

TRACTS ON TABOOED TOPICS.

Beard

 BY WILLIAM CARPENTER.

 DOES SPIRITUALISM DEMAND
 INVESTIGATION?

IT may be as well to premise, here, that I use the word "tabooed," in the title of these tracts, in a wider sense than a strict adherence to its literal import would permit of. I do not intend to limit it to such topics as are absolutely prohibited, or interdicted, but to extend it to some, which, though they may be freely and legitimately discussed, are excluded from the ordinary public journals, for some reason of convenience or expediency—oftentimes good and sufficing, though not always so.

In addressing myself to the subject of Spiritualism, in this number, I shall, no doubt, be deemed, by some into whose hands it may pass, guilty of no small degree of temerity, or of egotism and vanity, for presuming to induce the calm and serious discussion of a subject upon which many able and greatly respected men have in vain sought to fix public inquiry. I am indifferent, however, to the chances of these imputations, believing, as I do, that no man can foretell what effect he may produce in the discharge of what he feels to be a public duty. It is sometimes given to small men to accomplish what great men have failed to achieve. I will take my chance, though I cannot hope for any other reward than that which a sense of having done what one feels to be right brings with it, and, it may be, an impression of the blessedness of the truth—that 'the good as well as the evil that a man does lives after him,' and that none can estimate its magnitude.

It may be asked, why *I* should be listened to on this tabooed

topic—what claim *I* have to be heard—what proofs *I* can offer of good faith and sound judgment—what evidences of a desire to advance the moral and intellectual condition of my fellow-men? Such demands are not unreasonable. It is not to be thought that a man would submit his most cherished opinions, especially his opinions upon the subject of a future state and a spiritual life—of his interest in the one and his connexion with the other—to the rude and irreverent handling of one whom he suspected to be a fanatic or a rogue. No benefit could be derived from so doing, though some harm might be done; and he does well who preserves his most precious possession from the indignities and contingencies of such an ordeal.

Thus much by way of preface to a few words of myself.

Of the 67 years of my life, 44 have been devoted to an unflagging effort to promote the social, moral, religious, and intellectual condition of those classes, especially, for whom very little was done, and not much cared, when I first gave myself to the work. I would not now say anything that could tend to revive the feelings of bitterness with which the working classes at that time regarded, not only “the upper ten thousand,” who exclusively exercised the functions of legislation and government, but, all who were raised above them in the social scale, especially the manufacturing and trading classes; nor the feelings of jealousy and distrust with which these, for the most part, looked upon the labouring classes. But all who remember, or have heard of, the character of the legislation and government, and of the state of public feeling, during the first 25 or 30 years of the present century, know how exclusively in the interest of the wealthy the laws were made and the government administered, and how bitterly hostile was the spirit which animated the several classes of society towards each other; and, as a consequence, how comparatively limited was the development of those sources of comfort and prosperity which are dependent for their development on the co-operation of all classes, and which can be rendered contributory to the benefit of all, only by an equitable spirit of legislation and administration.

In 1828, I became, after having written and published half a dozen volumes, the editor and proprietor of the *Weekly Free Press*, a newspaper which circulated pretty largely, for a paper in those days, among artisans, and I was unceasing and earnest in my efforts to mitigate the spirit of hostility with which the working classes, as they were called, regarded the ruling class and the employers of labour, as also the feelings of

indifference, not unaccompanied with distrust, with which these looked upon the former.

The great obstacle which then stood between the press and those who most needed its instruction, was the fourpenny stamp imposed upon newspapers, making even a weekly journal a luxury which comparatively few, in those days of low wages and dear bread, could indulge in. The removal of this heavy stamp I felt satisfied must be the first step towards realizing a better state of society, and in August, 1830, I set about what I believed would inevitably lead to its removal, with a hearty good will; resolving to sacrifice all I had, personal liberty included, should it be necessary, in the accomplishment of my purpose. In October of that year, I published the first of a series of "Political Letters," without a stamp, and, avowedly, to evade the Newspaper Stamp Act and the Act defining newspapers, called "The Castlereagh Act," and to compel the Legislature to repeal them. I continued the publication of these "Political Letters" for several months, week by week, in spite of Government prosecutions, commenced by the Duke of Wellington's administration, and renewed by that of Earl Grey, which terminated in my imprisonment for a lengthened period, with heavy law charges, on account of both the Crown and myself. The large circulation of "the unstamped," which the "Political Letters" gave birth to, and not less the numerous prosecutions and imprisonments which followed the selling of them, for five or six years, finally induced the reduction of the fourpenny stamp to a penny, and gave us a "cheap press," though not so cheap an one as now that we are altogether relieved from the imposition of the stamp. There was a long interval of time between the first step and the last; but the one was the necessary consequence of the other. "We shall get rid of the six Acts, in one way or another, before it be long," wrote William Cobbett, in his "Register" of the 27th of August, 1831, "and we ought always to bear in mind that Mr. Carpenter has been, and is, a great sufferer, only because he brought these odious Acts to the test." Meetings were held all over the country—that is, in the large towns and cities—both before and while I was in prison, acknowledging the services I had rendered; Mr. O'Connell proposed and carried an unanimous vote of thanks to me in the "Catholic Association" of Ireland; Mr. Lytton Bulwer, Mr. Charles Buller, Sir Samuel Whalley, Joseph Hume, and other members of Parliament, brought the subject of my prosecution and imprisonment before the House, and condemned the conduct of the Government, in maintaining a

law—laws, rather, for there were two of them—so inconsistent with their professions before they acceded to office, and so injurious to the public; and Mr. Hume published a letter, addressed to me, in the *Globe* evening paper, May 27th, 1831, in which he said, “I am not very sorry at the verdict of the jury in your case, since, now that juries are not disposed to assist the people in evading bad laws, the only remaining course is to repeal them. Your’s will, I trust, be the last of the many prosecutions inconsistent with the liberty of a free state, and, when reviewed dispassionately, will, I hope, induce the Legislature seriously to consider the justice and the policy of immediately repealing the laws upon which it was founded.”

With similar feelings and expectations, Leigh Hunt, in an article in his “Tatler” of June 8th, 1831, wrote—“We cannot but express our sorrow at seeing a man like Sir Thomas Denman compelled, or thinking himself compelled, by his office, to assist the provisions of an Act hateful to his knowledge and his feelings, and protested against by himself, in no common terms, when he was out of office. But seeing, as we do, that all improvement is a thing gradual, and believing Sir Thomas to be one of those who neither wish to prevent its quiet increase, nor could prevent it if they did wish, we are glad that he, instead of a fool or a knave, was in office to contest the point in question with Mr. Carpenter; and from the amenity of this unusual Attorney-General, as well as from the resolution of Mr. Carpenter, we draw the most favourable omens for the approaching downfall of the Act itself, and the certain progress of that human good, which, with whatever differences upon minor points, must be dear to both of them.”

Upon taking up my quarters in what was then the King’s Bench Prison, I found a state of things existing which called for reform as much as anything existing outside. While a few of the prisoners who were in execution for debt were living in luxury, and indulging in all sorts of extravagance and profligacy, retaining their property, and setting their creditors at defiance, others were not only so poor as to be destitute of many of the necessaries of life—their families, outside, partaking of their poverty—but they were, at the same time, subject to the heartless and heavy exactions of the Marshal and his myrmidons, who levied fees and taxes to the amount of many thousands a year. Men who were presumed to be insolvent, and who were treated as such, were obliged to find money to meet these demands. The former evil was beyond

my reach ; but I thought it possible to get rid of the latter, and my resolution was taken to attempt it. I procured returns of the sums received by the Marshal, as far as he had acknowledged them, for several years preceding, and made myself acquainted with the powers conferred upon him by the "Rules of Court," by which he was supposed to be governed. I ascertained that his fees and other exactions amounted to, sometimes, £9000, £10,000, and even £12,000 a year ; and that in realizing these large sums, chiefly from the poor and helpless prisoners under his charge, he greatly exceeded his powers, and was guilty of much and unsanctioned cruelty. Having, by dint of much labour and perseverance, obtained the necessary knowledge, I laid before the public, in the columns of a weekly journal which had been brought out for my use, a number of very startling details as to the unauthorized conduct and proceedings of the Marshal, in the exercise of his functions, and appealed, as strongly as I was able to appeal, to the Legislature, on behalf of his prisoners. The Marshal and myself had many personal encounters during the publication of these revelations of his doings—which extended over some three months, or more—threats and promises were alike employed to induce me to desist from my purpose ; but in vain. My purpose was fixed, and I was not to be diverted from it. I addressed the public, through the columns of the newspaper, setting forth facts deeply inculpatory of the Marshal, as warden of the prison, and appealed to the Legislature for redress, by petition to the House of Commons. Mr Hume, and other members of the House, took up the subject, an inquiry was instituted, my statements were found to be substantially true ; and the result was the abolition of the Marshal's payment by fees, of his taxes on beer, &c., and the fixing of his salary, at, to the best of my recollection, £4000 a year. The reform was effected, and the Marshal shortly afterwards died—some malicious or jocose persons alleging that I had killed him !

Upon my liberation from prison, at the close of the year 1831, I became one of the editors of the daily newspaper, *The True Sun*, and, from that time until I was disabled by loss of sight and severe suffering, in the beginning of April, 1861, I laboured, according to my ability, as the editor of different metropolitan newspapers and other publications, to advance my first and most dearly-cherished objects—the elevation of the industrious classes in the social scale, and the promotion of those political and administrative reforms which I felt common justice and the common interests of society demanded. In proof of this I can refer to the columns of *The True Sun*, *The*

Weekly True Sun, The Shipping and Mercantile Gazette, The London Journal, The Morning Advertiser, The Railway Times, Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper, The Patriot, the Era, The Court Journal, The Family Journal, &c., of most of which I was the editor, and to the rest of which I was a retained and regular contributor. I exposed myself to much abuse and obloquy from some who put themselves forward as the "leaders" of "the people," because I supported, by speech and publication, the Reform Bill of 1831-2. I worked hard with those who pressed upon the Legislature the claims of the women and children employed in factories, and in mines and collieries; and, subsequently, when the manufacturers were unjustly assailed by Oastler, Stephens, and others, who had influence with the working classes, I was amongst those who laboured to show the injustice of the charges brought against them, and the misrepresentations on which they were built up. I was one of the two or three originators of the "Chancery Reform Association;" and, as its honorary secretary, I lectured, and wrote, and published, and organized forces, and got up public meetings, and pressed the iniquities of the Equity Courts upon the attention of the public and the Legislature, until a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into their alleged evils, which commission made such a report of the iniquities of the Courts as to lead to a reform that transformed them from the instruments of ruinous exaction and prolonged torture or death, into tribunals, which, though still open to many objections, have ceased to be infamous. *The Law Times* described one of these lectures of mine as "a powerful exposure of the abuses of the Court of Chancery;" and *The Law Review*, while deprecating our "vulgar mode of attracting attention," and "the inflammatory statements" made at some of our meetings, expressed its fear for the safety of the Courts of Equity, "because there was so much truth and justice in the complaints made, that our courts of justice and our legal procedure are constantly made the instruments of gross oppression—because we, as their real and sincere friends, are not able to deny many of the charges which are made against the law and its professors—because we see that, on all other occasions, if a just ground of complaint exists, that is made the standing-point on which to move all the rest." Our object was, as I have said, at length achieved, to a considerable extent, in the reform of the Courts, and not in their extinction. How much that reform was needed, the many victims—the impoverished widows and orphans whom the courts had despoiled of their last penny, after breaking the hearts of the husbands and

fathers—too surely testified; and, scarcely less impressively, the declaration of Lord Langdale, one of the judges in Chancery, who said—“Of all the grievances which afflict a country, none are so pernicious, none tend so certainly to unfasten all the bonds which hold society together, as those which are found to prevail in this Court.”

In 1859, having had my attention more particularly directed than it had previously been to the subject of life assurance, I became struck with what appeared to me to be the great disproportion between the obligations and the assets of several of the offices—some of them of many years' standing, and most of them doing a considerable business with the middle and other industrial classes; and I set myself to the laborious task of investigating their financial condition; that is, the amount of their pecuniary liabilities, and the means they had for discharging them as they became payable. The result of the investigation was, to me, almost appalling, and in February, 1860, I published “A Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer,” on the “Perils of Policy-Holders, and the Liability of Life Offices,” comprising the conclusions to which I had been led, with such proofs and illustrations of the insolvency of several of the offices, whose pecuniary obligations amounted to millions, and of the fraudulent means employed by others to conceal their condition, as must, I believed, lead, sooner or later, to the closing of their doors, and the putting an end to their heartless system of swindling. The sensation caused by this publication, in nearly all parts of the United Kingdom, as also in those States of America in which English Life Offices had local branches, was very great. “It fell,” as one of its reviewers observed, “as a bomb-shell among the offices,” and many provident persons had their eyes opened to the peril in which the future interests of their wives and children were placed. They saw that they had probably entrusted their money to institutions that were conducting their business upon false and fraudulent pretences, and whose managers were intent only on obtaining funds. The Insurance journals, that were, unknown to the public, in the hands of the Life Offices or their managers, and the others, that lived upon their advertisements and puffs, assailed me with the most virulent abuse, as an “unprincipled charlatan,” a “hired calumniator,” an “impudent quack,” an “impertinent traducer,” a “shallow blunderer,” a “malignant scribbler,” a “reckless assailant, dealing in slanderous criticism, and striving to gull a credulous public into a false and mischievous belief;” but they did not refute my statements, or satisfactorily impugn the soundness of my con-

clusions. A great parade was made, in preliminary announcements, of "a complete analysis and refutation" of the Letter, said to be written by an eminent actuary, and understood to have been undertaken at the request of an association of secretaries and managers of several of the offices, who felt that their craft was in danger; but the thing was pronounced by even some of those who wished to see my statements refuted, to be a miserable failure. The *Weekly Chronicle*, which at that time contained a series of ably-written articles, intended to encourage life insurance, and other prudential practices, thus spoke of the performance—"In common with a great many more, who take a lively interest in matters relating to life assurance, we were led to expect that the reply to Mr. Carpenter's pamphlet, which was promised in our pretentious contemporary (*The Leader and Saturday Analyst*), would have been a lucid review of the pamphlet in question, and that some serious attempt would be made to dispose of the sweeping charges contained within its 135 pages. . . . When we were promised that a 'complete analysis' was to be forthcoming, and more particularly when the rumour reached us, that the reply would be *ex cathedra*, and would be issued with all the advantages of official information, and all the weight of official authority, we expected that the matter would be treated in a trenchant and masterly manner. But we have been cruelly disappointed; in fact, no reply at all has been attempted. Surely the interests of life assurance are of sufficient magnitude to demand something better than mere flippant generalities and personal abuse, in answer to charges that involve the systematic deceit of delusive balance-sheets, if not the misappropriation of sacred funds, and the condition of absolute insolvency. . . . In consideration of the enormous magnitude of the interests involved, and in consideration of the gravity of the charges, we protest against this superficial and flimsy reply, heralded, as it was, by so much pomp, and assuming, as it does, so much authority. . . . One of the noblest social institutions of the country is impeached; it is placed on its trial, and its defence is committed to men who cannot meet, with a single definite statement, the serious imputations under review."

While the Insurance journals were assailing me with abuse, I was threatened with the more serious consequences of actions for libel, which were commenced by some of the offices. I had given to one company the name borne by a defunct company, the one taking an adjectival distinction which the other had not; and the payment of a heavy bill of costs and a public

apology were insisted upon, as the conditions of staying an action. Two typographical errors gave rise to as many actions, which were got rid of in the same way. The transposition of a page of copy in the printer's hands, exposed me to another action; while a fifth and a sixth, which were carried into Court and partly heard, were cut short by the movers in them obtaining from me an admission, under the pressure of counsel, that I did not impute personal corruption or dishonesty to the directors! But neither the scurrility of the Assurance journals nor the terrors of the law—proverbially uncertain, especially in cases of libel—deterred me from my purpose, which I continued to prosecute in a weekly journal called *The Policy-Holder*, bringing to light many additional facts, touching offices I had previously looked into, and others, into which I had not till then an opportunity of inquiring; and in March, 1860, I published "A Second Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer," in which I had an opportunity of expressing my gratification at having seen 17 of the insolvent offices broken up, with proofs of a damnatory character beyond anything I had discovered and made known; and several others "amalgamated" with companies of greater respectability and security. There are few things in my life upon which I can look back with more satisfaction than on the influence which my "Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer" had, in purifying the atmosphere of the Assurance world, and in putting an end to a system of plunder that involved millions of the money of the most prudent persons in the community.

I have referred to these various particulars, because they involve practical and beneficial results, and bear witness to the sober, matter-of-fact, and practical character of my life and labours.

So much for one side of my character. Now for another. At the age of 16 or 17, I was impressed with a sense of the infinite importance of the Christian system, in relation to our national, not less than to our individual, welfare; and such hours as I could snatch from the laborious duties, first, of a trade and then of a journalist, and not unfrequently from those that should, perhaps, have been given to rest, were devoted to the writing and editing of works whose object was to promote a better, because a more accurate, knowledge of the Scriptures. In the course of 30 years, I published 27 volumes, some of them of a large size and the result of great labour, on Biblical criticism and interpretation, in addition to 20 volumes on other subjects, and a dozen pamphlets. The present Bishops of Winchester and Ripon, the President of the Wesleyan Conference, and the

monthly organs of the Church and of the Dissenters, agreed—with, of course, minor differences—in accepting some of these works as of “great usefulness in promoting Scriptural knowledge;” several of them have been republished in France, Germany, and America; and Dr. Jenks, one of the most laborious and useful Biblical writers in the last-named country, who republished one of my larger works, who is wholly unknown to me, and who could have had no motive beyond a sense of justice, united with a generous disposition so to write, thus writes of me and of my contributions to Biblical science and knowledge, in his “Biography of Biblical Writers” :—

“A popular and eloquent English writer, of varied research, an elegant pen, and an excellent spirit. His writings tend to the diffusion of Scriptural knowledge, in the most solid as well as attractive forms; and as being peculiarly congenial with the purposes of the Comprehensive Commentary, they have been much used throughout it. The Guide to the Study of the Bible, found in the Supplement to the Comprehensive Commentary, is a rich proof of the useful abilities of Mr. Carpenter, whose labour and learning render account to the plainest apprehension of points hitherto thought beyond the reach of any but the professed scholar. Yet, while they lessen the time, labour, and disappointment of study, Mr. Carpenter’s works stimulate to active thought, requiring much more of the mind than to become the passive recipient of the ideas of another—a result the most valuable which a teacher can attain, for human nature is prone to mental far more than even to bodily indolence.”

I have written thus much of myself, not in a spirit of egotism or self-adulation, for no one can feel of himself more than I do, that I ought to have done much more and better than I have done. I have written it only to show that my life has been at no time and in no respect of a visionary character, but has been that of a practical worker; and, moreover, that what I may urge to induce an inquiry into the pretensions or claims of “Spiritualism” is not prompted either by an indifference to the teaching of the Bible, or the methods to be employed for rightly interpreting it, on the one hand, or by the dreamy tendencies and credulity of a mind that has been unexercised on the practical and every-day concerns of life, on the other.

I have written a long preface to what is to follow, and one not at all agreeable to my feelings; but I deemed it indispensable to my purpose, and I hope it will be rightly interpreted by my readers.

It is scarcely possible for any one, in the present state of the public mind, to say or write anything with the purpose of gaining a hearing for what is called "Spiritualism," or of inducing a calm inquiry into the character of the phenomena by which it is alleged to be supported, without subjecting himself to the imputation of either great weakness of mind or of a desire to impose upon the understandings of others. The imputation comes not only from the sceptical portion of the community, who, like the Sadducees of old, say "There is no future life, neither angel nor spirit," but from the religious community, also, whose conceptions of the future life, and of the relations of those who have entered into it with those who are still in this life, are shocked by the revelations now alleged to be made.

It has been found impossible to ignore the fact, that thousands of persons, constantly increasing in number, in almost every part of Europe, testify to their witnessing very extraordinary phenomena, which, for reasons assigned, they refer to a spiritual agency; and the great majority of public writers therefore affect to dispose of the fact by the very summary, if not satisfactory, method of distributing the "believers, or pretended believers," into the two classes of fools and knaves—the one being dupes to the trickery and fraud of the other.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult, I say, if not impossible, to obtain a fair hearing upon a subject which is exercising a prodigious influence, for good or evil, on a scale more extensive than can be assigned to any other influence, excepting Christianity itself.

It is, as yet, of little use to allege the fact, that men who are above all suspicion as to the soundness of their intellect and the honesty of their purpose, are found in great numbers among the believers in the spiritual cause of those phenomena which are now familiar to almost everybody, avowing their belief, and the ground upon which it rests. Were it not that prejudice blinds the eyes and closes up the avenues to the better feelings, it would be seen, and felt, and frankly acknowledged, that such men as Judge Edmonds in America, and William Howitt in England, are above all reasonable suspicion of being prompted by unreasoning credulity or deliberate fraud, to testify, in every available way, to their familiarity, and the familiarity of hundreds—I may say thousands—of others, with phenomena which they declare, after years of close investigation, they can trace to no material cause; and to express their conviction that such phenomena are assignable

only to spiritual agency. They may be mistaken in their interpretation of the phenomena, but they cannot be as to the phenomena themselves. I do not mean, therefore, that their *opinions* should be taken as conclusive, but that their alleged *facts* should be accepted as true, especially as they are known to multitudes besides themselves. The prejudice, however, is too strong to permit of the exercise of ordinary justice or judgment; and the men I refer to, and those who are with them, or who come after them, testifying to such things, must make up their minds to rank, for some time to come, with the "vain babblers," and the "pestilent fellows," who would "turn the world upside down." I do not hope to effect much change in the public feeling which opposes itself to the lives and writings of such men and women as Edmonds, Hare, Howitt, Crossland, Wilkinson, Crowe, Brownson, Browning, Shorter, and others that might be named, but I may contribute something towards the change which must come, and towards the accomplishment of which, every testimony to the truth is a contribution.

If a writer confines himself to the reproduction of stories of what are regarded as the superstitious vagaries of past times, and to speculations on their causes and consequences, he is not only tolerated, but is sure to be heard with avidity. When the publication of Sir Walter Scott's "Letters on Witchcraft and Demonology" were announced, a fresh and lively interest was excited on the subject. It was one on which many books had been written, and which had been speculated upon and tortured by men of diverse characters and opinions. It was thought that the author of "Waverley" would clothe it with fresh attractions, and throw some light upon a problem that had perplexed the most learned and profound; and many awaited with impatience the appearance of the work, with a lively anticipation of living again, and in worthy company, in those dark and mysterious times when spirits, it was said, both good and evil, not only interested themselves in the affairs of mortals, but held immediate intercourse with them. The subject is one, indeed, which, independently of any great name, will never cease to present strong attractions, as matter of superstitious gratification or of curious inquiry. Even now, though demons, and witches, and ghosts are believed to have forsaken us, something yet lingers within almost every one, which, if not belief, at least makes us feel more than ordinary interest in perusing the stories relating to them, largely mingled though they are with superstition and cruelty. The belief in spirits, and in their immediate

intercourse with men, for both good and evil, had not its origin in the woe-begone frenzy or delusion of superstitious times; it has its foundation in the deepest feelings of our nature, and obtains wherever men are to be found. It has, in some form or other, spread itself over the wide world, and amongst the most civilized as well as the most barbarous people, entering not only into the popular traditions and fictions, but into the daily affairs of life. It has not been confined to the weak, the credulous, or the half insane; it has taken possession of the most vigorous, the best informed, and the most carefully disciplined minds.

Sir Walter Scott, however, disappointed those who expected to find in his work anything that would help to a solution of the problems connected with the subject. He exhibited his wonted skill and dexterity in the composition of stirring narratives—and no more.

What now claims our attention, however, are not stories of diablerie and witchcraft, in which persons are alleged to have employed the agency of evil spirits in perpetrating acts of malignity and mischief, but acts which are alleged to be performed by the direct agency of spirits themselves, and to be frequently made the media of some intelligent communication.

I have already remarked upon the general indisposition to inquire into this subject. Some ridicule and flout it, as one of the many forms of trickery and fraud that obtain, while others deprecate it as a meddling with the forbidden and the vicious. They are intolerant of every thing pertaining to it, believing that it would be not only irrational but sinful to listen to anything that can be said even in favour of inquiry. But these are, surely—both classes—the irrational people; and they are, as it seems to me, guilty also of abnegating a serious duty. The strangeness of an alleged fact is no evidence of its non-existence, else what becomes of the Scripture miracles, which, as their designation implies, were inconsistent with the uniform experience of mankind. They who heard the first Christians speak with other tongues than their own, every listener hearing his own tongue spoken, “mocked.” Instead of inquiring into the nature and intent of the phenomenon, they said, “These men are filled with new wine;” the wiseheads apparently thinking that to impute drunkenness was the way to stay all inquiry, and to close the apostles’ mouths; in like manner as the wiseheads of the present day think to get rid of the subject of alleged spirit communications, by imputing credulity and superstition, or trickery and fraud, to all who aver their belief in them. But the slave of prejudice is as

reprehensible as the slave of superstition. He who obstinately refuses to examine an alleged important fact, which rests upon testimony that is *primâ facie* good, is as irrational in his conduct and as false to his duty as a man can be. Equally to be insisted upon as a man's duty to himself is his duty to others. If the alleged spiritual phenomena that are now making so many converts and creating so great a stir in the world, are facts, they involve matters of no small moment to all. If they are false—the product of imposture or the vagaries of superstition—and if they are making mental slaves of millions, as we learn that they are, then we owe it to those who are thus ensnared, and to the world at large, to investigate and expose the plausible tricks by which the imposition is effected; to say nothing of our special obligation to expose a fraud which profanely assumes to put men into immediate communication with the world of spirits, and to obtain direct and important communications thence.

As already suggested, the phenomena called “spirit manifestations” are not new—that is to say, the material or underlying parts of them are not new, though some of the forms they are said now to take may be so. History and tradition, reaching back to the earliest times, are pregnant with like wonders. Spirit appearances and ghosts, divinations and invocations, enchantment and witchcraft, magic and sorcery, presentiments and prophetic dreams, necromancers, spirit-seers, and fortune-tellers, have been known in all ages of the world, and have, at all times, found believers who did not partake of the alleged gifts or powers attributed to those who practised or experienced them. Good men have deplored the tendency of the human mind—not of the uneducated and illiterate mind, only, but of the educated and the erudite—to search after and believe in those things which it is orthodox to stigmatize as superstitious or impious. But, in spite of the reasonings of the philosopher and the denunciations of the divine, the aspiration after the marvellous, and the desire to hold communication with the world of spirits are so strong in the heart of universal humanity, that nothing has yet sufficed to suppress their manifestation, or to prevent those extraordinary exhibitions of them and of the phenomena alleged to accompany them, which now and then take place in different parts of the world.

It has been said, and, I believe, truly, that no humanitarian tradition—no universal belief—ever yet rested on a nonentity. The long enduring and universally prevailing must have a truth in it. That the belief in the appearance of disembodied spirits—ghosts, as they are generally called—is one of these

humanitarian traditions it would be easy to show ; and as easy to show its existence in the Scriptures, new and old, and its belief in the Church through all ages down to our own. Numerous journals and books pertaining to the subject, published here and in France and America, will furnish some idea of the multitudes of persons, including not a few of the most highly cultivated, who have been made converts to "Spiritualism;" that is, who believe the remarkable phenomena testified to, including unusual appearances and sounds—drawing, writing, music played, and objects conveyed from one place to another, by an unseen power—to be the work of disembodied spirits, who also converse or communicate, as they allege, on past, present, and future facts and occurrences, sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly; that is, sometimes with truthfulness, sometimes in falsehood; sometimes doing mischief, sometimes good; often bringing intelligent and affectionate assurances of immortal life, affording consolation under difficulty and distress, and giving forewarning of danger; sometimes writing or dictating medical prescriptions, and passages of Scripture with new and striking spiritual expositions, and sometimes compositions, not always choice in style, nor remarkable for either novelty or utility.

While "Spiritualists" believe in the spiritual causation of these phenomena, others refer them to mesmeric biology, or other occult but natural influences. My present purpose is not to pronounce an opinion on the subject; but I may say, that many of the phenomena that I have known—some, and upon several occasions, happening when only my wife and myself have been present, and not looking for or expecting such things—have presented features of intelligence, prevision, and solicitude, not reconcilable with any theory of mesmerism or biology, and certainly not with any assumption of self-deception or delusion.

To say that some of these phenomena are puerile or absurd—that some of the alleged communications are contradictory and untrue, and that many of them are useless, is nothing to the purpose. Do they occur? Are they facts? Are the evidences which attest them such as in other cases, and of an ordinary kind, would command attention and inquiry, if not belief? If so, then our reasonable course and undoubted duty is to look into them, and endeavour to ascertain their cause and character. "If the proofs of their occurrence be perfectly legitimate," says a writer in the *Cornhill Magazine*, "the nature of the facts themselves cannot be admitted as a valid reason for refusing to receive them as facts. Evidence, if it be otherwise trust-

worthy, cannot be invalidated by the unlikelihood of that which it attests. What is wanted here, then, is to treat facts as facts, and not to decide the question over the head of the evidence. To say that certain phenomena are incredible, is merely to say that they are inconsistent with the present state of our knowledge; but knowing how imperfect our knowledge is, we are not justified in asserting that they are impossible."

Next to the irrationality of making the reception of facts dependent upon their intrinsic character, or upon their conformity with our past experience, is that of making them dependent upon their apparent utility. Nothing is more common than to evade inquiry into the alleged spiritual occurrences, by pertinaciously demanding proof of their utility; as if an inability to furnish this could dispose of the facts themselves. True, philosophy first collects its facts, then traces them to their cause or causes, and then applies itself to the question of utility, or the practical usefulness of the facts and principles it has accumulated. No one would be justified in repudiating the evidences of these phenomena, even if those who believe in their spiritual causation were unable to refer to any good that has resulted from them, or were incapable of even suggesting the possibility of good. How much of good could have been foreseen or foretold of Galileo's discovery, that the earth revolved round the sun, and not—as all men's senses and daily observations induced them to believe—that the sun revolved round the earth? But who will attempt to estimate the amount of good that has resulted from it? There are millions of facts that should teach us modesty in our inquiries after the *cui bono*. We should, by all means, search for it, wherever there is, as in most things, a probability of finding it; but we should avoid the blunder of making the evidence and reception of a fact dependent upon the discovery of the *cui bono*.

The believers in "Spiritualism," however, have not overlooked this question of utility, and all those who wish to see how far they have succeeded, may do so by referring to the periodicals devoted to the subject, and to numerous other publications known to all booksellers. There they will find a huge mass of well-attested evidence to the fact, that good of the most striking and varied description—physical, moral, and religious—has been produced by alleged spirit agency.

Another class of sceptics refuse to listen to any relation of these phenomena, until they can be informed *how* they are produced. The demand is, as a condition, a very absurd one. If the question could be answered by "I don't know," only, it would be just such an answer as the objectors themselves are

obliged to give, in relation to many other facts. Our ignorance of causes is not limited to these phenomena. It extends to numerous physical phenomena. We do not know how an acorn becomes an oak—a small seed a blade of grass, an ear of corn, or a goodly-sized tree; or how a portion of an egg is transformed into a living feathered bird. And there are many other “natural” phenomena which it is equally impossible to explain or comprehend. But our ignorance does not induce us to reject the facts. Why should it do so in the alleged spiritual phenomena?

But if “Spiritualists” are ignorant of the means by which spirits make their presence known, and communicate, it is not because the subject has been uninvestigated by them. Some have, devoutly, and for many years, studied the phenomena, diligently collecting and comparing facts, and submitting them to such tests as they deemed best adapted to extract from them a knowledge of the means employed to produce them; and although the results of such investigations may not satisfy all inquirers, they suffice to show that “Spiritualists” are not all such credulous fools as they are supposed to be, by those who fancy they are themselves too wise to be taken in. This class of objectors to spirit intercourse evidently do not know that there is room for much modesty, even after we have acquired a comparatively large stock of knowledge. Who can say that he knows all the powers operating in and through nature? “The boundaries of nature,” says one of the Oxford essayists, who has some fine thoughts in the midst of many I hold to be the reverse, “exist only where our present knowledge places them. The discoveries of to-morrow will alter and enlarge them.” That spirits have communicated with men, all history, sacred and profane, abundantly testifies, though the *how*—the means by which the communication was effected—are as much unknown as in the alleged spirit communications of the present day. Why should the one be accepted and believed in, and the other be rejected, only on the ground of our not knowing how the intercourse is effected? “How can a spirit move chairs and tables, couches and pianofortes?” asks a writer in a popular journal. “How can a spirit thus handle and operate upon matter? When you can tell me that, I may, perchance, be induced to look into the subject which I now hold to be too absurd for inquiry.” This wise man repudiates, no doubt, all the sacred narratives in which spiritual beings are said to have brought themselves into direct contact with matter, and to have operated upon it; as in the case of Lot, when the angel spirit put forth his hand, and

pulled him into the house (Gen. xix., 10, 16); of Jacob, when he wrestled with an angel (Gen. xxxii., 23 *et seq.*); of the law written upon tables of stone, by "the disposition of angels," as the proto-martyr Stephen says (Acts vii., 53), or, as Paul has it, "by the communication of angels" (Heb. i., ii.); of Elijah, who, it would seem, was often carried about by spirits (1 Kings xviii., 12, &c.); of Daniel, (ch. x., 10, &c.); of the feast of Belshazzar, at which a spirit-hand wrote in letters on the wall (ch. v.); of Peter and the other apostles, who had their prison-doors opened, and who were led forth by spirit messengers (Acts v., 19, 20); of Philip, who was first spoken to by an angel, and was then conveyed by him from one locality to another (Acts viii., 26, 39); and of many others which might be referred to.

But do those who refuse to believe in the possibility of disembodied spirits acting upon matter, because they cannot have it explained to them how it is done, know how embodied spirits act upon matter? Or do they imagine that there is less disparity between the spiritual and the material parts of man than there is between a disembodied spirit and material objects? If a spirit cannot operate upon a table or other object, how can it operate upon a human body? If the disembodied spirit of another cannot make itself manifest to and communicate with me, how can my own spirit do so? That it does so, I know; and I know, furthermore, that it will, by-and-by, take its departure hence, and leave the body it is now in contact with, and operates upon, and sustains in life, an unconscious mass of corrupting matter. Pseudo-philosophy and unreasoning scepticism believe that spirits act upon and move the bodies in which they dwell, but they will not believe that they can act upon other bodies, though they know no more of the "how," or the means of acting, in the one case than in the other. Oh, wise philosophy!

Sceptical philosophers, however, are not more inconsistent in their mode of dealing with the alleged facts of "Spiritualism" than Christian professors are. A word with this class of objectors.

I have already referred to several particular instances of spirit appearances and spirit agency, in the sacred writings. But, in point of fact, those Divine books abound with evidence of spirit manifestations, of spirit appearances and agencies, and of the revisitation of this sphere by disembodied spirits, employed as God's messengers, or angels, to men. No devout Christian or Jew denies that it was formerly a part of the Divine economy in governing the Church and the world, and

in preparing those who live in them for another and a higher sphere, to communicate with mankind through the medium of spiritual beings. What is the Bible, if it is not a record of what has been communicated and received, through the instrumentality of spirit agency? What is the Book of Genesis, if it is not a record of God's communications to the patriarchs, through spirit agency (angels, as they are called, by reason of this agency)—of God's making himself known to men, by spirit messengers, in human form, ascending and descending, as Jacob saw them, and conversing with Abraham and others, who, as Paul says, "sometimes entertained angels unawares"? What is the rest of the Pentateuch, if it is not a record, chiefly, of what God communicated to Moses, for the government of Israel, and its moral and spiritual training, communicated, as Paul says, by angels (Heb. i., ii.), or, as Stephen said—on that memorable occasion when the outpouring of his divine eloquence made the unbelievers and deriders gnash upon him with their teeth, and cast him out and slay him—given and received "by the disposition of angels" (Acts vii. 53), and which, as the writer of the Epistle to the Galatians says, "was ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator"? What are the prophetic writings, if they are not the records of what "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," and of what they saw and heard in dreams and visions, and of what was communicated to them in those dreams, and also in their waking hours, by spirit messengers, who appeared in the human form, and thus made themselves seen, and heard, and felt? What are the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, if they are not records of marvels accompanying and following the introduction of the Christian revelation—marvels in which the ministry of spirits is an important feature? What are the Epistles, if they are not the Divine messages and the spiritual teaching which the men who formed them declare they were inspired to deliver, and who teach us, among other things, that by the Gospel we have been brought into the presence of an "innumerable company of angels [spirit messengers], and of the spirits of just men made perfect"; reminding the Christian, too, that he "wrestles not with flesh and blood [merely], but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against wicked spirits [once] in heavenly places?" What is the Apocalypse, if it is not a narrative of those wonderful visions which the "beloved disciple" had, spirit agents being his attendants, and sometimes his expositors; two of them describing themselves—one as the spirit of a Jewish prophet, the other as the spirit of a Chris-

tian believer? What is the history of the Church, downward from the apostolic age—but especially during the first two centuries, when it was uncontaminated by Pagan philosophy and worldly alliances—if it is not a history pregnant with the profound belief and testimony of the most eminent believers, touching the continuance of spirit communications, conferring spiritual vision and superhuman powers, exhibited in the healing of the sick and other miraculous acts? Barnabas, Clement, and Hermas (who immediately followed the apostles), Augustin, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Origen, Tertullian, Minutius Felix, Lactantius, Athanasius, with others of still later date, all refer, as matter of notoriety, to the existence of these things, and several were themselves living witnesses of it.

Now, those who believe these things, recorded in the Scriptures and in the writings of the early Fathers, are precluded from saying that such things are impossible, or even out of the circle of God's dealing with his creatures. All Christians believe the Scripture testimony, at least; and they would deem it profane, as well as unreasonable, if we made our assent to the Scripture narratives of spirit appearances and spirit communications dependent upon our knowledge of the means by which they were brought to pass. But they ridicule and deride all relations of what are said to be spirit appearances and spirit communications in the present day. They are things of the past, they say. All spirit manifestations and communications are gone by they allege; they were superseded and put an end to by the publication of the books of the New Testament. But upon what does the allegation rest? Where is the authority for it? Where is it so written? Upon what, even the slightest intimation to that effect, can any one lay his finger? I can find none. The Church, for ages after the apostolic age, as we have seen, could find none, but devoutly believed to the contrary, and alleged that it had abundant evidence to justify its belief, as any one may see in Mr. Boys' "Suppressed Evidence and Proofs of the Miraculous Faith and Experience of the Church of Christ in all Ages, from Authentic Records of the Fathers, Waldenses, Hussites, Reformers, United Brethren," &c., and unless I can find a very distinct intimation to the contrary, in that divine book which all Christians agree to accept as the unerring authority in faith and doctrine, I shall continue to believe that the Church has, in ever testifying to these spiritual phenomena, been in the right. I cannot believe, unless I am expressly told so, on the highest authority, that God, after having, through successive ages, and from man's

first entrance into this life, revealed Himself and His will by the agency of spirit messengers, which we call angels, and by means of visions, dreams, omens, and other and similar things—thus keeping open, as it were, a direct intercourse between His creatures and Himself; and walking with them, so to speak, communing with them, and sustaining a spiritual life in them, so as to make them feel that in Him they lived and moved, and had their being—that after all this He has withdrawn these manifestations of his spirit messengers and agencies, leaving us only narratives of the past, and such means of spiritual life and divine protection as are to be found through the recorded facts of the Old and New Testaments, and the ordinary operations of His spirit and His providence. I press it upon professing Christians to seriously ask themselves whether they are not guilty of much and grave inconsistency in scoffing at the alleged facts of “Spiritualism,” while they devoutly believe and cherish the like facts, as they stand upon the unerring pages of the sacred books? I believe they are, in this, glaringly and almost incredibly inconsistent. They believe the witnesses of past ages, but they will not believe those of this age, though hundreds of them are known to be intelligent, cultivated, devout, and conscientious. To characterize them all as fools is rather too much for even the most prejudiced and sceptical to do; and they are, therefore, distributed into fools and knaves—deceivers and dupes. Any one who will pay but a very little attention to the character of many of the witnesses to “Spiritualism,” will see what an amount of credulity is demanded to accept such a conclusion. There are still those, however, who “strain at a gnat, but swallow a camel!”

Let me once more say, that I am not here urging an *acceptance of opinions*, but an *inquiry into facts*. There is—however some may try to hide it, and others treat it with indifference—an extraordinary movement now going on in the world—in America, France, Switzerland, Germany, Australia, India, and elsewhere, as well as in England. Not only multitudes of the middle classes, who have not much time or taste for the investigation of the alleged phenomena, and are therefore more liable to the imposition of plausibilities; and of the higher classes, who are said to lack means of excitement, and therefore eagerly run after that supplied by “Spiritualism;” but of the more intelligent and inquiring of the working classes, are among the converts who believe and testify to the alleged verities of “Spiritualism.” In London, there are two periodicals and a “Spiritual Institute,” while a “Spiritual

Lyceum" is in course of formation. In the country, there are, I believe, three, if not four, periodicals; and there is a "Spiritual" Literature, comprising some scores of volumes. All these are mainly purchased and supported by the middle and upper classes. The *Westminster Review*, which will not be suspected of much superstition or credulity upon spiritual matters, has taken some pains to inquire into the effects produced by "Spiritualism" on the other classes, and the result of the inquiry is given in an article on "The Religious Heresies of the Working Classes," in the number for January, 1862—three years ago. If the inquiry were made now, the results would be found still more remarkable.

"It is a very significant fact," says the reviewer, "that modern Spiritualism, both in England and America, has won the belief of large numbers who were formerly 'Secularists' (a phrase now applied to all classes of unbelievers in the Bible). In Bradford, Bingley, and other Yorkshire towns, there are people once notorious for believing nothing, now equally notorious for believing everything (?). It is the characteristic of these rude northerners to be afraid of no inquiry, and, out of a love of fair dealing, to be proud to welcome what others excommunicate. Scepticism has always been rife among them, and there is no part of England where preachers have harder to fight, or more shrewd heretics to contend with, than in the West Riding." There is a building in Keighley, the reviewer proceeds to say, once a Methodist chapel, but which, when the Methodists removed to a larger place, fell into the hands of parties who converted it into a Working Man's Hall. "Here this world took the precedence of the other, and chartism, socialism, strikes, and atheism, were advocated there in their turns. Fergus O'Connor and his political followers, Robert Owen and his anti-theological followers, regarded it as their peculiar property; and there is scarcely a politician or a heretic of any note among working men who has not spoken in it, and looked on it as one of the holy places of unbelief. For years, this [place was known in Keighley and the neighbourhood as the 'Infidel Chapel.' Artisan inquirers from distant towns made Sunday pilgrimages thither; while the pious crossed themselves when they mentioned its name, and crossed the street when they met one of its attendants." By-and-by, "Spiritualism" was imported into Keighley, and the managers of the "Infidel Chapel" were converted. "The Sunday evenings, and other evenings, also, were devoted to *séances*, and lectures were given on God and Immortality; and, in time, a Free Christian

Church was established. The *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* was conducted by men who had been accustomed to look up to Paine and Voltaire as Biblical critics, and to see in the Baron d'Holbach's 'System of Nature' an authoritative text-book of theology. The Secularists who remained unconverted were left without a home; and the itinerant lecturers, who had hitherto always found a safe haven in the 'Working Man's Hall,' struck Keighley out of their lists."

Thus far the *Westminster Reviewer*, who, if he push his inquiries in other directions, will find results equally striking with those he has chronicled in Yorkshire. The pains which he has taken to get at the facts, and the honesty with which he has related them, might put to shame some who imagine that all 'truth, virtue, and honesty, are confined to them and other "orthodox" believers, and that no good thing can come out of the *Westminster*, the writer in which, like a wise philosopher, suggests, that, "whatever view we take of the speculations of the 'Spiritualists,' they are not without useful lessons."

It is these "useful lessons" which it behoves all wise and thinking men, and especially of all religious men, to seek after and turn to good account; but they will not find them, so long as they shut their eyes to the facts, and obstinately refuse to open them, for fear the light should be found disagreeable to their feelings.