

TABLE-MOVING
AND
TABLE-TALKING,
REDUCED TO NATURAL CAUSES:
WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE REV. E. GILLSON'S
RECENT PAMPHLET.

BY
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"Nothing is more mischievous to a new truth, than an old error."—*Goethe.*

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TABLE-MOVING AND TABLE-TALKING, REDUCED TO NATURAL CAUSES.

WHEN the little pamphlet of the Rev. E. Gillson, entitled, "Table Talking; Disclosures of Satanic Wonders, and Prophetic Signs," made its appearance—the author of these pages little thought that his pen would ever be engaged in combating the opinions there advanced—he rather expected that like the ephemeral insects that skim the surface without disturbing the current of the stream, and then pass away; that little book would "sport in the sunshine of the passing hour," then die, and be forgot. Contrary to his expectations, however, much excitement has been created amongst the Bath public more particularly, and it has surprised him that the whole body of the Clergy have not risen up to disavow so dark a spot on the bright Protestant sky of this enlightened country.

It is true that many laymen did step forward, and express in strong terms their disapprobation of Mr. Gillson's proceeding; and while some expressed their regret, at what they conceived to be that gentleman's credulity, others lamented the gullibility of the public who so readily received such statements. But to affect to treat those statements as a burlesque on human credulity, or

deride their author, without demonstrating their absurdity and denying the inference drawn from them, is to leave the poisonous arrow still rankling, where it was too surely planted.

And though many have been deterred from attempting any confutation of Mr. Gillson's arguments from a sense (in which the author entirely shares) of the weakness and inconclusiveness which characterize the whole of his pamphlet, still it must be borne in mind that the Rev. gentleman has many advocates for his opinions, not a few being among his own congregation—and therefore merely-satirical attacks, so far from facilitating a settlement of the question can only tend to sunder still further the advocates of the assailed opinions, and throw new difficulties in the path of a peaceful solution of the question. The public must necessarily divide themselves into two parties—the one maintaining that the Rev. gentleman is labouring under a huge self-delusion, and consequently and even conscientiously a deceiver, *nolens volens*,—the other concluding that the statements are correct.

Experiment, however strongly to be deprecated, necessarily follows; human curiosity, naturally anxious to obtain a peep into the world of spirits, will not desist unsatisfied. The author is acquainted with many families who, following Mr. G.'s directions, were unfortunate enough to meet with the same results, and were it consistent with his present object he could give a monitory description of the deplorable condition to which these revelations have reduced them; so that they no longer venture to remain alone in the room they believe to be tenanted by Satan, but shrinking and starting with horror at every creaking of the most innocent furniture, they live in constant dread lest

these invisible and dreaded guests might leave their abode in the leg of their drawing-room table, and choose a more comfortable sojourn in their hearts. Here it suffices to say, that such lamentable facts as these are not among the least reasons to which these lines owe their origin.

It is by no means the intention of the author to wreath around his ideas passages of Scripture. The matter in question stands so wholly on the ground of Natural Philosophy, that he would consider it a degradation of the Divine Word to use, or rather *abuse*, it to such a purpose. The provinces of Scripture and of Physics are widely different. Scripture never dwells on natural science,—what right has natural science to meddle with Scripture? It is too frequently the case that men who are as shy of thinking, as a lunatic of the moon, cover the absurdity of their assertions with the shield of Scripture. This reminds one but too forcibly of the system of antiquated scholasticism and spiritual tyranny, by which every new thought and phenomenon that lay beyond the limits of narrow-mindedness was considered as blasphemy. Because it was written in Joshua—"Sun, stand thou still!" Galileo was required to abjure as blasphemy his theory of the solar system. Still, should any refuse to consider this matter on purely natural grounds, the author would beg to refer them, and earnestly commend their attention, to Matt. xii. 24—30. If the evil spirits are acquainted with futurity, they must have been aware of the exposure that would follow the knowledge of their existence and their agency. Would not this be Satan fighting against Satan, which we are here so solemnly assured can never be?

Every thoughtful reader of Mr. G.'s pamphlet, must

feel surprise at his venturing to impose on the public the result of one or two hours' practice in these strangely assumed revelations, without making them the subject of serious and laborious investigation. To deduce so much from so little*—is to declare the five senses infallible judges—and that too on the first appeal made to their discrimination. Why do we not then maintain that the heavens touch the hills which limit our horizon? Certainly because having mounted those hills, we prove it an optical delusion. Might not this simple instance teach, that the narrow limits of the intellectual horizon of one man are not those of everybody else? The author is surprised that Mr. G. should have shewn so little acquaintance with the writings of Aristotle, or his own great countryman, Bacon. Surely he must have forgotten the great stress laid by those two eminent philosophers on the only distinctive feature of man, namely—never to place an empiric fact within the sphere of absolute truth, before it has been recognized and stamped as such by the highest tribunal of thinking beings, *i.e.* "reason." With this we must conclude our introductory remarks and proceed at once to a scientific investigation of the subject—else will our door be larger than the house.

The immortal principle of our existence, *the soul*, stands during that period which we call *life*, in connexion with the exterior world by the medium of our body. Every idea, every image, every conception, in fact the whole of our intellectual life, which, by this immortal power are classified into sciences and arts, has either been received from without, or is *awakened by objects* from without.† The medium by which the

* "I have attended but one investigation."—*Mr. Gillson*.

† Aristotle takes the first view, "*nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensibus*." Plato takes the second view. He says that all ideas are innate, and that education only makes us conscious of them.

soul puts those instruments of the body—the senses—into action, which bring before her the impressions from without, is an effusion of an invisible force proceeding from the brain and flowing through and putting into activity the whole organism. In want of a proper name for this force, as well as not to give offence to the reader by the application of a word which might lead to misunderstandings (for names often do more harm than the matter itself),* the author leaves every one at liberty to substitute for the term which he might be inclined to adopt,—vital efflux, vital force, odylic principle, magnetic aura, &c. &c.: “will,” it is generally called when it acts under the express command of the soul; the other terms are more applicable to those effluxions which are performed independently of such command, although there is no essential difference between these vital forces in either case. For example, if after a good dinner the digestive organs require a greater quantity of this force than usual to perform their functions, if consequently the brain has to yield an increased supply, and to deprive the other members of their due share, we perceive the effect of this unequal division not only in the inertness of our organic functions, but we find also that our members, and even our intellectual powers, are less ready than usual to obey the commands of the soul. The vital efflux is most closely united with the exterior world by means of the senses. Here it lurks as it were, and whenever it comes into contact with objects, it makes its reports of the received impressions instantaneously to the soul, which may be prepared or not, to receive

+ Thus Mr. G. was severely and, perhaps, undeservedly censured for using the word Popery in his satanic inquiries. He did not mean at all to use it in a sense in which it is generally looked on by Protestants, but merely, as he states in a letter, to avoid repetition of terms.

them.* All senses are originally only one sense, which we divide into five, according to the effect produced on it by its contact with objects.

The vital force is hardly with any man entirely confined to the limits of the body ; it radiates beyond its prison, and puts itself into an immediate communication with the objects around. This beaming forth of the vital force has been termed by the philosophers "*the sixth, or universal sense*," and it is certain that we are less acquainted with it than the ancients were, whose social life, religion, and habits, made them live closer on the bosom of nature than we do. The constantly receiving new impressions by our senses, and the increased activity of our intellect to work them out, consume so much vital force that that quantity which finds its way out of the body is too weak to make reports of its functions to the soul—it is as a light placed in the open sunshine. It is only when all the other senses are closed and inactive, for instance, in the state of sleep, that the universal, or sixth, sense shows itself active. Many persons, for example, are instantly sensible, though asleep, of a light being brought into their room, while others cannot sleep at all in moonlight. Nor is there any lack of examples of persons in whom this universal sense has asserted its existence on all occasions. Persons have been known who could tell what the ground on which they stood contained—salt, metal, or water. A Frenchman, known to natural philosophers by the name of *L'homme à la Baguette*,† could not only tell the proximity of springs,

* That the soul does not receive all the impressions which are forwarded to it by the senses is evident, for a person in deep thought hears and sees everything that happens around him, but if you ask what he has heard and seen, he is unable to tell you.

† See Reichenbach, vol., I. translated by Ashburner.

but, with tolerable accuracy, the depth at which they were.

The effluxion of the vital force is seen more evidently than in the above-mentioned cases in all phenomena which are produced by what is termed in England Mesmerism.* Nature often produces them spontaneously in persons in a state of high sensitiveness or illness; it may also be produced by putting the vital force of one person in communication with that of another, "mesmerising." In such cases innumerable examples have shown that the odycal efflux becomes so strong that the senses are deprived of their share thereof—giddiness, drowsiness, and sleep are the necessary consequences. The vital force being no longer confined merely to the body (and particularly to the senses), but having passed its bounds, will thus come in immediate contact with the exterior world, and, being still in communication with the brain, from which it emanates, will convey to it (and hence to the soul) the result of this contact without the aid of the senses. Thus the five senses have become one universal sense in the true acceptation of the term, being at once hearing, seeing, feeling, &c. &c.†

* Mesmerism is nothing else but the efflux of vital force; it is called in England Mesmerism, on account of its investigator, "Mesmer."

† Some years ago, before the author had made this branch of philosophy a subject of investigation, he expressed his doubts respecting the existence of it in the presence of a clergyman of Bath. This gentleman was kind enough to allow him to be a witness when exercising mesmerism on one of his patients. Here the most marvellous phenomena were seen which could so much the more be relied on, from the upright and benevolent character of that gentleman which removed all suspicion of deception, as well as the condition of the sick, who had been given over by the doctors, and who stood on the brink of the grave, where man is certainly beyond the thoughts of deceit. Amongst other things, it was seen that whenever the Rev. Mr. — brought to his mouth a drop of vinegar, the sick man would distort his face, and the contrary effect was proved when, instead of vinegar, a sweet material was taken, although they were not in sight of each other. We learn from that, that the odycal power had stepped over the confines of the body, and thus was able to report to the soul, without the medium of the senses, by what it was effected without.

Let us now proceed to the application of the afore-said with respect to Table-moving and Table-talking.

The *will* is the agent which directs and sets the *odycal force* to work, these two terms being often confounded. If several persons join together with the intention of performing the experiment of table-moving, their intention is accompanied by the "will," *i.e.*, they give the command to the odycal force of their bodies to pass over into the table. As soon as the effluxion of vital force has become so strong as to overcome the obstacles of gravity and friction the table must begin to move according to the laws of nature. If the will limits its commands to a mere motion, this motion takes place according to the laws of polarity, inasmuch as the left side of men and animals is of a positive, and the right of a negative. In this way a party forming the usual circle, for the purpose of trying this experiment, constitute by their arrangement and contact a life-electric battery, each member emitting the surplus essence of this fluid from his positive left side, to the negative right of his neighbour, till the transmission embraces the whole circle. The rotation will cease directly the will abates its commands, as may be the case when fear or awe interfere. With persons who look on these phenomena as the result of supernatural agency the presence of the Bible will have that effect, or any other book which should, by mistake, be presented for the Bible, as was the case the other evening in a family where Gulliver's Travels was placed on the table by mistake for the Bible.

If this species of experiment be persevered in for any length of time, the parties engaged, particularly those of great sensibility, will soon feel, by cramps, drowsiness, giddiness, &c. &c., the effects of an increased

effusion of vital force of which they deprive the body.

By allowing an object (in our case a table) to partake of our vital force it becomes as subject to our will as a member of our body. As the operations of our hands are not performed independently of our will, but are only the executors of it; in the same way the table can act only in accordance with the will of those by whom it is influenced. When a party of individuals is engaged in such experiments the pronouncing aloud a question to be directed to the table by one person, renders the will of the rest uniform, or else the effect will be annulled by a division of the wills.

The author feels convinced that the candour of those who met in the mysterious number of seven* on September 2nd, 1853, will lead them to admit that the answers to the questions proposed were at least *anticipated* in their own minds before the table responded by its satanic "Yes." If the table, being only the instrument of Mr. G.'s will, became violently agitated and "literally frantic" when a certain question was put to it, nay, even became so violent as to suggest the fulfilment of the prophet's prediction, is it not, dear reader, more than probable that could you at that moment have obtained a peep into the Rev. operator's heart you would there have seen, in the agitation and excitement that prevailed, a sufficient explanation of the strange behaviour of the table?

Although the author is well aware that nobody will read these lines who has not read Mr. G.'s pamphlet, as the moon owes its faint light only to the brilliancy

* "We accordingly met, Sept. 2nd, 1853, seven in number."—*Mr. Giffson.*

of the sun, he quotes here, for the sake of accuracy, the passages alluded to :—

Are you a departed spirit ? Yes.

Are you unhappy ? .

Writhing motion, which no earthly power could imitate.

Shall you be for ever unhappy ? The same answer.

Are you a fallen angel ? No answer.

Which indicated a negative.

(Why is no answer a negative ?—*The Author.*)

Do you know the fallen angels ? Yes.

Are they more powerful than you ? Yes.

Are you obliged to obey them ? Yes.

Do you like their society ? Yes.

Do you know Satan ? Yes.

Is he the Prince of Devils ? Yes.

Will he be bound ? Yes.

Will he be cast into the abyss ? Yes.

Will you be cast in with him ? Yes.

How long will it be before he is cast out ? He rapped ten.

Will wars and commotions intervene ?

The table rocked and reeled backwards and forwards for a length of time, as if it intended a pantomimic acting of the prophet's prediction :—

"The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage, and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall and not rise again."—*Isaiah xxiv.* 20.

Are Satan's head quarters in England ? Slight movement.

Are they in France ? A violent movement.

Are they in Spain ? Ditto.

Are they in Rome ? The table seemed literally frantic.

Do you know the Pope ? Violently agitated.

How long will Popery continue ? Ten raps.

How many devils are posted in Bath ? Innumerable ones.

Can you give me your name ? Yes.

Two letters were given. I would not allow him to proceed,

because he had told us that his relations lived in Bath, and I thought it might lead to very painful feelings if the name was given.

If it is really true (and why should we doubt it?) that the rocking and reeling was a pantomimic acting of the prophet's awful prediction, not only the inhabitants of this island must have been awe-struck—nay, the Devil in his head-quarters in Rome must have lost the equilibrium on his throne.

The author was tempted to put to his own table questions similar to these, and when asked where were the Devil's head quarters? the table really had the impudence to tell him, that Satan's head quarters were in his (the author's) own heart. He would no doubt have fallen a victim to despair, and not even the balm of Mr. G.'s consolatory words* would have restored him to peace, had he not found comfort in the passage of St. Matthew xv. 19, where we are told from whence the devils proceed that we have to dread.

The writer could have wished that Mr. Gillson had thrown a little more light on one passage in his pamphlet that appears to be of much importance, and concerning which if he forbears from making those conclusions which the words would abundantly justify, it is purely out of respect to that gentleman's person and office.

He tells us that it is an evil spirit who has his abode in the object which affects the rotations, rappings, &c. &c. When his own body was made the object for experi-

* "They (the evil spirits) are sent to deceive, and they are employed in doing evil. Hence the most atrocious *calumnies* may arise out of their answers to questions respecting individuals. They will especially delight in maligning the people of God."

ments, his satellites ranging around him and encompassing his waist, thus forming a group in motion, the reverse of other solar systems, there were, if we are to adopt the Satanic solution of the question—immediate indications of such spirits being active.*

Questions of the following kind must therefore arise in every person's mind:—

Was Mr. G. the abode of an evil spirit? if so, did it pass into him from one of his roundstanders?

Has the evil spirit since taken his departure from Mr. G.? &c. &c.

These remarks are not designed to cast ridicule or contempt upon what has been (as the author believes) conscientiously written; they are simply the legitimate "*reductio ad absurdum*" to which he conceives the theory (if such it may be called) is necessarily open. Sincerely is it to be desired that the well known talent and highly appreciated worth of the Rev. gentleman may not be detracted from by his late ill-advised publication.

What harvest can he expect who sows such seed in the hearts of those entrusted to his care? It certainly is one of the most important duties of the shepherds of souls to admonish their flocks to trim their lamps, and to bear in mind the words of the Great Shepherd—*Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.* Amongst this "ye," Mr. G. is also comprised; and if the time of the *last struggle* is concealed from man, let Mr. G. settle it

* "Hands were placed around my waist, I soon experienced a sensible pressure, drawing my flesh from the right hand to the left."—*Mr. G.*

with the Lord by what authority he pre-occupies the designs of the Almighty, and hurls, with a prophetic air, his predictions into the world.*

The final struggle has been the favorite theme of faint-hearted beings these eighteen hundred years, and talking of it, often takes the place of preparing ourselves for it. Should such an idea take hold of a nation's mind, it would be the same as cutting in twain the nerves of energy, and putting a stop to glorious enterprises which are calculated for centuries yet to come.

Should these lines have the effect of calming the disturbed minds of any, and establishing the conviction that these phenomena are attributable simply to natural causes, and to be explained by natural laws, the aim of the author will be accomplished. Should they, however, fail in so doing, he can only express a hope that some more able pen, and one more skilled in psychological science than himself, will attempt the task, and so exhibit Truth, that the public mind may be tranquillized, and valuable talent and energy be no longer diverted from the cause of usefulness and the interests of mankind.

* "We are entering, without a doubt, upon the final struggle. The battle of the great day of God Almighty is at hand."—*Mr. G.*

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