

N^o 74

TABLE TALKING

AND

THE PARSONS.

BY

THE FOX OF BALLYBOTHEREM.

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

ARCADES OMNES.

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PREFACE.

WHEN the sober deductions of science are ignored by priestly fanatics, no fitter weapons than satire, sarcasm, scorn, and mockery, can assail their profanity.

Table-turning diabolism is not the only one in our Protestant Church of England. In it simony, advertised sales of advowsons, pluralities of livings, bewildering tractarian subtleties, dubious doctrines, hair-splitting controversies, and moral tergiversations, such as would be denounced with scornful repudiation in the commercial world, are acquiesced in by the dignitaries of the Church of Christ.

What an odious spectacle these make before the people, competing one with another for wonder-working miracles, and placing themselves on a par with the money-changers of old, and on a degrading level with the most frenzied ravings of spirit-rappists, Swedenborgians, Irvingites, and Mormonites. Bigots and enthusiasts injure every cause they espouse; their excessive zeal and wild fanaticism lead away the weak-

minded educated classes along with the uneducated. Reason failing to have its normal influence over them, few shafts of irony levelled against their delusions may effect their purposed aim.

With this view the following pages were penned, trusting to the good sense of the reader not to attribute the censures therein contained as anything antagonistic to the *doctrines* of the Church of the Author's conviction, but aimed at the few "silly geese" who infest it with sacerdotal delusions.

February, 1854.

TABLE-TALKING.

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WHILE Oxonian Masters of Art, students of Cambridge University, and literate incumbents of the Church of England are busily engaged in *ravelling* the mysteries of spiritual agencies through the sacred media of table-dancing,* table-talking, and table-rapping, it is not too incongruous a pastime for so classical an animal as myself to imitate those zealously devout pastors. The tables having been frequently turned† against me and my kind, it is now my recreation to turn them against those reverend poachers so *fitfully* occupied in hunting novelties within the preserves of Beelzebub.‡ With this object in view, I invited several members of my family to a *séance* of our own. The circle being considered incomplete without the addition of a few geese, we invited four of the most choice specimens of that anserine society

* "And when mesmerism was beginning to grow *stale*, it was succeeded by table-turning, spirit-rappings, and electro-biology."

† "Now it is turning the other way."

‡ "He is called Beelzebub, to indicate the innumerable multitude of devils who are subjects to him."

to join us, and to testify to the results of our experiments. Our place of rendezvous was to be in the centre of Marlborough Forest. Around a table* lent to us by my friend the gamekeeper we were seated, awaiting the arrival of our distinguished guests. In the distance we espied a fine, fat old gander, whom we agreed to receive as the Right Reverend Father Old Harry, waddling along as well as his fat sides would allow him. On his arrival he was treated with all the respect due to his eminent station, and seated on a dais on the right of Mrs. Fox.

Following close to his lordship's tail, cackling anathemas against the zealots of his creed, we observed another gander. He was a majestic-looking fellow, in fine feather. His bill was as scarlet as the mantilla of the lady of Babylon; his eyes keener than those of the lynx, and more penetrating than those of the serpent. His voice was soft and persuasive as the cooing dove, ay, mellifluous as an intoning priest. His long and snowy-white neck, crowned with a jet-black hood, almost induced us to believe that we were about to be honoured with the gracious presence of a noble swan. We knew he must be some one very eminent in his vocation, before he presented his card as the Very Reverend the Dean of St. Dives. While paying, in imitation of the sycophancy of society, obsequious

* "We see a table manifesting all the appearance of a most *animated* creature—obeying every command. Hence I declare that living agency, possessing not only power but intelligence, was impressed into the table."

attention to him, another pair of geese announced themselves as representatives of the Reverends Anser Gillson and Stolidus Godfrey. They seemed to be on very good terms with each other, being near neighbours, with fraternal interests in their respective ponds. Indeed, on approaching our door, they were heard to discuss the subject of table-talking in an animated yet friendly manner, affirming each other's experience while denouncing the *awful incredulity* of the present age. Science, they said, runs mad; and its professors would believe nothing more than their five common senses affirmed.

Faraday they considered as a hopeless unbeliever, who ought to be immolated as a holocaust sacrifice to the offended deity of Satanic agency. We received these worthies, also, in spite of their martyrizing indignation, with *our* characteristic marks of *apparent* esteem; viewing them as the Urim and Thummim of table-talking diabolism. Indeed, we could do no less, for we deemed it a blessed privilege to be numbered among their friends. Gillson, the author of the "Second Advent," was placed on the left side of Mrs. Fox, while Godfrey, S.C.L.,—which means, I believe, Stolid Confessor of Lying Spirits,—took his seat on my right. The fourth guest was the Reverend Minor Canon, of Brighton, Chaplain to the 1st Royal Fussyliars. From the compliments of the day, and the usual small tea-table talk, we entered into conversation on general topics of current interest.

My reverend guests, I quickly found, were, in

political matters, strong advocates of vested rights, agreeing very cordially except on one head, the *meum et tuum* of orthodoxy. Mrs. Fox, always fond of poking her nose into matters she little understood, alluded to the statistics of clerical society, slyly insinuating that the value of livings, the number of glebe-land acres, the size, the comfort, and situation of glebe-houses, were not such as they ought to be. This firebrand wife of mine nearly set my table in flames with the hot controversial antagonisms of my friends. Seeing how the wind blew, I adroitly turned the conversation to some of the other quackeries of the day, such as hydropathy, homœopathy, allopathy, and mesmerism.* This had the desired effect, in cooling down the enthusiastic ardour of the combatants; for, in support of their several opinions, they were fast proceeding from heightened tones to animated gesticulations, which, had not an hydropathic thought occurred to me, would have ended in blows, or something very allopathically disastrous. Here his lordship, a keen observer of men and things, showed signs of an outward and visible displeasure.

Though he generally argued strongly and warmly whenever his interests were at stake, yet he discountenanced it in his subordinates. Indeed, he had elevated the crozier to knock down, with one Gorham blow, the two most heated disputants, and would have carried his threat into deadly execution, had I not

* "That mesmerism and table-turning are essentially the same, is very obvious."

given him a masonic sign of peace. Quiet restored, we determined now to proceed to the business of the evening—namely, table talking and table moving. Having formed ourselves into a circle, and connected our paws with the webbed feet of our guests, we stood silent while the benediction was given by his lordship, the response to which was screeched by an owl, crouched in the hollow of an old tree just over our heads, in the following verse:

Oh bird most rare!
 Although thou art
 Uncommon common on a common,
 What bird can with thee compare?
 An ancient Roman would answer,
 Anser!

We were just then frightened, never dreaming that one of *Minerva's* family could, by any probability, be so impertinent as to join us uninvited. However that may be, we allowed her to remain only as a spectator, and desired the Rev. Anser Gillson to commence his exorcism. To give the reader as little circumlocution as possible, we will relate matters just as they occurred, only remarking that all the queries were intoned.

The Rev. Anser G. I can call the spirits from the vasty deep!

The Rev. A. Stolidus G. So can I.

The Fox of Ballybothorem. So can any goose, but will they come when you do call for them?

Rev. A. G. Why, I can teach thee, coz, to *command* the devil.

The Fox of B. And I can teach ye both to shame the devil,

By telling truth: tell truth, and shame the devil.—

If you have power to raise him, bring him hither,

And I'll be sworn, I have power to shame him hence.

Oh, while you live, tell truth, and shame the devil.

Mrs. Fox. Come, come,
No more of this unprofitable chat.

Old Harry. No; here it is.

Sit, cousin Godfrey: sit, good cousin Gillson;
For by those names as oft as Exeter
Doth speak of you, his cheeks look pale, and with
A rising sigh, he wisheth you in heaven.

The Fox of B. And you in hell, as often as they hear
Henry of Exeter spoke of.

Old Harry. I cannot blame them. At my nativity,
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
Of burning cressets; and, at my birth,
The frame and huge foundation of the Church
Shaked like a coward.

The Fox. Why, so it would have done
At the same season, if you mother's cat had
But kitten'd, though yourself had ne'er been born.

Old Harry. I say the Church did shake when I was born.

The Fox. And I say, the Church was not of my mind,
If you suppose, as fearing you it shook.

Old Harry. The heavens were all on fire; the Church did tremble.

The Fox. Oh, then, the Church shook to see the heavens on fire,
And not in fear of your nativity.

Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth
In strange eruptions: oft the teeming Church
Is with a kind of colic pinch'd and vex'd
By the imprisoning of unruly wind
Within her womb, which, for enlargement striving,
Shakes her old beldame sides, and topples down
Steeple and moss-grown towers.

Old Harry. Cousin, of many men

I do not bear these crossings. Give me leave
To tell you once again, that at my birth
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes;
The sheep ran from the mountains, and the shepherds
Ran strangely clamorous o'er the frighted fields.

These sights have marked me extraordinary;
And all the courses of my life do show

I am not in the roll of *common* men.

Where is he living, dipped within my see,
Who chides the tracts of Sophists, or scorns my nuns
Who call me father, and who confess me?
Bring that man out that is but woman's son,

Can trace me in the arts and wiles of faith,
And hold me pace in deep resentment.

Mrs. Fox. Fie! Ballyboth'rem, how you cross the Father!

The Fox. I cannot choose: sometimes he angers me
With telling me of the piscina and the stole;
Of the dreamer, Newman, and his prophecies;
And of a dragon, and a cardinal;
A scarlet lady and the Seven Hills,
And such a deal of non-natural stuff,
As puts me from my faith.

Men, after all, are truly such dupeable animals, as to put us out of conceit with them. No sooner is the false halloo sounded by some poacher in the preserves of politics, physic, or divinity, than he bounds off, running helter-skelter up the hills, and down the vales, over rocks, and through the rivers, without the purpose or the skill of the stratagetic doublings of my friend, the hare.

A truce to reflections; let the transactions of our learned society tell, this evening, its own tale, as elicited by their reverences.

Are you a lost spirit?—Yes! [*indicated by the test of rapping.*]

Who and what were you?—Dr. Humbug, Regius Professor of Natural and Supernatural Agencies; late of Oriel; late of Corpus Christi, and now of St. Ignatius.*

Are there other lost spirits with you?—Yes.

What are their duties?†—To delude and cajole.

Where do they haunt?—Purgatorial bishops' palaces, Cantwell deaneries, and Tractarian vicarages.

Do they‡ lie?—When it suits.

* "Are Saturn's head-quarters at Rome? The table literally seemed frantic."

† "Baxter II., and some others, found that they were lying spirits. They are sent to deceive."

‡ "One spirit confessed that he was sent to deceive and ensnare us."

Do they speak truth?—When it suits.

Can you name them?—Yes, Legion.

Are you acquainted with them?—Yes; with both bishops orthodox and heterodox, the Deans of Quakery, the Revds. Chancellors Simony, Rectors Pride, Canons Conceit, Rubric Zeal, *cum multis aliis*.

Old Harry, becoming very impatient, kicked the table, and denounced the unclean spirit.

My friend, Mr. Fox, of Cunning Hum, expressing himself dissatisfied with the brevity of Dr. Humbug's table-rapping sorcery, wished to make further inquiry into the iniquities of the Church, with which desire the Fox of Bally Blustrem agreed.

Requiescat in pace being our *public* motto, we thought it too insulting to the memories of the dead to evoke any impertinences which could only wound the sensitiveness of the living.

Strongly impressed with the rectitude of our motives, while yet anxious to obtain the direct testimonies† of the living, we again collected round the table. In a few minutes it gave evident symptoms of being perturbed. "The spirit moves," said the Rev. Anser Gillson; "it is now in the table," vociferated the Rev. Asinus Godfrey; and so it seemed, for the table was *polkaing* in the most approved fashion. "Ask thy questions, Brother Gillson," commanded old Harry. "Amen," replied he; and then the following colloquy was carried on, rendered readable by

* "Many wonderful truths they may tell."

† "If it were the testimony of man, it would obtain an hearing."

a guest deputed to serve us, on this occasion, by the chief director of the Electric Telegraph Company.

Who is there?—The Dragon of St. Cross.*

Your business here?—To tell the *truth* and shame the devil.

Proceed then.—The Mastership of the Hospital is not an ecclesiastical benefice. I was nominated to the hospital *merely* as a *guardian*, and have *no* cure of souls; nor was I *inducted* to the Church. I am not subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction or residence.

1833?—I am *not* incumbent of St. Faith.

1836?—I am *not* on the bishop's books as rector.

1845?—I have no clerical office in the hospital.

1849?—The Mastership is an ecclesiastical benefice to which I was instituted and inducted, and read in, in the church on the 4th of January, 1808.

Are you one of the Legion?

The spirit felt itself so insulted by this *pertinent* question, that it would not deign to manifest itself, but retreated, we presume, rebuked and, it is to be hoped, ashamed.

All this was a complete triumph to the simple Reverends Gillson and Godfrey, but not so to the rapacious maw of the Very Reverend Dean of St. Dives. He wished another experiment to be tried, to confound the Irvingites† and the Faradays‡ of the present day. He witnessed the table-turning tested at the ordination breakfast of his right reverend friend,

* “Unclean spirits are to go forth out of the mouth of the Dragon.”

† “Baxter II. No *candid* mind, *free* from prejudice, could read his book on Irvingism, without feeling satisfied that satanic agency was employed there.”

‡ “Professor Faraday never could have witnessed anything of the kind, or he could not for a moment advance his physical theory as an explanation.”

Dr. Olive Ant; where, from a slight oscillatory movement, it revolved progressively into the wildest gyrations, which no exorcism could diminish, until they placed on the table the ponderous weight of the "Iniquities of the Registrarship* of Canterbury." Our respective Mesdames Fox showing certain symptoms of nervousness,† we considered that we had effected enough to convince the world of the *noble* and *sound* truths of table exorcisms. On the suggestion of my friend, of Cunning Hum, I was advised to deliver to my guests the following "pastoral address" before we parted.

My dearly beloved brethren—Let us calmly review the subject of table-talking and table-turning. There are many quackeries in theology as also in science, the dupes of which are not the most numerous among the ignorant. Unfortunately for the nobleness of human nature, the chief empirics are found among the educated—the shallow-minded, credulous simpletons of the academy and the university. "Pity it is, 'tis true;" yet more the pity that their abiding-places are found in Agapemones, communistic fraternities, and demagogue societies. Difference of opinion on sceptical topics will ever appear, as long as this world exists, yet common sense ought to guide us through

* "But the instant the divine volume was laid on the table the movement ceased."

† "It was accordingly tried upon a lady, who soon felt the influence and began to turn: a sensation of sickness and faintness, however, was creeping over her."

the devious path of contested logic, or the mazy windings of sciential or polemic controversies. That it will do so in time, there can be no doubt. Time is required to develop the intricacies of dubious and antagonistic interests; and that time will assuredly arrive, when sound opinion, with mature judgment, will safely pass through the ordeal of criticism to brighter landscapes than morbid visions ever beheld. Judging from the events of the present age, we are gradually becoming more and more convinced that the polemic questions of the various and severed Christian denominations will not be left alone for decision to the judgment of the cleric theologian. The laity will fall in and divide the disputants. They will, like the lawyer, present each client with a shell, after having themselves partaken of the oyster.

The Romanist and the Puseyite—the High and Low Church, beside the ever-dividing Sectarians will find “their sheep running to the mountains,” while their shepherds are seen “scampering over the frightened fields.”

What wail and lamentation then! What hopes deferred, hearts sickened, and what prospects shadowed! Turn, ye silly geese, from these wild satanic gyrations of a hobnobbing table, to that where your labour and sacred ministrations may effect their purposed good. “Let your lights so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven.”

“Read, mark, and inwardly digest” that solemn

service, wherein your sacred office impresses mankind with the obligations due from believing and repentant creatures to their Creator. There you will be found in your true vocation; there you would be respected; there you may gather together into His fold the stray sheep of benighted shepherds: instead of which, by your wild phantasies, your controversial bickerings, your simonial immoralities, and your worldly ambition, you, "dressed in brief authority, play such fantastic tricks before high heaven, as make the angels weep."

Our evening's amusement being thus ended, we "willed" the table to hop home; it went, as if "possessing not only power but intelligence," rapping at the gamekeeper's door, while the geese waddled to their respective glebes, edified and edifying.

THE END.