumstance which induced me to publish these few pages. It has been my object to follow, as far as possible, the guidance of reason and common sense.

In writing this paper no claims are laid to any high pretensions; it is simply a little pamphlet which may perhaps serve to while away some idle minutes. If the reader finds anything in which he differs from me, I

would throw myself on his candour and generosity ; if, on the contrary, he is pleased, his gratification will be a source of pleasure to,

His obedient servant,

THE AUTHOR.

Bath, September, 1853.

TABLE-TURNING

AND

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FROM the *savant* in his studio to the artisan in his workshop ; from the theologian in his library to the mechanic in his club ; in all grades of life—in all the various classes of society—there is one all-absorbing theme of conversation ; one all-absorbing stimulant to curiosity ; one all-absorbing pursuit to be brought forward, and to be carried out, at every possible opportunity ; it is table-turning and table-talking.

We believe in satanic agency, that is to say, we believe, as all who read their Bibles must believe, that a great power is given to Satan by God, and that “the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.”

There can also be no doubt that Satan has under him an innumerable host of fallen spirits, whose delight and whose business it is to stir up men's minds to evil. It is quite foreign to the present subject to enquire to what extent the devil is allowed to carry the power delegated to him ; to investigate any fanciful theories with regard to his omniscience or omnipresence ; to search out the reasons which an infinitely just and holy, yet infinitely merciful God could have had for permitting Satan first to fall himself, and then to exercise such an influence over human affairs. The question on hand is : Have we just and sufficient reason to suppose that satanic agency is exerted in table-turning and table-talking ? Can any power be found capable of producing the effects which are described as taking place ?

1. With regard to the motion being produced by an involuntary movement of the muscles of the fingers, according to the explanation of Professor Faraday, we do not think it to be a sufficient explanation ; for, supposing all the actors to be perfectly honest, and we have no reason to suppose that they were not so, it must be a very light table

indeed which could be made to turn by a movement imperceptible even to the very person who makes that movement himself.

In venturing to propose anything contrary to that which has been asserted by the learned Professor, we would desire to act with the greatest caution, as we are well aware how greatly superior his judgment must be in all things of this kind. But it is not with learned theories we wish to have to do ; we do not wish to fathom any scientific researches out of the mines of wisdom ; we would simply bring, as we stated in our preface, common sense to bear upon these strange matters.

2. There is a subtle matter which pervades all nature to a greater or less degree. We have very little knowledge of electricity, except as to its effects, and with the potency of these every child is well acquainted. A flash of light gleams across the heavens ; persons are killed ; the steeples of churches are thrown down ; enormous trees are shivered ; and we are told that this is the effect of electric fluid. And for this terrible, yet mysterious agent, nothing is too massive, nothing too solid, nothing too strong, nothing too firm ; no limit

is placed to its powers, no bounds are set to its ravages; it is present almost everywhere, it is easily excited, and easily communicated. It does not seem to us at all contrary to the dictates of common sense to suppose that it is this, mysterious and wonderful I allow, yet certainly not satanic, agent which may produce those surprising effects which so many of us have witnessed; and it is surely more consonant to have recourse to such a theory as this, than to set down immediately to the working of evil spirits that which seems to be incomprehensible.

3. But again, we have very little knowledge of our own mechanism, especially to that part of it which refers more particularly to the mind and the will; and I firmly believe that there is in us a great deal more than most people are willing to admit. To take a case which cannot fail to have come under every body's notice—the glance of the eye. What is it which causes a person to understand immediately the wish, the thought, or the impulse of another? What is it in that glance which makes another quail before it? Mark it more particularly—it is simply a

glance of the eye—a look; and yet that look exerts an exceedingly great influence on the person to whom it is addressed; provided, and this is very important, provided the person who directs the glance has, from whatever cause it may be, sufficient power to exercise an influence over the person to whom the glance is directed. But it is not the eye which exerts the influence, that is merely the instrument through which it is communicated; the influence itself is caused by mind acting upon mind; and hence mesmerism, which we think, without a doubt, is closely linked with the table-turning.

4. And we see mesmerism, or mesmeric influence, or call it what you will, exerted every hour of the day; only not to a high degree; for it is impossible to separate that influence, which in every day life mind exerts over mind, from mesmerism; they are in their essential points (as to cause, not as to effect) entirely the same, and proceeding from the same principle, though differing greatly in degree. In other words, we think that mesmerism is nothing more than that influence which a powerful mind by some wonderful

organization exercises over a weaker mind, exerted more strongly than usually comes under our notice.

5. We have spoken rather at length on this influence of the mind, because we think that it is connected with the transmission of the subtle fluid, which is to a certain extent dependant on the will. In common language we speak of electrifying any one ; and, I must own, I see nothing at what common sense has to cavil at the idea of a fluid being as easily communicated by a glance as by the touch. Our bodies both contain electricity, and are electric conductors ; and bearing in mind the force which we know by experience this fluid to possess, does it seem incredible to you, that an electric train, passing round and round a table, should have sufficient power to move it ? If a flash of lightning were to shiver the table to atoms, you would not be surprised at it ; it would not strike you as wonderful ; why then cannot this lesser effect be produced by the electricity contained in our bodies ?

6. It is no argument against this to say that the experiment does not always succeed, which

we should suppose would be the case, if the movement were occasioned by the excitement of the fluid. This is developed differently in different persons, and where there is but little of this fluid previously existing, there can be but little effect produced. This is made more clearly manifest by the experiment of turning persons, in which we find some are, as it were, forced to turn, while on others the touch produces no inclination to move, even in the slightest degree.

Let us now consider the table-turning and table-talking in connection with satanic agency, and enquire, with all candour, whether it is reasonable and in accordance with common sense to suppose that the devil, either personally, or by means of his subject spirits, is an actor in these astounding transactions.

1. All that the Bible tells us concerning the state of departed spirits is this: That the souls, previous to the final judgment, are in an intermediate state of being, and are reserved in Hades till their last doom shall be pronoun-

ced at the resurrection. We are informed by scripture, and repeat every Sunday in the creed, our belief that our blessed Lord himself descended into hell (Hades, the place of departed spirits generally, both good and bad, and not Gehenna, the place of torment, which we usually call hell). Here the dead, according as their works* have been good or evil, enjoy bliss or suffer misery; but neither the one nor the other to the same extent that they will after the resurrection. With regard to the spirits, either of the just or of the wicked, being allowed to roam about the earth, either at their own pleasure or at the command of another, the Bible is altogether silent. It is very beautiful for a poet to introduce the idea of a child coming from the grave to hover around the beloved form of a mother:

* I use good and evil works here in the same sense as our Saviour in his parable of the final judgment. We look for *justification* entirely to the cross through grace: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."—Ephs. ii. 8. 9.

"If I can I'll come again, mother, from out my
 resting place ;
 Though you'll not see me, mother, I shall look
 upon your face ;
 Though I cannot speak a word, I shall hearken
 what you say,
 And be often, often with you, when you think --
 I'm far away."

But in common life, in which we have to do
 with stern realities, the idea of the evil spirits
 of dead men being allowed to wander around
 us has always been treated by sound minds with
 ridicule. We do not bring this forward as a
 positive proof that it is impossible that de-
 parted spirits should enter the table, but that
 it is in the highest degree improbable; and the
 idea of spirits—to which the idea of evil spirits
 animating the table has pretty close affinity—
 has always been regarded as the tip-top of
 superstition.

2. It is generally allowed that Satan is a
 being endued with intelligence, with superior
 intelligence; and this being admitted, we can-
 not in reason suppose that he would do any-
 thing without sufficient cause. The question,
 then, naturally arises to our mind, what pur-

pose has the devil in permitting his satellites to appear? It must be from his very nature for some sinister purpose or another, and in order to promote evil; and yet the effect produced must be the very opposite; for we should think that no one could see a table acting in a *frantic* manner, at the same time believing it to be caused by the impulse of satanic agency, without being most solemnly and awfully impressed at the idea of evil spirits hovering so closely and perceptibly around him. From this it appears that Satan, an intelligent being, acts in a way clearly to defeat his own ends and purposes, which is contrary to common sense.

3. If table-turning and table-talking be really the work of evil spirits, it is clearly manifest that any individual, or at all events any party of individuals, has the power of calling up at any time evil spirits, and compelling them to answer any questions which may be put to them. Looking at the almanac, we find that we are living in the nineteenth century, but we really think that the publisher of the almanac before us must have made some mistake or another, and it must be the

ninth or tenth century. Awake, ye legislators, for here is a new subject, on which you must frame wise laws and statutes! What is to be done? Shall we kindle again the fires of the inquisition, and torture the witches and wizards to know by what strange spells and wondrous incantation they have acquired this power over the spirits of the dead? Shall we, as our forefathers once did, neglect to sow our fields, and fear to move from place to place, because the world is coming to a conclusion? No, it is not possible! we are not living in the nineteenth century, in protestant, unsuperstitious England, and yet hear that the departed are to be invoked. Surely this is contrary to any dictate of common sense!

4. With regard to the effect the Bible pro-

* It has always appeared to us particularly presumptuous in some prophetic writers to attempt to fix dates in the way in which they do. We are expressly told, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Matt. xxiv. 36. And for these commentators to get over the difficulty by saying that they cannot fix the very day, but can only tell thereabouts the time, appears to us the greatest logical (or rather illogical) quibble that was ever penned.

duces on the table, when it is in motion, we will mention a fact which we read a few months ago in a local paper. A party were assembled for the purpose of trying the experiment of turning a table. They had not been seated very long, when the table began to be slightly agitated, and in a few moments took a rotundary motion. It was now proposed by one of the party, to place a Bible on the table, which had the effect of arresting it at once. A Church Service was then tried, but produced no effect. Various other books were placed on the table in succession, but none could exercise the magic charm of the Bible. After some time one of the party suggested that the Bible should be placed on the table open, when to the astonishment of all present the supposed Bible was discovered to be a volume of Gulliver's Travels. The charm was now at an end, and poor Gulliver exposed had lost his power, the table revolving as before. This does not require much comment; if the table is possessed by spirits, we are inclined to think the spirits have not very much penetration, and we are not *quite* prepared to give implicit faith to all they may choose to declare. It is to be

hoped that "the innumerable number of spirits posted in Bath" will be found better able to perform the rather difficult task they are so very willing to undertake.

5. Another point which cannot but seem strange to us is, that the spirits should choose such a peculiar way of manifesting themselves and of making themselves understood. We would ask the supporters of the satanic theory, why the spirits should prefer causing the table to lift up its leg and rap to the far simpler and easier way of speaking. We imagine the objection would be that the spirits are not corporeal, and therefore have not the organs necessary for articulation ; but then surely the lifting up of the leg of a table and causing it to rap must be an action purely physical. Perhaps some of the invokers would kindly enquire of the spirits why they prefer this laborious, and somewhat difficult, manner of procedure to the simpler one of speaking an intelligible language. We must own that we think that the spirits are in one or two points not quite as rational as they might be ; and that the rappings altogether are very far removed from any approach to common sense.

Permit us to add a few more words. We do not at all agree with the Rev. Mr. GILLSON, and we have not the slightest faith in any of these phenomena being the work of Satan; yet we think that great praise is due to that man who has dared, from conscientious motives, to publish such a pamphlet. Mr. GILLSON is fully worthy of credit, and those who know him best can bear ample testimony to this; and believing what he saw to be of satanic agency, he boldly determined, like a faithful watchman, to sound a warning. Far from deserving blame, or reproach, or ridicule, he is worthy, not only in our poor opinion, but in the opinion of all the truly good and noble, of praise, for having thus dauntlessly done what he considered his duty. Whether it were a wise or judicious step to publish such a book is a perfectly distinct question, and here we think that Mr. GILLSON did commit an error of judgment, as the pamphlet has the tendency on the one hand of promoting superstition, particularly among the lower classes; and, on the other hand, cannot fail to draw down a charge of superstition on Protestantism generally, especially from our most inveterate enemy,

the Church of Rome. Still, let us be permitted to repeat it, we would give Mr. GILLSON unqualified praise for the conscientious manner in which he has acted ; and would ask all our readers to answer this question candidly : Does a man deserve either ridicule or blame for acting according to the dictates of his conscience ?

In conclusion, whether table-turning and table-talking be the effect of satanic agency, or the result of any hidden natural causes ; it is certain that the unclean spirits of the Arch Fiend are constantly hovering around, seeking to whisper in our ear their seductive but deadly temptation ; waiting to surprise us in the moments of weakness ; ever seeking an opportunity to instil their subtle poison in our hearts ; adapting, with wonderful skill, the temptation to the peculiar constitution of each individual ; and rejoicing in diabolical triumph when they have ensnared a victim. How necessary, then, it is for each one to “watch and pray lest he enter into temptation.” But on the other hand, we have the consolation of knowing that the armies of the living God keep guard about the path of the righteous ;

and that, though evil spirits do spread their pernicious and unhallowed influence around us, it is the office of the angels of light to neutralize that influence, and to bear us up lest we dash our foot against a stone. Are devils about us? so are holy angels; are devils watching for our fall? holy angels are jealous of our salvation; are devils enticing to sin? holy angels show us the beauty of holiness; are devils gnashing their teeth at us? angels are smiling at us in love; are devils striving to lead us to everlasting death? holy angels (blessed be God's holy name) are striving to win us for everlasting life. Willingly obeying the commands of their God and our God, it is the business and delight of these holy beings to watch over and tend the meanest denizen of earth who has laid hold of Christ for his Redeemer and eternal portion. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

3 00 53

Printed by S. GIBBS, 5, Union Street, Bath.