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HINTS BEARING UPON SO-CALLED "SPIRITUALISM."

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THE BROTHERS DAVENPORT AND MR. FAY.

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THE subjoined is a copy of a letter which has been addressed to Mr. ROBERT COOPER, who corresponds for the above-mentioned party :—

32, TORRINGTON SQUARE, W.C.  
May 26th, 1868.

SIR,—In a printed circular with which you have favoured me there occurs as follows :—

"In respect to the causes of the physical acts which take place in their presence, the Brothers Davenport have no theory to offer. They declare simply that they have no art or part, by conscious thought or bodily action, in their production. They do not originate, will, direct, or control them. Solemnly and religiously they affirm, and take every possible means to prove, that no fraud, no deception, no illusion, is ever practised in their exhibition."\*

Mr. Fay avers to the same effect.

This induces me to ask—

Supposing a party of gentlemen, whose names shall be submitted to you, should profess themselves willing, in the interests of truth, to be constituted a Committee of Inquiry, and to give up their time to a careful investigation of "the causes of the physical acts which take place" in the presence of the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay, would the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay, in the interests of truth, give up an evening (or two evenings, if found necessary) to permit of and aid in the investigation?

Though desirous of avoiding such offence as might be occasioned by the expression of a doubt as to the truth of what the Messrs. Davenport and Fay "solemnly and religiously affirm," still it is requisite for me to remind you and them that, if this matter is to be inquired into in a philosophic spirit, it is of primary importance for the inquiring body to do their utmost to place themselves beyond the possibility of "fraud," "deception," or "illusion."

Thus it would be necessary for the Committee to be at liberty to furnish— if at a preliminary meeting it may be resolved on as advisable—their own cabinet, ropes, guitars, tambourines, bell, horn, &c., as well as three complete changes of raiment, to be donned, in the presence of witnesses, by the Messrs. Davenport and Fay immediately before entering upon the *séance*.

\* The circular goes on to challenge an examination into "phenomena which are producing," it is asserted, "a revolution in human thought," etc., etc. For "fifteen years" the Brothers Davenport have "cheerfully submitted" (it is presumed they mean *out of England*) "to the most trying ordeals, and no person has ever detected," etc., etc.



Further, it would be necessary for the Committee to be at liberty to fasten the hands of the gentlemen either *behind* or *before*, and after whatever method the Committee may deem most satisfactory—using ropes, or twine, or leather thongs, or ordinary handcuffs, and securing the fastenings, if considered requisite, by encircling them with thread, or by affixing seals, or by the application of any other efficient safeguards.

It is also important that the Committee should have power to satisfy themselves by indubitable tests that no *movement* of the bound hands, or of the bound feet, takes place during the dark *séance*, or during such times as either of the Brothers Davenport, or as Mr. Fay, may be shut up in the cabinet.

In fact, the Committee should be invested with the fullest precautionary powers compatible with discretion. This is due not only to each and every of the members who may compose the Committee, but to the Messrs. Davenport and Fay, whose integrity (supposing them to be honourable men, and all men ought to be so regarded until proved the contrary) will be made the more manifest the more painstakingly rigid the investigation.

The *séances* should be entered upon by the one side and examined by the other with no spirit of prejudice, but with an earnest desire for the setting forth of *truth*, the two parties regarding themselves, not in antagonism (so long as everything on either hand looks honestly), but as co-workers in a scientific inquiry.

I will simply add that those whose cause you advocate—and apparently with great sincerity of faith—will (if matters be arranged as I propose) have to deal with men who will not hesitate to state candidly their belief that “no fraud or deception” is practised throughout these exhibitions, if upon the close of the scrutiny such shall be their opinions; but at the same time with men who, should they discover that any imposition whatever has been practised upon the public, will feel it their bounden duty to expose such imposition as widely as possible.

Should the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay be inclined to enter upon such an ordeal as is here suggested, an intimation to that effect will oblige.

Yours faithfully,

THOMAS HOPLEY.

To the Author of “Seven Months  
with the Brothers Davenport,” &c.

Mr. Cooper's reply:—

52, CONDUIT STREET, W.

May 30th, 1868.

SIR,—I am in receipt of your letter, proposing a scientific examination of the phenomena attending the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay, in the desirability of which I fully concur, and, as far as I am concerned, am willing to afford every facility in my power to carry it into effect, my object being to get what I believe to be a truth recognised. I am at present, however, unable to accede to any such proposition as you make, in consequence of being already committed to an engagement of a similar kind with one of our learned societies [*This engagement was brought to naught a day or two afterwards, and was never, save in the instance before us, mentioned as a reason for not accepting the challenge.*—T. H.]; and I am afraid I should be taxing the liberality of the Brothers too much by asking them to engage in two gratuitous undertakings at the same time. We must, therefore, await the results of the present inquiry before entering upon the one you propose. I may, however, state that I can see nothing in the conditions you propose that would be objected to. The Davenports since, &c. [*Here follows irrelevant matter.*—T. H.].

My object, as I have already intimated, being to get the reality of these phenomena established, I shall only be too happy to avail myself of your services in the way proposed, if I think they will further my aim: I should, however, require to be satisfied that the names of the investigating Committee would be such as to carry weight with the public, otherwise it would not be worth the time and trouble involved for the Davenports to submit to such an ordeal as you prescribe for them.

Yours faithfully,

ROBERT COOPER.

THOMAS HOPLEY, Esq.

The names put before Mr. Cooper representing, without exception, gentlemen of very high character, and of acknowledged celebrity in their various important callings, names which would "carry weight with the public," he could not but express himself fully satisfied. They were accompanied as follows:—

"I now enclose the greater portion of them; a few others are under consideration. I beg to say, however, that I am not at *present* authorised to make use of any *one* of these names (*i.e.*, as of a consenting person), as everything final must depend on the nature of your reply,\* a copy of which, together with a copy of my letter to you, will of course receive their careful consideration before pledging themselves. Please understand, therefore, that the said names are submitted to you in *strict* confidence, and, except so far as is necessary in consulting the Messrs. Davenport and Fay, for your *strict* privacy."

Afterwards Mr. H. had an interview with Mr. Cooper, which occasioned the following letter:—

32, TORRINGTON SQUARE, W.C.

June 6th, 1868.

SIR,—With respect to what passed between us the other day, I cannot for a moment doubt but that the Committee would be very pleased for any of you to make any statements, explanations, or suggestions for their consideration, previously to their deciding upon what may seem to them the most proper mode of conducting, so far as they are concerned, the proposed *séance*. This might be done either by *letter* (which I would take care to place before them and would guarantee should receive the due attention), or *personally*, previously to the Committee's entering upon their preliminary consultation. That you should be present at that preliminary consultation, I cannot for a moment suppose you yourself, or any of your party, would desire. In a case of this kind, when the object of every one concerned should be *the elucidation of truth for the enlightenment of mankind*, it is incumbent (as I cannot but think you will agree) upon every one engaged in the matter to endeavour to avoid the possibility of people imagining that the Committee were, through feelings of delicacy, or from any cause whatever, prevented the expression of free speech at the council-board. They must, if their labours are to be of essential service, not only convince *themselves* as to the character of what are termed "the manifestations," but must so conduct affairs as to convince a reflecting *public* of at least as much as this—that they (the Committee) were, in every sense, unshackled in their powers, whether of arrangement or investigation, and most painstakingly cautious throughout in arriving at conclusions.

\* The names were dispatched an hour or two before the "reply" (Mr. C.'s letter of May 30th) came to hand.

The gentlemen who give up their time to this inquiry (should it take place) will have (it cannot be disguised) a very onerous and very unenviable duty to perform. For them to acknowledge the phenomena genuine without the most careful scrutiny, you yourselves would—as you declare—consider highly culpable: on the other hand for them to condemn your exhibition and in three or four years' time discover that they had been too hasty, would be, to say the least, a very serious public blot upon the discriminating character of each and every of the investigators. Surely a strong assurance this, that they will enter upon the inquiry in a most determinedly unprejudiced manner.

I should feel obliged by a final answer to my invitation.

Very faithfully yours,

To the Author of "Seven Months  
with the Brothers Davenport," &c.

THOMAS HOPLEY.

Mr. Cooper wrote in reply that he would "give a definite answer in the course of two or three days" when the Brothers would know more of their future movements, of the time at their disposal, etc. "The remarks in your letter I fully concur in"; but "I think there should be some on the Committee who understand a little of the subject."

Mr. H. answered as follows:—

32, TORRINGTON SQUARE, W.C.  
June 8th, 1868.

SIR,—In your favour of the 6th you say, "I think there should be some on the Committee who understand a little of the subject."

If you will mention any two or three gentlemen whom you would like to be added to the list already submitted to you, I will endeavour that it shall be done. They must, however, be men whose names will be a guarantee to the world that they will enter upon their duties in a thoroughly conscientious spirit—men, too, of acknowledged judgment and capability, or their opinions will have but little weight. You may, however, feel very sure that among those already selected there is not one who would for a moment think of taking part in a practical investigation without first acquainting himself with *more than* "a little of the subject." And let me repeat, that "the Committee would be very pleased for any of you to make any statements, *explanations*, or suggestions for their consideration." Your so doing would be regarded as a valuable help in the right direction.

Yours faithfully,

THOMAS HOPLEY.

To the Author of "Seven Months  
with the Brothers Davenport," &c.

A few days afterwards the complete list of proposed names was forwarded:—

With this you will receive the *complete list* of proposed names—unless you desire to add to them. If there are any to which you object, please favour me with a line at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,

THOMAS HOPLEY.

To the Author of "Seven Months  
with the Brothers Davenport," &c.

Other letters passed ; but they are of no moment. Every point, from the first, was, with due caution, conceded to the party who were under challenge ; but it had become quite clear that there was no desire whatever on their side to submit to the inquiry. About three weeks after the commencement of the correspondence, a letter came to hand as follows :—

52, CONDUIT STREET, W.

June 13th, 1868.

DEAR SIR,—I have waited thus long in the hope of being able to give a reply favourable to your project. I am sorry to say that I cannot authorise you to get together the Committee of Investigation.

The matter stands thus :—The Brothers Davenport, in consequence of not being able to make their *séances* in London remunerative, have determined to go next week into the provinces, where they will probably be engaged till their departure for America.

It is *just possible*, however, that should success attend them in the provinces, they may prolong their stay beyond the time at present fixed for their departure. In that case they would *probably* return to London, when an opportunity would be afforded of carrying out your project. Of this I will give you timely notice ; as I feel quite sure that what you propose to do is the best thing that could be done to advance the cause I have at heart.

I remain, yours faithfully,

ROBERT COOPER.

THOMAS HOPLEY, Esq.

The letter came to hand about noon on Monday, the 15th ; and the party were going to leave *that week*. To prolong the negotiation seemed needless. Mr. H. wrote as follows :—

32, TORRINGTON SQUARE, W.C.

June 18th, 1868.

SIR,—How is it that the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay are “not able to make their *séances* remunerative” ? Neither you nor they can be justly offended at my reminding you how it is ; in as much as both you and they know and admit the reason. It is, then, because the great bulk of the more intelligent portion of the community do not believe what the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay “solemnly and religiously affirm,” but look upon them simply as clever conjurers, and consequently as gross, and even blasphemous impostors, who not only ought nowhere to be encouraged, but who ought everywhere to be “put down,” nor longer allowed to prey upon the credulity of the weak and ignorant—day by day scattering among them pernicious error while pretending to be unflinching advocates for the advance of truth. Pray understand me : I am not (Heaven forbid) taking upon myself to judge them : I merely remind you how they are looked upon by the generality. But I cannot of course be blind to the fact that here has been arranged for them (at the cost of much time and trouble) the opportunity of proving themselves (if it be possible) *honourable men*,—the opportunity of proving themselves so not simply before the country, but before the civilised

world; and they decline to do so. And need you be told that if they had creditably undergone the ordeal proposed, they would no longer have had to complain of their *séances* not being "remunerative"? Only had the Committee's attestation to the genuineness of "the manifestations" appeared in the *Times'* columns, and from that day the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay would have been "the rage"; and wealth and honours would have poured in upon them from every quarter. You and they must be fully aware of this.

Before shaking the matter from my hands permit me to give an opinion that it will be very difficult for any one who reads this correspondence to believe that the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay are really anxious—whatever in future they may "solemnly and religiously affirm"—for a strictly impartial, philosophic inquiry, or that there really exists any cause whatever for their declining such inquiry, beyond the consciousness that it must lead to their being detected in imposition of the very wickedest character.

Yours faithfully,  
THOMAS HOPLEY.

To the Author of "Seven Months  
with the Brothers Davenport," &c.

The last letter (of June 18th) having elicited no rejoinder, this M.S. will now (June 24th) be sent to the printer's.\*

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NOTE.—It is due to that portion of the proposed Committee with whom Mr. H. conferred on this matter to say that from the beginning they expressed a conviction that the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay, when driven into a corner, would make a means of escaping from the inquiry, and very much doubted whether it was not a waste of time and energy to try to deal with them. In one sense it clearly was. It appeared, however, to Mr. H. that it could not be very wrong to endeavour to bring under a strict scrutiny certain so-called "manifestations," which (it was argued) if genuine, are unquestionably of importance, at least in a scientific point of view,—and if the result of clever cheating, it would be well to expose publicly. Most readers of the above correspondence will doubtless consider that the failure to bring the said "manifestations" to a test, is a pretty strong proof of their nature;—in other words, that failure in this instance is a sad success. Others may think differently. Mr. H. is far from desirous of offending *any*; and more especially would he wish to be on his guard against offending any who may have conscientiously—and after what they consider due painstaking to arrive at correct conclusions—adopted a particular opinion or creed—however strange and, as many must think, absurd such opinion or creed may be—in con-

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\* Since the above was in type a letter has arrived from Mr. Cooper. He cannot "authorise any arrangement for a test *séance*." "My engagement with the Brothers," he adds, "terminates on the 4th of July."



nexion with what is called "*spiritualism*." Every person honestly pursuing what he or she considers the right way, ought, even when wandering in a maze of error, to be respected. But surely it behoves all who are really anxious for a more perfect condition of humanity not to adopt too hastily supposed new truths. The healthy-brained philosopher, while he will never reject without inquiry, yet will never accept without sure proof. It is only by labouring with the most painstaking, test-applying care, that the mountain of philosophical *fact* can be slowly and steadily built up grain by grain. Does it not, reader, seem very lamentable that on both sides of the Atlantic people may be found who would be affronted were they not ranked among sensible men and women, and yet who have even *changed their religion* from no more potent reason than that they have seen a man's coat whipped off they know not how, a horn thrown out of a door without their being able to detect the agency, a table rapped or moved and no one seen to do it, or a noisy tambourine rise from the ground in apparent opposition to the laws of gravity? "But is it right," you may return, "to pooh-pooh such appealing to the eye and to the ear, simply because they seem grotesque and foolish?" No: certainly not. But they should be accepted as *facts* only with the extremest caution—only after the most indubitable proofs that they are what is said of them—*altogether unconnected with deceit*. And then they should be accepted *for just what they are worth*—no more. There *may* be—it is as yet altogether too early times to say that there are,—but there *may* be hitherto unexamined forces in Nature—forces connected with vitality—which, under certain peculiar conditions, *may* perhaps be sufficiently powerful to hold in check or to counteract for a time other powerful forces (such, for instance, as the force of gravity); just as life itself, throughout the animal and vegetable kingdoms, holds in check, or counteracts, the chemical law which, acting upon a dead body, causes what in popular language is styled decay. It is not altogether impossible that there *may* be such forces in Nature (as who can say there are not thousands of others of which man as yet knows little or nothing?); and these hitherto unexamined forces connected with vitality (supposing such forces to exist) *may*, under certain peculiar conditions, occurring but at rare intervals of time, cause the manifestation of phenomena only more startling than the phenomena with which man is every day surrounded, because of a kind with which he has not learnt to be familiar. This may be so or not. Whether it is so or not will

doubtless (if man's intellect is to reach the point at all; and of what need science despair?) be one day settled by strictly philosophical investigation. Till then, far better to watch and wait than plunge unwittingly into error. The conduct of the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay demonstrates on these heads *nothing*—either one way or another: it simply demonstrates, or seems to demonstrate, that there is something in their particular exhibition which causes them to shrink from so truth-testing an ordeal as was laid down in the programme; and this though night after night, they declare themselves, in the presence of wondering audiences, anxious to “take every possible means to prove” that in their *séances* there is “no fraud, no deception, no illusion.”

If the trouble Mr. H. has taken in this matter should be the means of occasioning only a small portion of those for whose perusal these pages are issued to think more deeply and to act more cautiously, it will not have been bestowed in vain, and will be very far from being regretted. Few who converse with Mr. Cooper can (it is considered) doubt but that he is a conscientious man—a believer in what he professes to believe; and could he have prevailed on the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay to have undergone this investigation, he would (it is thought) have done so. The fact of his being highly conscientious, doubtless causes him to trust at times too fully to the supposed conscientiousness of others.—T. H.

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\*.\* Some, on reading these pages, may think *The proposed investigation might have taken place had the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay been paid the usual price received at each SÉANCE*. But this is a mistake. An investigation might have taken place, but not *the* investigation. Such as rank high in philosophy, or are eminent in other ways, are naturally very jealous how their names are used at *all* in connexion with matters of doubtful character. To give up their valuable time in order to search into scientific truth, or where they feel they can serve the public, is all in their way; and had the Brothers Davenport and Mr. Fay shown an earnest desire (in more than mere words) that their case should be philosophically investigated, gentlemen whose names are a power in the world would have stepped forward for the occasion. But gentlemen whose names are a power in the world will not condescend to subscribe for the encouragement of possible deceivers.

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