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THE

R A T I O N A L E

OF

S P I R I T U A L I S M .

BEING

TWO EXTEMPORANEOUS LECTURES

DELIVERED AT

Doddworth's Hall, December 5, 1858,

BY THE REV. T. W. HIGGINSON.

REPORTED, PHONOGRAPHICALLY, BY T. J. ELLINWOOD.



NEW YORK :

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PREFACE.

In presenting to the public a full report of the following able lectures, we comply with a general wish on the part of those who listened to them. The report has undergone some revision, necessarily hasty, by the speaker; and some changes have been made in the connection of the parts, to adapt it for the purposes of a pamphlet. At his suggestion, it has also been divided into three sections, with appropriate headings, instead of the original two. No other important alteration has been made. For the success of this pamphlet, we depend both upon the intrinsic merit of its contents, and the high esteem in which its talented author is held by all classes of reformers.

THE PUBLISHER.

Entered according to Act of Congress in the Year 1859, by

T. J. ELLINWOOD,

in the Clerk's Office of the District Court, for the Southern District of New York.

RATIONALE OF SPIRITUALISM.

I. THE PROBABILITY OF SPIRITUALISM.

I have been invited to address you to-day, my friends, as a congregation consisting mainly of "Spiritualists." In assuming that you are such, I assume, of course, that you have had too much opportunity of thought and knowledge, for me to teach you as children; and that you have among yourselves too great a range and variety of thinking, for me to expect that all of you will agree with what I shall say. If it were to be so, there would be but little use of my saying anything. It is said that the reason why the Germans cannot unite upon any political revolution is, that wherever there are two Germans, there are at least three different opinions. I trust that where there are two Spiritualists there are three or three or a dozen different

ried forward, thus far, mainly by its enemies; and that its friends have done but little of the work. Indeed, it is almost always so with every new truth. Give me, to develop the evidence and the value of any great new fact, a determined opponent, unflinching, uncompromising, unyielding, logical, clear. That man exhausts the grounds of opposition; he develops all the difficulties; he uses the weapons on the other side, till he wears them out; and he establishes the truth, so far as his influence can go, no matter what his motives may be. But let that man be at last converted to the truth, and you instantly find him tempted to become insincere; to claim more than he knows; to put two and two together to make four, before he knows that either of the twos is really two, after all.

I rejoice in the intelligent opposition any new movement meets with, but I feel a terror when I watch the course adopted by its friends. Emerson says that the wise man is always glad to learn from his assailants, "for it is more his interest than theirs to find his weak point." And nothing but a resolute determination to carry into our own affirmations the same spirit of close investigation and dogged accuracy which we find in our opponents, will make us as useful as they. Is there a man or woman here who dares to claim to have rendered so great service to the progress of Spiritualism, as has been rendered by the suspicion, the hostility, even the injustice, if you please, of the Cambridge Committee?

(I have very little fear of any of the popular arguments against the hopes and the beliefs that we call Spiritualism. These objections defeat themselves too easily. Why tell me that Spiritualism is dangerous as causing insanity, when I am satisfied that where it makes one person insane, it saves ten from becoming so, and when I know from observation, how infinitely better is the insanity of hope which Spiritualism brings, than the insanity of despair which you find in the churches? What is its fanaticism of love and joy, compared with the fanaticism of hate, which rules so widely in men's religious associations, and mars the purity of the worship in every church in this city to-day, by the jealousy and narrowness that haunt it also.

What is even the demoralization that in some cases results from Spiritualism, when we know that the worst demoralization of every age always shelters itself beneath religious hypocrisy? What is it to me, to complain that Spiritualism does not instantly reform all the sinners it touches, when, at the worst, I can see no other abstract belief which reforms so many? Why point to the defects of the Spiritualist literature and eloquence? I know it; we all know it, too well. But those who, from the platform of the ordinary philosophies and theologies, criticize this weakness, prove too much in making the criticism. They complain of the barrenness, the meagreness of the nourishment which Spiritualism as yet offers. Be it so; and yet poor as that nourishment is, what hungry thousands are eager to seize upon it; and what, then, must have been the previous diet on which those thousands have been feeding! If the pasture is so poor which Spiritualism offers to the soul, what, oh, what must be the unutterable barrenness of those other pastures which the sheep and the lambs are all leaping the fences to get out of, into ours! (I repeat, the ordinary criticisms are nothing: the ordinary objections are little.

No doubt the Spiritualist movement has thus far been unsatisfactory in its results, but its advocates have been trained in a manner which justifies this. You have asked your questions of your friends in heaven, and the answers you received were poor and prosaic, it is true. But were not the answers as good as the questions? That is the only fair test. You talk with an astronomer. You yourself have never learned the preliminary facts of science; you do not know whether the earth moves around the sun, or the sun around the earth; and you do not, therefore, (if you are a reasonable man) find fault with the astronomer, because he has not made the whole theory of planetary motion clear to you in five minutes. You talk with an inventor. You are entirely unacquainted with the science of mechanics, and you do not therefore complain that this inventor does not elucidate his machine to you in one sentence. You attempt to talk with an angel, and can you complain that your dozen stammering questions do not elicit, in reply, the

whole mode and manner of his new state? It is the same previous ignorance—the same want of preparation—which mars your efforts in that direction also. The Scriptures suggest that a fool should be answered according to his folly. We have most of us asked very foolish questions, and in many cases have received very adequate responses. But when we see the antecedent condition of men's minds—the crudeness, the vagueness, the deadness of their spiritual preparation—it is no wonder that they have gained no greater results.

In the midst of a world full of despondency, of doubt, of sadness, with a sad and weary life, in many cases bounded by a sadder and more weary view of eternity, comes a new hope, a new excitement, a new aspiration. (Are men prepared for that? Of course not; they are unprepared. What is the average view of God in the community? Terror! What is the average view of this life? A vale of tears, with hotter tears beyond! What is the average view of eternity? Despair—for ninety-nine out of a hundred of the human race! How can you expect a community like that, to take up any gospel of hope, and not be made by it, sometimes, fanatical and insane, ending, perhaps, in the reaction of licentiousness? Think what, even in the churches, is the average teaching of the children of the community!

Harriet Beecher Stowe, one would think, represents a progressive type of established religion. Her little daughter, it is said, while reading the Bible one day, came to a problem which her mother, though the representative of a race of clergymen, could not solve. Said the little girl, "Mother, is it right to be angry?" "No, my child, of course not; why do you ask?" "But, mother," said the pertinacious little questioner, "is it *never* right to be angry?" "Never, my child, I am astonished at the idea." "But," exclaimed the child, "it says in the Bible, that God is angry with the wicked every day; what is God angry for?" "O, my child," said the mother, "that is in accordance with his law—his holy law; you will understand it by and by." The child wanted to comprehend it earlier, and she tried to solve the mystery herself. She meditated for a moment,—and then,

exercising that remarkable capacity for hitting the nail on the head, which is the birth-right of her race, exclaimed, "Ah! I understand how it is, mother, God is not a Christian, is He?" Thus the piety, the faith, the morality, the philosophy of centuries of Christendom, end at last, in the youngest of a race of saints, with the worship of a God who is not a Christian!

Now, for such a community, so trained, to enter at once into any great thought or hope, is impossible. There must be hidden dangers, inconsistencies, absurdities, that threaten the believers, worse than the more transparent inconsistencies at which the unbelievers smile. Through oceans of folly, across wastes of dreary doubt, must the human race yet press onward to its goal. And I know, for one, that so momentous the importance of the subject, so great the difficulty of grappling with the least of its novel problems, of meeting the least of the questions that we ask ourselves—which are far harder than any questions that others ask us—that I feel the wish constantly renewing upon me, to remain dumb upon it, myself, in a more than Pythagorean silence; for Pythagoras only made his followers hold their tongues for five years. Nothing but a sense of what seemed my duty, has induced me, little as I know of this subject, to speak before you to-day of that little.

(There is one preliminary point which is very clear, in speaking of Spiritualism. Whether we believe or disbelieve in the present practicability of Spirit-communication, it is certain, at any rate, that the whole progress of science and thought, for centuries, has been steadily pointing in this direction, and no other.) Formerly, the possibility of communication between this world and the next was believed; but as a tradition, as a vague superstition; believed, without a scientific basis of actual evidence. So far as such evidence existed, it lay outside of the understood fabric of science, and was irreconcilable with it. But it is the peculiarity of all modern scientific discoveries, that by their gradual ascent into the higher powers of Nature, they have prepared the way for Spirit-intercourse. The discoveries of the last fifty years have dwarfed all previous centuries, and yet it is not the *quantity* of these discoveries, but their *quality*,

which is most important. It is not the accumulation; it is the direction in which these successive accumulations point, all aiming upward, all pointing to something higher and yet higher. That is the remarkable fact. What a series of successive steps, beyond the early material knowledge of nature, has been taken by the race! What a step, for instance, into Galileo's discoveries of the powerful pressure of this invisible atmosphere! What a step further and higher into a knowledge of the gases;—lighter, more subtle, more penetrating than the atmosphere! What a step into the knowledge of steam;—a new power, not remarkable merely because greater than the previously known mechanic forces, but because higher, finer, more akin to the spiritual! What a step forward and ascending into a knowledge of electricity;—so much higher and more subtle than steam; not invisible only, but imponderable! Further yet, science was not yet to exhaust its marvels, and passing, by direct progress, from the delicate applications of magnetism and electricity, there came into knowledge a range of human powers akin to these—a human magnetism—a spiritual electricity—a power of man over man, of soul over soul, and all the wonders of somnambulism and mesmerism began to dawn.)

As the earliest steps had shown visible matter to be the servant of the invisible, then the merely invisible to be inferior to the imponderable, so the merely imponderable seemed low and coarse, compared to this spiritual or semi-spiritual agency—this influence of mind over mind. If it was wonderful that man could see with his eyes, and act with his hands: how much more wonderful without them. Thus man was brought, not abruptly, but by gradual preparation, into a knowledge of new capacities and new powers. I repeat, all these successive steps were remarkable, not for the *quantity* of knowledge they developed, but for its *quality*,—not for the fact that we had more power than before, but because it was carrying us up and up, into a still rarer and finer region, where it seemed as if the very vault of the heavens would be scaled, and as if by these advancing faculties, men communicating soul to soul, without the intervention of the body, might at last touch the disembodied, and

speak to them also. Thus high the aspiration of man ranged itself at last, and when the climax of that aspiration came, the answer was given, and new and more wonderful knowledge burst; not as a thing exceptional, strange, or out of the direction of all previous tendencies of thought, but crowning those tendencies;—the last result of the aspirations of the nineteenth century;—(a ladder stretched by successive rounds, built up year after year, and reaching from matter to spirit, at last.)

I can understand perfectly how multitudes of persons see no adequate *a posteriori* evidence of the existence of spiritual communication, even now, after all the facts we have had; but I cannot understand how there can be a single person, in the least acquainted with the tendency of thought, and the progress of knowledge, for the last fifty years, who does not see that (every thing has pointed steadily in that direction.) And even now, if all our thoughts on this subject should prove a dream, the *a priori* probability would be the same—that we are on the eve of the great discovery, and shall come to it soon, even if it should turn out that all present hopes are a delusion, and we have not attained to it yet.

Now to any person accustomed to thinking, these general considerations are of inestimable value. God's laws do not reveal themselves spasmodically and in fragments, with no connection between them: they flow in vast accumulating waves of thought; and when the time has come for the final climax, that is ready also. Any person can see the antecedent probability that, in this age, or very soon, spiritual communication will be realized, because he can, if he will, familiarize his mind with all the preceding steps, and see that they point to something. Of course, a man may stop at any given point, and refuse to go further. He may make his protest very early; may believe in the invisible air, only because it blows his hat off, and in the steam-engine, because it sometimes explodes. (Many men, even now, disbelieve in the Atlantic Telegraph, and regard the messages of the Queen and President as rather prosy counterfeits. Some disbelieve in the Telegraph under any circumstances; and in the same way, some men reject somnambulist clairvoyance

and mesmerism. Therefore I say, the mere attitude of incredulity proves nothing; of course, a man stops at each of these advancing steps into the Invisible, until he sees firm footing before him; then he goes one step higher.

Of course we must be cautious; but it is one thing to be cautious in receiving a new fact, and another thing to proclaim it impossible. One is the caution of a wise man, the other of a bigot. If I know anything of the tendencies of the age, they are all in one direction. This does not prove that they have yet reached any given point in that plane, but it does make this result far more probable than if their movement were known to be in the opposite direction.

I suppose there is no fact so absolutely momentous to the human soul as the personal conviction of immortality. The time has long passed when well-meaning persons who called themselves atheists, could set aside the doctrine of immortality as the mere invention of a priesthood; they now admit it to be the result of a yearning (though as they think vain) desire, in every human soul. I suppose that all the united suffering from all other causes of sorrow on earth, is not equal to the suffering that proceeds, even now, from doubts and anxieties on the subject of the future life. I know, although it has been my special avocation for a large portion of my life to sympathize with the sorrowing, and to search out the suffering, that I have never seen any grief worth naming grief, that did not have this element in it, immediately or remotely. And undoubtedly there is more of this suffering among the believers in immortality than among the disbelievers, since any man of common humanity would prefer, if he could choose, to believe rather in annihilation than in hell-fire.

I met, a day or two ago, in a religious pamphlet, a quotation from an early Roman writer, describing his personal experience in regard to immortality—his hopes, his doubts, his fears. This, the editor said, was the result of Paganism. As I read it, I recognized, step by step, and point by point, just the same doubts and distresses that I had had laid before me for sympathy, again and again, from the children of Christian families;

and there was not a point of dread or suffering in it, that I could not have matched by personal confidences, from those who had been trained in Sunday Schools, and had even found their way into pulpits. Explain it as you may, the fact is certain. I have myself seen death in many forms, and under many circumstances, from the luxury and love of happy homes, to the lonely sadness of a sailors' hospital in a foreign land; I have sat beside death in varied shapes, and I know that the worst sorrows I have ever seen to accompany it, among the dying or the survivors, have been in Christian households, and among Christian church-members. You may explain the fact as you will, the fact is certain.

(The senses fear death, you may say. Yes; but theology makes it much more fearful.) If the books which have been written to argue away the possibility of any natural, instinctive faith in immortality; books written to prove that if it were not for the resurrection of Christ, all this immortality would be not only improbable, but out of the question,—if these books were brought together, they would fill this hall, almost all of them having been written by Christian men; and a large proportion of them by Christian clergymen. And such books as these have done more to root out all natural faith, to discourage all the natural yearnings, to drive away the instinctive hope in immortality, than could be met and conquered on the other side by treatises on the resurrection of Jesus, though they accumulated in numbers enough to fill the Astor Library.

(The Church has tried to kill the natural faith in immortality, and substitute for it a historical one; and the result has been more disastrous—I will not say than that produced by the teachings of Paine, for Paine believed in immortality—but than all the spasmodic, hopeless, faithless despair of all the self-styled atheists in Christendom.)

No person who has not been a minister can know how important to men's minds is the belief in immortality. I have so often been through the experience of this, that when a summons comes for me, as it will sometimes come, to attend a funeral among strangers, and when I think of the task that I have

often found before me in such cases, and may find before me in this case, to summon up, namely, all the life and light given me, to carry it into that gloomy house, and to put the point of my own firm faith, as it were a glittering spear, beneath that mass of hopeless despair that rests there, and try to raise it for a little moment, at least, until the services are over; when I think what I have had to do, spiritually, at funerals, and what I have got to do again, my heart sinks within me, and I say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" I approach the door of that house, I might almost say, with worse shrinking than I should if I knew that my own beloved household lay in death within,—for that I could bear; it would be only my own burden; but this is bearing the burdens of others who are faithless and hopeless. I have done it, and I can do it again; I can leave such families happier than I found them; but I tell you that, for a healthy human soul, there is no task on earth so exhausting as this one! And I tell you the truth when I say that when—as has sometimes been the case—I have learned, ere the funeral, that the family into which I was thus summoned were Spiritualists, my whole heart has bounded up with joy again; I have felt a thrill of exultation; I have known that this stern duty of which I have been speaking, would not be mine; I have been certain that I should find sympathizing friends there, and those who believe in God as well as in man; I have gone to that house with joy, and have gone away from it perhaps with greater joy; and have felt that the "funeral," as men call it, had been to all of us a time of deeper joy and higher faith than any joy of wedding or of family festival. When a man has had that experience, it is hard to convince him that the work of Spiritualism is anything but a blessed one, or that its cause is one from whose service we should shrink.

Therefore, in spite of all the perplexities, doubts and difficulties, which rest upon the details of the subject, and may rest for years longer, as has happened with many a new discovery before, I feel at times a thrill of rejoicing that I am permitted to bear testimony to the truths that are carrying life and light to so many. And yet it is to be remembered that the more im-

portant these results are, the more important it is that they should be attained by legitimate means. (Spiritualism rests, after all, upon certain facts which we believe to have been demonstrated. Above those facts is built a superstructure of certain arguments and deductions. If the foundation is false, the superstructure is false; but if the foundation is firm, the superstructure is secure.

II.—THE FACTS OF SPIRITUALISM.

Let me speak, then, of these facts. Let us remember that our own position, in regard to them, at first, was that of incredulity, and let us cherish respect for those who retain that position still. It is not strange if they are even influenced by a certain inward disinclination, not to the fact of immortality, but to these special proofs of it; not to spirit-communion in itself, but to the forms now claimed for it. This is a legitimate distrust. It is a ground of objection to any facts, when they seem in themselves inconsistent, undignified, and unworthy of God's order, and the general beauty of the universe.

I think it may be fairly urged, however, that these critics ignore some of the necessary laws which must govern any conceivable form of spirit-intercourse. While we have bodies we must submit to their conditions. To complain that the methods of spirit-communion are gross and earthly, is to complain that we have gross and earthly bodies to communicate through. I have often wondered why those who criticise the forms which God and nature appear to have chosen, in which to introduce us to intercourse with the departed, do not imagine some better ones in their place. Alphonso of Castile declared that if he had been present at the creation, he could have given some useful advice. We have heard as yet not a single piece of useful advice as to the forms in which the fact of spirit-communion might have been better presented.

Think of the vast variety of human temperaments. Conceive, if you can, what different forms of intercourse would be chosen by these various individuals, as suitable to their needs. One, very ardent and earnest, would long for the most immediate

contact. "Let me," he would say, "hear the voice of my friend, speaking to me audibly; let him even touch me perceptibly, or let some vision, marked by his personal appearance, come before my mind's eye." Another, more timid and sensitive, would say, "I shrink from that degree of nearness; let the communication from my friend come through some other person, worthy to receive it; let some letter be written bearing his private characteristics; or some message come which shall authenticate the messenger." Another, more ideal, would say, "These things are too direct, too palpable a form for spiritual intercourse; some new one more poetical should be invented. Let my beloved speak to me from the spirit-world in music, or let glancing lights float to me in the darkness, waxing or waning, changing or moving, to represent the varying moods of thought, and the impulses of feeling." Others again, of more matter-of-fact disposition, would say, "Away with all this, it is too transcendental and ideal; give me a solid fact; give me a noise that I can hear, and a motion that I can see. Move these substantial objects. Here is a table, stir that. There is a door, open and close that. Let the atmosphere around me be shaken as by an earthquake. I am a matter-of-fact man; give me something solid and substantial, and I will believe."

Now here is the point of interest. Each of these persons, making his own special demand for a particular mode of spirit-intercourse, criticises all other modes; and each perhaps fails to see that of all the range I have gone through, of the possible varieties of communication, for different temperaments, there is not one which has not been exemplified, again and again, by the recorded and proven facts of Spiritualism. If there is any intelligible or supposable form of spirit-intercourse which has not been more or less exhibited, I have yet to learn what it is. So far, therefore, as these *forms* are concerned, there is no ground for reasonable objection.

After all, the laws of nature are wiser than any will of ours. The farmer has his special prayer in the churches for rain. The field of one needs it, while that of his neighbor needs sunshine. Each offers his petition, and thinks he could manage the uni-

verse better than it is now guided; but while the prayer of neither is literally answered, yet the abundant skies send their showers and sunshine on the good and on the evil, and the broad earth laughs in harvest. The laws of God easily execute what the wisdom of man would be powerless to plan.

The antecedent prejudice against the mere *forms* of modern spirit-intercourse, I have therefore shown to be unfair. But to demand satisfactory proof of the *facts* is right. I wish it were demanded more rigidly, while I rejoice that so many Spiritualists were, at the outset, skeptics as obstinate as the Cambridge Professors. But even now, where one holds out too long, a dozen are convinced too soon. The conversion too easily made, is easily shaken.

But to give such positive proof as is needed, is not possible in a lecture. A lecturer can present only general considerations, and introduce facts only by way of illustration, and on the credit of his own personal authority. Fortunately, however, ten years of possession give some right, at last, to shift part of the burden of proof upon the other side. When ten years of constant investigation, among the most curious and persevering people that ever existed, have only served to establish a class of facts more firmly, throughout a vaster community of believers, the balance of probability begins surely to incline on that side. When a wholly new and strange phenomenon is first brought forward, we have a right to say to those who believe it, "Prove it." But when several hundred thousand intelligent people have been observing it for ten years, the case is changed, and they have a right to say to those who disbelieve it, "Account for our delusion." Granted, that there is error; granted, that there is exaggeration; granted, that ninety-nine per cent. of what we claim is false,—how do you account for the one per cent. of thoroughly proved fact sifted out of it? There is no temptation to counterfeit, where there is no genuine. But when every church in the land, by your own showing, is undermined by Spiritualism; when it penetrates political circles so that there is said to be serious danger of its having a plurality in the next congress; when the vast majority of its believers have in-

vestigated incomparably more than the majority of its opponents,—the time has certainly come to assume a more defiant position, and throw the burden of proof upon the other side. Why should I multiply facts when I have never yet found a man who could give an intelligent explanation on the theory of imposture, of the simplest fact I can tell him.

Twenty-five thousand (some say fifty thousand) mediums cross-examined for ten years, under every advantage to the examiners, by private committees of their own family, society, church, and public committees of the shrewdest skeptics in the whole community; no question omitted, no insult spared, no personal familiarity forborne—and not a discovery yet made, worth the naming! Think how they have run the gauntlet of bitter opponents. At the very first public investigation, in Rochester, how easily the critics expected to dispose of the humbug! One zealous citizen bet a hat that in half an hour he would expose the mediums; and they put him on the committee. Another said, give him an hour, and if he could not see how it was done, he would leap over the Falls of Genesee; and they put him on the committee. Their propositions were complied with, and the investigations were made. The man who bet a hat lost his bet, and paid it; and the man who was to jump over the Genesee Falls lost his bet, and didn't pay it; and I am not sure but both became converts to the facts, whatever they might think of the theory. And from the beginning till this time, from the first public investigation down to the last little committee of your neighbors in your parlor, you know that the investigations have always been conducted by the most incredulous.

It is very proper that each one should base his judgment on his own observations; for facts so important and novel as these, cannot produce their due effect at second-hand. But really, the virtue of caution does not quite supersede the virtue of humility; and it might be well if this mob of hasty inquirers, who find it so easy to reject without examining, should remember to show some respect for the other hundreds of thousands who believe after having examined. Let each pause a moment before

he pronounces himself a keener lawyer than those who have scrutinized the evidence of spirit-communion, as they never scrutinized the evidence in any other case; a wiser physician than those who have taken the diagnosis of this case with more conscientious accuracy than that of any patient; a shrewder business man than those who have sifted this transaction as they never sifted any other, and know that spiritualism is solvent, if there is not another concern in New York that is.

There is another class of improbabilities which ought to be weighed by intelligent and cautious minds;—and that relates to the personal character of these mediums. It is an easy thing to sneer at mediums; it is an easy thing even for the Spiritualist to do this—as if he could have learned anything of Spiritualism without them; but it is time to remember that because there are among them many proved impostors, it is really asking rather too much of us that we shall abandon all the ordinary maxims of human conduct, and rules of human probability, and assume that they are all such.

What I mean is this. In the less important forms of mediumship, there may be unconscious self-deception. But in the important ones,—those involving manifestations of *intelligence*,—there can be no middle ground. Every medium of this class, if an imposter, is an intentional one; and on the other hand, if there is a single such medium who is not an imposter, the whole is proved, and the essential facts we claim are established.

Now, who are these mediums to whom we can allow only these two alternatives; whom we have to locate absolutely, by our decision, either among the innocent or among the scoundrels? Who are they? Why, they are you who hear me; they are our brothers and our sisters; they are our fathers and our mothers; they are our own children, of five years old; they are our dearest friends; they are persons whom we have known from their cradles, in many instances, and in whom we trust so utterly, that we believe, although nature's laws may fail, their purity cannot,—these are the persons whom we are expected so lightly to condemn. Condemned they must be; there is no middle ground; either the facts of spiritualism are true, or

they are all atrocious liars ; not one alone, not two, not a mere majority of them, not three-fourths of them only, but every one of them, down to the last innocent little girl, who was frightened on discovery that she had the medium power. There is not one good—no, not one ; because if there is a single genuine medium in the nation, the whole thing is proved. Either they are all criminals, or the facts are established. Now *are* they criminals? If so, why are they? What is the temptation? Where lies the attraction? Do they make money and friends by it? How many do this? Two, three, a few out of the number, make a little notoriety and a good deal of money ; but, for one person who has made money or friends by this means, there are ten who have lost them, grown poorer, less prosperous, less popular ; and yet persisted in it, year after year,—for what? For the pleasure of telling gratuitous lies, making noises in their own parlors, and breaking to pieces their own furniture? Is vice, then, so intrinsically attractive that, even when it is opposed to men's interests, they will still pursue it? I fear the doctrines of total depravity are getting worse and worse. It has always been admitted, hitherto, that the worst sinner would do right when there was any advantage to be gained by it. Some Frenchman said of Mirabeau, "That man would do anything for money, even a good action." These mediums have reached such a point of depravity that they will not do a good action, even if you pay them for it.

For, were profit the object of attraction, what pay would be too great? What difficulty would there be in raising a thousand, or ten thousand dollars, in this room to-night, for any medium who would truly, and clearly, and intelligibly, show how the trick of intelligent communication is done, if trick it be? I would give my hundred dollars ; you would give yours, joyfully, for such a revelation. And yet, ten years have passed, and these despised mediums have gone on sacrificing their own money and reputation to establish their lie, and neither bribes, or any other influence, can induce them to forsake it. During these ten years all the currents of life have ebbed and flowed over the heads of these desperate and base impostors, busy in

their fendish career ; and love has come among them, and hope, and marriage, and parentage, and death, and all else that ordinarily calls out man's better nature. Over twenty-five thousand men, women, and little children, have these influences been working all this time ; let a single one repent for an instant, and we should know it all ; and yet not one has been moved ! The means by which the simplest *intelligent* communication is carried on are yet as absolutely unknown as they were ten years ago. The most incredulous philosophers—the Cambridge Committee themselves—have never thrown a ray of light on the problem, how the thing is done ; and all the detected impostors have given us nothing, because their imposition was so shallow that they had nothing to give ! They evidently had never touched the really important facts.

I know that I, for one, have been pondering on this thing for years. I do not endorse the observations of any other, but I cannot resist my own. I have eagerly sought for new precautions to adopt ; new tests to apply. I have eschewed crowds and circles, and especially, as a general rule, dark circles. I have sat with mediums *alone*, and watched for all glimpses of light that would aid the solution. Mere mechanical and unintelligent wonders I have set aside, as of little interest. Trance-speaking I have seldom heard. I admit all the perplexities, the contradictions, the obstacles. I rest my whole argument on the fact of *intelligent communication through the manifestations* ; and I will give a hundred dollars, to-day, to any man who will carry on a conversation with me for five minutes, by means of the "rappings," under the ordinary precautions I employ, and show me afterwards that it was done by trick, and how it was done. And there are, no doubt, fifty more of you who would do the same.

If it is for the interest of skeptics to discover the truth in this matter, how infinitely more is it for our interest, who are risking friends and reputation on the belief that Spiritualism is *not* imposture. I have always been in the habit, when consulted by a young person as to what books he had better read on any important argument, of saying to him, "Find out on

which side your interest or predilection lies, and begin with the arguments on the other side."

So I would say to persons wishing to believe in Spiritualism, "Read Mahan, and Beecher, and Gordon, and (if you survive long enough to see it in print,) the official report of the Cambridge Investigation." Or go to hear some detected impostor, or "reformed medium," give his exposition. I have lately done so, and it was one of the most convincing demonstrations I ever saw.

Here was a man professing the desire and the ability to show how the tricks were done; and I, for one, went in the sincere hope of obtaining light on, at least, some of the humbler forms of imposture,—the method of counterfeiting so much as could be counterfeited. The announcement was of immense pretensions: the failure was profound. There was not a test, worth mentioning, permitted; nor a precaution, worth mentioning, taken; nor a phenomenon, worth mentioning, produced. He rapped a little, visibly, with his feet; he peeped, visibly, into folded papers; he carefully excluded all Spiritualists from the committee of investigation, and yet those who were on the committee could not avoid seeing everything he did. Not a fact took place which would have been worthy of more than a moment's attention, if it had come from a medium; not a phenomenon occurred which the most careless observer, with eyes in his head, could not have seen through. There was no use in waiting to see how his tricks were done: you saw through them all before they were finished. It was said that the speaker had been a professional medium. He could not have been one long; starvation would have carried him off in a month, if his professional manifestations had been no better than his revelations. And precisely here lay the interest, for me, of the exhibition. This man, I saw, was keen, sharp, ingenious, and absolutely determined to make money out of the exposure of Spiritualism. If he could not do it, it looked as if it could not be done.

Now, I say, there are these immense antecedent improbabilities to be overcome. Here comes this system of fact, with ten years behind it. Ten years of close investigation from scientific

men have not exposed one essential fact as deception; for, I repeat, the manifestations of intellect are the only essential ones. Neither have ten years of life, and death, and remorse, on the part of its vast army of deceivers, if deceivers they are. There is in this an accumulation of improbability, which is far more incredible, as it seems to me, than the manifestations themselves.

In regard to these manifestations, however, my object is not so much to convince skeptics, as to lead them to personal investigation. It is very difficult, and, indeed, impossible, to present, in a lecture, any adequate evidence of these things, just as a whole lecture on electricity cannot convince an unbeliever so well as one moment's grasp of the handles of the machine. We need personal experience. I never made a new observation myself in these Spiritualist investigations, without remembering, afterwards, to my surprise, that I had previously heard or read full accounts of the same observation from others; but they had made no impression on my mind, because they came from others only. Coleridge once said to a man, "I am not surprised that you disbelieve what I am saying. I have seen many things I would not believe on your testimony; how can I complain if you do not believe this on mine?" Nay, more than this. Men can have experiences that, however vivid at the time, seem afterwards almost incredible from their intrinsic strangeness. When Brydone, the traveler, was in his old age, his daughters read aloud to him his early travels. He was very much interested in them, and used to say, "This is very interesting, but I cannot help wondering whether it is all quite true." And every investigator of these phenomena has had the same experience. When I think of the fact that I myself have seen, in distinct light,—a musical instrument play tunes at my request, *visibly*, without the touch of hands, and that it was played also when resting on my own knees, or held in my own hand;—I feel that if I were to have the same thing happen again, it would be almost as strange as when it happened the first time, so intrinsically astonishing is it; and yet I *know* that it happened, and that I was in full possession of my senses. And so there are many facts which rest on the testimony of others—testimony

that is unanswerable, irresistible, on which you would risk your property, life, and character—which are yet hard to believe until confirmed by our own observation.

I know, for instance, that a lady in the city of Worcester,* unsurpassed in character, intelligence and social influence, has repeatedly described to me an occurrence which took place in her own house, some time since. She sat in her parlor, at eleven A. M., with a “medium” and four of her own friends, all persons of the highest character, and all known to me. They sat around a large dining-table, with their chairs drawn back from it, and no one touching it. A pencil and paper was placed in the middle of the table, and it was not long before they saw that pencil rise up bodily, and write on the paper an intelligible message for one of the persons present. There was the simple fact,—a thing, one would say, unmistakable. The other witnesses have confirmed it to me; their evidence, or half of it, would hang every member of any investigating committee that ever assembled; and the same phenomenon, with as reliable testimony, has occurred in many other places. But, if it stood alone, and if, in spite of such evidence, we set it aside because it seems improbable, what becomes of all modern science? And if this is (as it is) only one of the minor items, one of the trifles, of the Spiritual phenomena, what is the logical value of that vast accumulation of facts which fills our records with things yet more astounding?

It is easy to find difficulties. It is an easy thing, in new departments of investigation, to ask questions that cannot be answered. Every inquiring person asks himself harder questions than anybody else thinks of asking him; and in a subject like this, so novel in its whole sphere and suggestions, it would not seem strange if it should cost a century to establish the preliminary facts, and another to make them practically available. We think it a good year’s work to get an ocean telegraph laid, and one communication through it; it may require many

* This is understood to refer to Mrs. Eliza Davis, widow of Hon. John Davis and sister of Hon. George Bancroft.

years to get it in working order, and we shall, very likely, become impatient before that is accomplished; yet the scientific fact of its practicability is settled.

So here; suppose we do obtain only isolated fragmentary facts; suppose we do establish communication one moment, and then have it cut off the moment after; suppose we do find ourselves dealing with laws we do not understand, tampering with tools we cannot manage, and sometimes cutting our fingers—what of it? There are the laws to investigate; there are the facts. A fact is a piece of the universe of God. A fact is true, let every man in the world be a liar; it exists whether it is recognized or not, whether understood or not. And if Spirit-intercourse were broken off to-morrow, it is nevertheless a fact established for all time, and a fact to be harmoniously united with all other facts, within the vast circle of natural laws.

In science it is not theory which conquers; it is fact. "Whatever has been seen by one pair of human eyes," said Dr. Chalmers, "is entitled to outweigh all the reasonings of a thousand human understandings." The fact which conquers the world and revolutionizes science, is commonly some fact which withstood the incredulity of philosophers until they were compelled to admit it; some fact which they would have proved untrue, if they could; some fact such as that of which the old Frenchman said, when he found it would not fit his theory, "so much the worse for the fact, then,"—that is, the fact which, though perhaps for years left standing alone and unexplained, at last furnishes the anchor by which all future science swings and floats securely.

For instance, science easily remembers the time when there was no mystery more perplexing than the fact that water would follow a piston upwards in a common pump. Who could explain it? There was a vacuum produced by the piston, and somehow or other the water would come up and fill it. Was it certainly so? Yes. What was to be done about it? There was nothing to be done about it but to wait and observe. "Ah!" said some philosopher, ambitious to suggest a reason, "nature abhors a vacuum;" and the wiseacres took that phrase

for an explanation. At last they tried the experiment a little further; and to their amazement, found that there was a point at which the law ceased to work. They opened their eyes wider. Nature was apparently a little inconsistent, then. Nature abhorred a vacuum intensely, up to thirty-two and a half feet, but beyond that point she did not seem to care so much about it, after all. And so that isolated fact continued unexplained, until at last Galileo grasped the thing. He put his finger through the glittering ring of that one sure fact, and brought to light the great law of the pressure of the atmosphere; and half of natural science stands revolutionized by a law we should never have known, but for the observation of that unexplained inconsistency of nature.

Now there are in store for us, not one, not a hundred, not a thousand, but countless millions of isolated facts in nature, which future committees, and professors, and academies, shall first denounce and ridicule, and then own themselves powerless to explain; and the Gallios will always outnumber the Galileos, for a time. Yet do not doubt that the human race will ever afford a supply of those who, out of all these seeming anomalies, will develope new laws of God, and new hopes for the human race.

We never can be too cautious in our investigations, short of refusing to investigate at all. We can never be too careful in our experiments, except when we indefinitely postpone them, because we cannot make them perfect. Sir Isaac Newton gives a good specimen of the true method of investigation—the accuracy and care in the pettiest things—which becomes the true philosopher. It was with reference to one of his most important experiments in optics that he said, “I made in a piece of lead a small hole with a pin, whose breadth was the forty-second part of an inch; for twenty-one of these pins laid together took up the breadth of half an inch.” We need to use, in all our investigations, such minute accuracy as this. It will not save us from being reproached with haste and carelessness, for even Newton was so reproached; but it will save us from self-reproach. It will save us from hasty conclusions, from rash infer-

ences, from theories which have nothing to support them but the inaccuracy of our own eyes and the carelessness of our own senses. It will save us from the remorse which every man feels who has gone faster than right reason has led him; who has attempted to vindicate as fact what in reality is his own misconception. But let us remember that however wild the range of credulity may be, it is total, impenetrable incredulity which is the wildest delusion of all. "He is a rash man," said Arago, "who outside of pure mathematics, pronounces the word *impossible*."

III.—THE THEORY OF SPIRITUALISM.

I have spoken, very briefly, and inadequately, of the facts which form the material basis of the theory called Spiritualism. But how few, even of professed Spiritualists, have yet permanently fixed their minds on any sure *argument* which connects these facts and this theory. The majority draw the inference to-day, abandon it to-morrow, and resume it again the next day. To-day they witness experiments which are entirely satisfactory to them; they think the case is clear, and that their minds are settled forever. To-morrow some delusion is unmasked, or they find that some false reasoning has led them into extravagances; they forget all their previous convictions, and are adrift again. In many cases, indeed, they have never properly reasoned at all. I consider that multitudes who call themselves Spiritualists, are doing harm to Spiritualism every day they urge it, not only risking their own peace of mind, but that of others, by coming to conclusions hastily, and without adequate demonstration. It does men no good, but only harm, to make them accept even an important truth, on insufficient evidence. If your friend asks you to go upon the roof of his new house to see the sun set, it is a kind act on his part, and you are glad to avail yourself of the opportunity, so long as the house stands firm; but if it turns out that the building comes down with a crash, you feel that the intentions of your friend were undoubtedly good, but you wish he had taken some other form for their exhibition. The fall from a belief in immortality

back into disbelief again, is worse for a man than would be a fall from Trinity church steeple on the hard pavement; and God forbid that I should help any of you to take it.

I will say then, to begin with, that I do not think there are many forms of the "manifestations" which can be justly relied upon as furnishing absolute evidence of Spiritual communication. Our neighbor writes, under some temporary influence, words of greater wisdom than is exhibited in his ordinary life, and we say at once that he was spiritually guided. Who knows that he was any more spiritually guided then than at other times; for who can measure the range and possibilities of the human soul? Or you hear your friend speak, on some special occasion, thoughts which at other times he could not have grasped, venturing almost into the realm of new knowledge, certainly into the realm of new reasoning, and manifesting at every point, new mental power and scope. Can you dare to infer that he was under some separate spiritual guidance at such a moment? Alas! every public speaker knows too sternly how much depends on circumstances, and influences, and atmospheres, and how little upon the poor human soul itself. With all the eloquence that has been exhibited, in the form of trance-speaking, I have yet to be satisfied that there is one unerring argument to be founded upon it, in favor of direct spiritual communication, even where new spheres of knowledge have apparently been introduced; and I have known very rare instances of that. It is certain that the utterances of the most eloquent of speaking mediums, Mrs. Cora Hatch, (in whose sincerity I have great confidence, and of whose powers I have a strong admiration), although possibly beyond the reach of her ordinary abilities, and therefore startling, are not always accurate or reliable,—far from it. And even where new spheres of knowledge are explored, I know, from my own experience, how possible it is for us to call up, under some special influences, facts and circumstances which we never remember to have learned, and which have slumbered in our memories somehow, we know not how, till the time comes for producing them. And it is known that in this country and in other countries, there have been public speakers as qualified as she—I

could scarcely say more qualified—to grapple on the instant, with a new question, and who could arrange it, and systematize it, and state it, as well as she can, but who never laid the slightest claim to spiritual guidance in their brilliant improvisations. Instances of this kind were known before what are now called spiritual phenomena were exhibited. I say this, not to detract from the interest or proper value of such phenomena, but simply as a tribute to logical precision; because I know that however much of interest there may be in such eloquence, still there is not that absolute *demonstration* of such influences which I believe to exist in other cases.

To pass to another subordinate class of manifestations, it is unnecessary to say that this absolute demonstration is not to be found in merely physical phenomena. There may, if you please, be strong probability, but there never can be absolute certainty, in the inferences drawn from such manifestations. We know too little of the range of human powers, to say how far we are to claim them as our own, and how far to attribute them to controlling intelligences. It would be exceedingly strange and unaccountable, in the light of all previous laws, if by the power of my will I could raise this book or this cushion one inch from the desk before me. It would be scarcely stranger or more unaccountable, if I could bid this building be removed hence, and hover in the air. But neither in the smaller case nor in the larger, however astounding the evidence of the working of new laws, would there be anything like demonstrative evidence of spiritual agency. That might be a possible, or even a probable solution, among others, but there would not, so far as I can see, be any certainty of its being the correct one.

Now where does evidence of spiritual power, outside one's self, come in? The distinction seems to me clear. The evidence of direct spiritual power comes in where *an answering intelligence* is made manifest—no sooner. To claim it as demonstrated sooner is hasty and careless reasoning: to deny it afterwards is worse logic on the other side. To move this book, this cushion, this building or this world, in answer to my will, does not prove that there is any intelligence acting, except my own; but when,

unconsciously to me, without power of control on my part, this book, this cushion, this house or this world, by any method that can be devised, gives evidence of an intelligence apart from mine, answering to mine, communicating with mine, as one mind communicates with another through human organs, then evidence of an intellect foreign to mine comes in,—comes in irresistibly.

I ask no better statement of this point than that given by Professor Agassiz, in his great work on zoology, where, arguing for the existence of a Deity, he asserts that “any manifestation of thought is evidence of the existence of a thinking being, the author of such thought.” There is the point of departure. All argument dates from that. Miss that distinction, and you miss everything. Grasp that, and you have in your hand the one chain of argument that has not been, that cannot be answered; that all exposures of imposture fail to touch; that every opponent is powerless to meet; and that leaves you at last, where it puts you at first, in a state of absolute conviction. Wherever there is a manifestation of intelligence answering to your mind, there is an intellect distinct from your own.

It is the old case of the automaton chess-player. We all remember Maelzel's famous automata; the little horses that would run; the little men that would jump upon the horses' backs; the flute-player that would play upon his flute; the conflagration of Moscow that would burn itself away. These things, as all who witnessed them understood, were accomplished by machinery—a cog here, and a crank there;—but the moment the automaton chess-player came upon the scene, every logical mind in the company knew, as he watched the game, that there was more than machinery there. Machinery could easily cause the figure to make the first move in a game of chess; but all the accumulated ingenuity of the human race would be powerless to construct an automaton that could make the second move; for there must be intellect there.

It was not the machinery—it was not that there was to the eye anything more strange in the chess-player's putting out his finger to make the second move than in his putting it out to

make the first; but to the mind it was the step from matter to intellect. And precisely so in this case. Grant that some blind power, be it machinery or mesmerism, could move this book, this house or this world, and still no evidence of intellect be given; but when the first atom of matter is moved so as to express *intelligence* which is not yours, then there is an intellect behind the manifestation, or else logic fails.

I have seen a musical instrument, not in the darkness, but in the light, not merely produce inarticulate throbbings, but play tunes. Well, what of it? You have all seen musical boxes. There is nothing strange in them. It might indeed be interesting to know that there is, in certain persons, a power, be it mesmeric or mechanic, by which a guitar can be transformed into a musical box. Such a power would be convenient, inasmuch as a musical box costs more than a guitar. Such a power would be a fact of the intensest interest, as the exhibition of a novel law, but it would not necessarily show any spiritual agency. That might be one solution, but not a necessary one. But show me a guitar that will respond to the wishes of persons present by playing tune after tune, not in a mechanical routine, but as they are requested, accompanying the voice, or answering to the thought, and that moment it is plain that we have to do with something more than a mere machine; but that this instrument is operated upon by a thinking being, somewhere. And thus it is easy to show that the simplest forms of communication, through the rappings, for instance,—the mere vibrations on a table—carefully observed and tested, may afford me more positive evidence of an intellect outside myself, than the eloquence of all the trance-speakers that ever thrilled the world, or than all the physical power that ever seemed ready to move it on its axis. It is mind against matter.

When I sit in a room alone with a medium, and sustain for moment after moment, perhaps for hour after hour, a conversation by means of these vibrations, asking questions, and having them answered, introducing subjects and having them taken up and continued, and then having other subjects intelligently in-

troduced and debated, such conversation having all the characteristics of a conversation between two human beings—when I sit thus, and hold such intercourse as that, I *know* there is an intellect present, beside my own; and all the skepticism of mankind is powerless to shake my belief, until its foundations are removed. I know that I am not dreaming, but in full possession of all my faculties. I know that I cannot control the other party in that conversation any more than in ordinary social intercourse. I know that the other party is not the medium, because it is easy to employ checks which render it physically impossible that the medium should even know the subject of the conversation. In such a case it would be as idle for any one to try to convince me that I have not been conversing with *somebody*, as it would be for a person to endeavor to make you believe there has been no voice addressing you here to-day. And if that *somebody* is not the medium, what hypothesis so simple, as to suppose it a disembodied being?

And as in the analogy I just cited of a public lecture, the proof of the *fact* is entirely independent of the intrinsic *value* of the communication,—so it is with spirit-intercourse. Those who go away from this hall rejecting every word that I have said as fallacious, are just as sure that *somebody has spoken it*, as if they believed it all to be true. It makes no difference to me whether the being I converse with tells me a truth or a falsehood, so far as concerns the evidence of the actual occurrence of the conversation. It requires as much intellect to tell a consistent lie, as it does to tell a consistent truth; indeed, lawyers say that it requires more.

You lose your way in the night-time. The darkness is so great that you cannot see around you, but you fancy there is some one near. You ask your way. A stranger directs you. You afterwards find the direction he gave you to be wrong; but still you are as sure that somebody spoke to you, as you would be if he had spoken the truth. The argument for his human existence is one thing: the argument for his veracity quite another.

I have sat with a medium, and for an hour I have had two

currents of conversation run side by side, with two different professedly spiritual beings,—conversations conducted in different styles, and showing widely different characteristics. One claimed to be a friend whom I knew to be in the spiritual world, and told me nothing but the truth from beginning to end; the other told me nothing but lies, and most ingenious lies they were, requiring much more intellect than to tell the simple truth. I was as powerless to account for the false communications as for the true ones. The circumstances were all the same; my mood was the same; the medium was the same; and there was no one human being present but the medium. The medium was absolutely ignorant of the circumstances of the case, and did not discover that one communication was not as true as the other. But there was the fact; and yet I undertake to say that the evidence of the existence, outside myself, of those two intellects,—if they were two separate intellects, and not one wearing two masks,—was precisely identical. The argument for the existence of the false one was as real as for the true one; for that argument was based, not upon veracity, but upon intelligence.

All I have aimed now to do for you is to clear up this one logical position, on which all the argument for spirit-intercourse hangs,—that where there are marks of intelligence there is an intellect behind them. Philosophers think this a sufficient argument to demonstrate the existence of a God, and yet they will not allow us to hang upon it the much less difficult demonstration of the presence of an angel.

This, then, is the theory of Spiritualism. We know that it is possible to hold communication with another sphere, because we have ourselves had intercourse with intelligent beings, outside of ourselves, who yet were not, and could not be, human. Whether they deceived or instructed, helped or hindered us, is not now the point; nor whether we have yet fathomed the laws of their existence, or learned even to recognize their personal identity. Let us go to-day no farther than we are sure. The progress of discovery cannot be hurried. If we know this much, and no more, let us say so, and hold to it.

And let us, above all, be *worthy* of it. All that you can do for humanit.; by the utmost care in the search for truth, will be a little thing compared with what the weakest among you can do by exhibiting in his life some noble practical results of the truth which he holds. It is a law of human progress that it is the moral triumphs, and not the intellectual, that carry the day. Though man may exhibit the clearest truth in the most convincing manner, it is of no account so long as he disgraces that truth by an immoral life. The world looks at the practice, and not the logic, and long rejects even truth if it is defiled by impure touches. It is no matter though Spiritualism be the most precious discovery God grants to the children of men; if Spiritualists themselves degrade it by their conduct, the truth will be—not destroyed—but postponed in its reception until grasped in more worthy hands. What do I care how much of a Spiritualist a man is, if he is a debauchee at the same time? If he is selfish at home, and fraudulent abroad; if he is careless of the ills of the world; if he looks unmoved upon pauperism and prostitution; if he is indifferent to the wrongs of woman, and of the slave, and of the Indian,—then, the higher his ideas in the abstract, the deeper is the darkness of his life, and he will prove himself a hindrance, not a help, to the cause he urges.

We who believe in Spiritualism are too apt to believe that the world will be transformed by letting in a little more truth upon it. But it is not truth, it is love; not light, but life, that shall transform the world at last, and bring the kingdom of heaven down.

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