

Modern Spiritualism:

A LECTURE

BY

JOHN F. MORGAN,

OF MANCHESTER.

"THE TRUTH AGAINST THE WORLD."

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"The inquiry of Truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it; the knowledge of Truth, which is the presence of it; and the belief of Truth, which is the enjoyment of it;—is the Sovereign Good of human nature."
—*Bacon*.

"We learn by descending to the sober work of seeing, and feeling, and experimenting. I prefer what has been seen by one pair of eyes to all reasoning and guessing."—*Dr. Chalmers*.

"*Magna est Veritas, et prævalebít.*"

"Before you condemn this, or any other novelty, sit down five minutes and ask yourselves what you *know* about it."

"We talk of a credulous vulgar, without always recollecting that there is a vulgar credulity which, in historical matters, as well as those in religion, finds it *easier to doubt than to examine*; and endeavours to assume the credit of an *esprit fort*, by denying whatever happens to be beyond the very limited comprehension of the public."—*Sir Walter Scott*.

"Whether they are right in their belief in the existence of disembodied spirits or not, we do not know. One thing is certain, they are not without grounds for their faith. They have what, to them, appears no less than ocular demonstration. They have what would once have appeared conclusive as ocular demonstration to us. And though we are obliged to confess ourselves doubters, we cannot help feeling at times as if our doubts were *unreasonable*. We cannot help feeling as if the faith of the Spiritualists was more reasonable than our own unyielding scepticism."—*Joseph Barker*.

"The commandments of truth are high and imperious; and her true disciples never hesitate to follow whithersoever she leads. Any theory, hypothesis, sect, creed, or institution that fears investigation, openly manifests its own error."—*A. J. Davis*.

"All newly-discovered truths have, at first, the lot of struggling against old beliefs, but, *in the end, they are victoribus*."—*J. H. Fichte*.

"We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen."

"Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."—1 Thess. v. 21.

MODERN SPIRITUALISM.



A GREAT Author has said, "The generality of persons, by whom the most important and reliable information might be given, have been educated into the habit of concealing it entirely, or communicating it with great caution, lest it subject them to the odious suspicion of being weak, visionary, credulous, superstitious, or partially insane."* In face of all that may be said against the advocate of Spiritualism,—amidst all the sneering, contempt, and opposition of nearly all classes of society, I declare myself a believer in the possibility and reality of Spirit Communion, or, in other words, a Modern Spiritualist. My object in this lecture, is to try and answer the very important question, "What is Spiritualism?" and to give you my views of the phenomena, and how they are produced.

If we were to ask the generality of people, What is Spiritualism? the answer would almost sure to be, "Table moving or Spirit rapping," and this by a people who have condemned the whole subject in such a way as would lead one naturally to think that they had studied and investigated it; but their very answer betrays their ignorance, and shows that their investigation has been of the most superficial character. What is Spiritualism? It is the intercourse with those loved ones who in very truth are "not lost but gone before,"—with those dear ones who have cast off the trammels of earth-life, and entered upon a career of happiness in the bright summer-land. It is the knowledge that those whom we loved on earth, and at whose grave our hearts were sad, are not far off in a distant heaven, but still with us, watching over us, and ministering

* Adin Ballou.

JAN 23 '46 67 of 100

to the wants of those they loved on earth. Spiritualism is the science which explains the mystery of the after life, and which enables the believer to look upon death not as a king of terrors, but as a "kind and welcome servant, who unlocks with noiseless hand life's flower-encircled door, to show us those we love."

Millions of men and women every year are leaving this earth, their bodies decaying, and their spirits entering the eternal world. Death is no respecter of persons ; all classes alike have to yield themselves to its power ; the rich and poor, the righteous and the wicked. Every hour some loved one is leaving us, leaving desolate some home, bringing sorrow to some dear, loving heart ; and, oh, how we try to pierce the veil which hides them from our view, and how wistfully we look after them. Can we not argue that they, entering the spiritual world, still look upon us here, and feel an interest in our well-being ? The Bible teaches that all our interest in the affairs of this world does not cease with our departure from it. Does not Christ say,—“ There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.”

There are many who may, perhaps, read this lecture, who are desiring to believe in a future state,—in an immortal existence,—who, like Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, can say,—“ Though I neither hope—for that would be presumption—nor expect it, seeing no foundation, *I shall be pleased to find a life after this.* Not a life where those are punished who were unable to believe without evidence, and unwilling to act in spite of reason, for the prospect of annihilation is pleasanter and more profitable to contemplate ; not a life where an easy faith is regarded as ‘ easy virtue ’ is regarded among some men ; but a life where those we have loved and lost here are restored to us again ; for there, in that hall, where those may meet who have been sacrificed to the cause of duty,—where no gross, or blind, or selfish, or cruel nature mingles,—where none sit but those whom human service and endurance have purified and entitled to that high company, Madeline would be a Hebe. Yes, a future life, bringing with it the admission to such

a companionship would be a *noble joy to contemplate*.”* To such who have this great desire for a future state, to those who, while they worship God in all sincerity, yet cannot clearly recognise their own future existence, Spiritualism comes, and with its facts and testimonies convinces the sceptic, and enables him to realise the most important fact in the universe,—that man shall live beyond the grave,—that man is a progressive being, whose progression does not end with life here, but continues through the countless ages of a never-ending eternity. Spiritualism is a question of facts. Let us, then, look at some of the phenomena of Spiritualism, and see how far we are justified in ascribing the phenomena to the agency of disembodied spirits.

“The first regularly recorded modern Spiritual Manifestations occurred in the year 1834, in Canandigua, New York, and recurred in various parts of Pennsylvania, in 1836. Many remarkable occurrences took place in the house of Mr. Dods, the origin of which was never discovered. In the village of Hydesville, New York, there was a house occupied, in 1846, by Mr. Weekman, and in 1847 it passed into the occupation of Mr. J. D. Fox. Mysterious noises were frequently heard in that house, much to the disturbance of the family. The following is an extract from Mrs. Fox’s journal, on the evening of March 21st, 1848,—‘My husband had not gone to bed, when we first heard the noise this evening. I know it from all other noises I had ever heard in the house. My daughter, who was fifteen years of age, said, in sport, ‘Now, just do as I do,—count one—two—three—four, striking one hand upon another.’ The blows which she made were repeated. She began to be startled. I said, ‘Count ten,’ and then it made ten strokes or noises. I then asked if it was a spirit? and if it was, to give two sounds. I heard two sounds as soon as the words were spoken.”†

When the report was circulated that the “Fox Family” were holding communication with disembodied spirits, many began to inquire into it, and owners of haunted

* “Last Trial by Jury for Atheism,” page 76.

† Barkas’ “Outline of Ten Years’ Investigation.”

houses began to question the strange noises they heard, and in many cases received intelligent answers. The question soon spread, and circles of earnest inquirers and truth-seekers were speedily formed. Thousands of mediums became developed, and hundreds of thousands of intelligent, sensible, and scientific men became convinced that it was indeed a truth that no law could account for the strange manifestations that were constantly occurring. In a very short space of time the Manifestations increased in number and variety. Tables were tilted, and raps on the table, walls, ceilings, &c., were produced, and by these means questions were answered intelligently and correctly. Mediums were thrown into a state of trance, wholly unconscious, and while in that state beautiful and eloquent addresses, sermons, and prayers were delivered, messages were written out, questions were answered, and events predicted. In America, all classes of society investigated the subject, and many eminent statesmen, theologians, and men of science announced to the world their conviction that these Manifestations really occurred, and that under circumstances rendering any trick or collusion impossible. Amongst these we may mention Judge Edmonds, Senator Talmadge, Professor Hare, Dr. Bush, Dr. Dexter, William Lloyd Garrison (the friend and champion of freedom), Rev. C. Beecher, Professor Rogers, &c.; many of them declaring their belief in the spiritual origin of the phenomena.

In a very valuable work by Judge Edmonds and Dr. Dexter, which contains records of Manifestations of a very high order, Judge Edmonds says,—“ I have known a pine table, with four legs, lifted bodily from the floor, in the centre of a circle of six or eight persons, turned upside down, and laid upon its top at our feet; then lifted up over our heads, and put leaning against the back of the sofa on which we sat. I have seen a mahogany table, having only a centre leg, and with a lamp burning upon it, lifted from the floor at least a foot, in spite of the efforts of those present, and shaken backward and forward, as one would shake a goblet in his hand, and the lamp retain its place, though its glass pendants rang again. I have known

a dinner bell taken from a high shelf in a closet, rung over the heads of four or five persons in that closet, then rung around the room over the heads of twelve or fifteen persons in the back parlour, and then borne through folding doors to the further end of the first parlour, and there dropped on the floor. I have frequently known persons pulled about with a force which it was impossible for them to resist, and once when all my strength was added in vain to that of the one thus affected. This is not a tithe—nay, not a hundredth part of what I have witnessed of the same character, but it is enough to show the general nature of what was before me. At the same time, I have heard from others, whose testimony would be credited in any human transaction, and which I could not permit myself to disregard, accounts of still more extraordinary transactions, for I have been by no means so much favoured in this respect as some.”*

W. Lloyd Garrison says,—“As the Manifestations have spread from house to house, from city to city, from one part of the country to the other, across the Atlantic into Europe, till now the civilized world is compelled to acknowledge their reality, however diverse in accounting for them—as these Manifestations continue to increase in variety and power, so that all suspicion of trick and imposture becomes simply absurd and preposterous, and as every attempt to find a solution for them in some physical theory relating to electricity, the odic force, and clairvoyance, and the like, has thus far proved abortive, it becomes every intelligent mind to enter into the investigation of them with candour and fairness, as opportunity may offer, and to bear such testimony in regard to them as the facts may warrant, no matter what ridicule it may excite on the part of the uninformed or sceptical. As for ourselves, we have been in no haste to jump to a conclusion in regard to phenomena so universally diffused, and of so extraordinary a character. For the last three years we have kept pace with nearly all that has been published on

* “Spiritualism,” by Judge Edmonds and Dr. Dexter.

the subject, and we have witnessed at various times many surprising Manifestations, and our conviction is that they cannot be accounted for on any other theory than that of spiritual agency."

We might quote hundreds of other testimonies, but these must suffice. The phenomena of Spiritualism was introduced into England about the year 1855, by Mr. Daniel Dunglass Home. The Manifestations coming through Mr. Home's mediumship are very varied and peculiar. Tables, pianos, and other articles of furniture are not only tilted, but floated in the air, beautiful music is played on the accordion and on the piano, without the aid of human fingers, flowers are handed round by invisible hands, and Mr. Home is floated about the room; one of the most remarkable phenomena being the elongation and compression of his body. In a description of a recent Séance held near London, we find it recorded,—“Here the extraordinary Manifestation of elongation and shortening occurred. The height he attained must have been six feet nine inches; as he lengthened out, his clothing at the waist separated fully six inches; and again, as he became shorter and shorter, the waistcoat descended quite below the hips,—Mrs. ——— holding the end of the waistcoat to make certain of his elongation.”* At another time,—“He (Mr. Home) knelt down before the hearth, and deliberately breaking up a glowing piece of coal in the fireplace, took up a largish lump of incandescent coal, and placing the same in his left hand, proceeded to explain that the caloric had been abstracted by a process known to them (the spirits), and that the heat could in part be returned. This he proved by alternately cooling and heating the coal; and, to convince us of the fact, allowed us to handle the coal, which had become cool, then suddenly resumed its heat sufficient to burn one, as I again touched it. I examined Mr. Home's hand, and quite satisfied myself that no artificial means had been employed to protect the skin, which did not even retain the smell of smoke.”†

* “Human Nature,” Feb. 1868, p. 29.

† “Human Nature,” 1868.

These wonderful Manifestations have been constantly occurring in the presence of Dr. Ashburner, Dr. Gully, Wm. Howitt, S. C. Hall, Gerald Massey, Wm. M. Wilkinson, and many of the leading literary and scientific men of the day, many of whom have given in their opinion, that it was impossible to account for them by any known law. But a higher phase of Manifestations is seen in the trance-speaking and writing. The mediums in this case are made totally unconscious, and while in that state eloquent addresses are often delivered, and tests given; very often the addresses and the language are far beyond even the comprehension of the medium, the sentiments all tending one way, to lead the spirit to God, to shun the evil way and walk in the path of light, of reason,—all urging us to work for that day

“When man shall live by reason,
And not alone for gold.”

William Howitt, in a letter written in 1861, to the Rev. G. H. Forbes, author of “No Antecedent Impossibility in Miracles,” says,—

“More than six years ago I began to examine the phenomena of Spiritualism. I did not go to paid, or even to public mediums. I sat down at my own table, with members of my own family, or with friends,—persons of high character, and serious as myself in the inquiry. I saw tables moved, rocked to and fro, and raised repeatedly in the air. I saw a small round table, whenever touched by a medium, lay itself down, and crawl, as self-moved, all round the room; and this was continued daily for a fortnight, the table refusing to perform any other motion. The absurd spirit which was supposed to be moving it, was then solemnly exorcised in the name of God, and the table was immediately all right. A most sensible and obedient odyle, you must think. I heard the raps; sometimes a hundred at once, in every imaginable part of the table, in all keys, and in various degrees of loudness. I examined the phenomena thoroughly, though I knew every person present treated the inquiry, not only with a serious, but sacred feeling. Silly, but playful spirits, came frequently,

and drew the most laughable life-scenes on paper, and told the most rhodomontading stories. I heard accordions play wonderful music as they were held in one hand, often by a person who could not play at all. I heard and saw hand-bells carried about the room in the air; put first into one person's hand, and then into another's; taken away again by a strong pull, though you could not see the hand touching them. I saw dining and drawing-room tables of great weight, not only raised into the air, but when placed in a particular direction, perseveringly remove themselves, and place themselves quite differently. I saw other tables answer questions, as they stood in the air, by moving up and down with a marvellous softness. I heard sometimes blows, apparently enough to split the table, when no one could have struck them without observation; and breathed perfumes the most delicate. I saw light stream from the fingers of persons on the table, or while mesmerizing some one. As for communications professedly from spirits, they were of daily occurrence, and often wonderful."

But the most general kind of Manifestation in England is that of mechanical writing. The hand and arm of the medium is moved quite mechanically. Often in total darkness, original pieces of poetry, and touching, loving messages have been written out; the medium not knowing and being unable even to guess so much as the subject of the writing. Many very conclusive tests are often given; let me mention one. I went into a room, where some six persons were sitting at the table, I being a perfect stranger to most present. Presently the arm of a young lady was influenced, and I was given to understand that the spirit of my dear mother wished to speak with me. To satisfy myself of the entire genuineness of the communication, I asked various test questions, such as date of death, name, residence, &c., all of which were answered satisfactorily. To my great surprise, another, and still better test was to be given me,—part of a *death-bed conversation* I had with my mother, was written on the slate, —a conversation which had been told to no human being;

all proving to me beyond a doubt that it was indeed my beloved mother, who had entered the summer-land six years before, that was then conversing with me.

Another remarkable kind of mediumship is that of "seeing" the spiritual beings who communicate. Let me quote an instance related by an earnest Christian minister. He says,—

"In my own house I have, for weeks, tested the reality of this in every possible way. The 'medium' in this case being, not a professional person, not some abnormal, unhealthy, nervous, sensitive, but a bright, cheerful, good girl, who only knows that she plainly sees what she describes. This spirit-seeing, as a rule, is in total darkness; and I have, more than once, taken perfect strangers into the room, without any warning, who, within ten minutes, have had described to them, with curious minuteness, spirit-friends who were then with them; their own characters being at the same time described with singular correctness. Once, on the coming in of a gentleman, while the medium was in a state of trance, the room being perfectly dark, she suddenly took paper and pencil, wrote a message, signed it with initials, and pushed it across the table to him, past eight or ten persons. It proved to be a most appropriate message, and the initials were those of his daughter. Immediately after this the medium described her, gave an account of her lingering illness, and minutely depicted a little scene which took place between this father and his child a few days before she died."*

But now, having looked hastily at the various phenomena, we ask ourselves the question, "How are they produced?" The opinions of investigators may be classed under four heads:—

1. That they are the result of trick.
2. That they are the work of his Satanic majesty.
3. That they are produced by mesmerism, clairvoyance, od force, involuntary muscular action, &c.

* "Six Months' Experience at Home of Spirit Communion," by a Truth Seeker.

4. That these phenomena are produced by disembodied human beings, both good and bad.

The first, or old idea, making the 30,000 mediums into "Wizards of the North," is not worthy of our serious consideration. Sufficient answer for this is, that millions of intelligent persons are sitting every week, in a prayerful spirit, investigating, in their own home circles, this wonderful subject, and receiving, as the result, the most satisfactory Manifestations and tests, and under such conditions as preclude the possibility of trick or collusion.

No. 2 is a little more serious; but this is also an answer that must vanish before the light of reason. Let us judge by the messages, and we find that we are constantly told to have more trust in God, to live purer lives, and to shun all wickedness. Surely if the demons are turned into "preachers of salvation," hell's kingdom must be doomed, for a "kingdom divided against itself cannot stand." Dr. Cumming even, quite abandons the idea that these phenomena are the work of the devils.

The third, and scientific explanation, is a much more satisfactory one, and one that may explain away many of the phenomena. Professor Faraday propounded the doctrine that the movements of the table were produced by "*involuntary muscular action*." This might account for *some* of the table moving, but will it account for the intelligence that answers correctly by means of the table? And it will not touch any of the other phases of mediumship. Dr. Cumming says,—

"After what he had witnessed he was quite satisfied, with all deference, that Dr. Faraday's theory did not explain the phenomenon. It was a fact, that the fingers, laid lightly on a heavy table, made it spin round and round, and throw itself into most extraordinary convulsions. He had, moreover, himself, in connection with his own son, made a chair spin round the room, and perform the most Bacchanalian gymnastics."

I do not think one single instance can be found where any person could produce raps, table-tilting, &c., without the aid of some kind of mechanism. Neither do I believe

that any one will come forward and declare that these "Physical Manifestations" are produced by any power of mesmerism or clairvoyance; and although, perhaps, some cases of trance speaking and writing may be accounted for on the principles taught by Mesmer, yet no one will say that tables, and other ponderable bodies, can be moved by the power of the will.

Baron Reichenbach propounds the theory that all these phenomena are produced by the *od force*. And no doubt the invisibles do make use of this peculiar emanation to manifest themselves to us; but will any one imagine that this fluid alone, however powerful, possesses an intelligence which shall answer correctly questions which no one round the table could answer?

The fourth theory is the one on which I take my stand, viz., "That the phenomena are produced by disembodied human beings, both good and bad." Taking for granted that no known law, that no mesmeric influence, thought, reading, prevision, or somnambulism can account for the Manifestations, the most reasonable theory is that they are produced by disembodied human beings. That really by this means we can converse with the "dead." And however much this theory may be opposed, it is not so new or strange as it may appear at first sight. In every age of the world there has been intercourse with angels and demons. Every religion is based on Spiritualism, no matter whether the supreme Being be named Jehovah, Brahma, or Vishnu. If we were to deny the possibility of disembodied spirits or angels visiting this earth, we should have to give up some of the dearest hopes and consolations of the Christian religion. The Bible itself is based on Spirit Revelation, and gives a good history of Spirit Visitation in the early historic period. Let Bible students read the accounts of angels visiting and conversing with men, showing themselves in a "glorified body," as on the transfiguration day,—opening the doors of the prison, and letting the Apostles go free,—rolling away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, &c., &c., as contained in Genesis xviii. 16, Judges vi. and xii., Daniel viii. and

ix., Luke i., &c. All these prove the possibility of Spirit Communion, and also that to well developed mediums the spirits can make themselves recognisable to our ordinary sense.

The whole range of Heathen Mythology is based upon this intercourse with the unseen world. Mystics have lived in every age, who often consulted the spirits on important subjects. Our great religious and social reformers, Wesley, Doddridge, Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Swedenborg (the great Swedish seer), and many others, all contend in favour of Apparitions and Spiritual Ministrations. Our poets have sung of the "ministering spirits," and in beautiful poetry told of their visitations to the sons of men. Milton says,—

"Millions of spiritual beings walk the earth,
Both when we sleep and when we wake."

Longfellow sings, in one of his poetic inspirations,—

"Then the forms of the departed
Enter at the open door,
The beloved, the true-hearted,
Come to visit me once more."

Our own talented poet-laureate, Alfred Tennyson, whatever may be his views of Modern Spiritualism, writes,—

"Dare I say
No spirit ever brake the band
That stays him from his native land,
Where first he walked when clasped in clay."

Many well authenticated cases of Apparitions are constantly appearing, but our materialistic tendencies will not let us credit them, and we put them down to optical illusions, &c. And how often do we prevent the "communion of saints" by our improper living, and material scepticism? The sainted mother of John Wesley once said,—"*I am inclined to think there would be frequent intercourse between good spirits and us, did not our deep lapse into sensuality prevent it.*" Dr. Cumming says,—

"Connected with the intercourse between the higher and the lower world, there is a most interesting question,

beset with extreme difficulties. Do our near and dear ones, who have preceded us to glory, in any shape or in any way know us, love us, or hold communion or intercourse with us? That angels do so, is an unquestionable fact; whether those who have preceded us to the better land do so is a very different question. All the Scripture says on the subject I have gathered. Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, says, 'In heaven a vast multitude of them that are dear to us await our arrival; a multitude of parents, brethren, and children, who are now secure of their own salvation, and are only anxious about ours.' Those who are gone before us recollect this world, and those they have left behind them. It seems to me an irrefragable conclusion that those who have gone before us must recollect them they have left behind. The life that now is shapes the life that is to be."*

But now you will ask me, "Supposing all this be true, —admitting that the phenomena are produced by spirits, —what good is effected by it?"

Very proper question, for nothing is permitted by the all-wise Father, except for some good. Spiritualism has been the means of convincing many of the reality of an immortality. Numbers who were once materialists, believing that there was no hereafter, now are rejoicing in the glorious hope that has made them free. Spiritualism will give a positive knowledge of the Spirit's home. The Bible only gives a negative side,—“No night,” “No pain,” &c., —but Spiritualism sheds a ray of light over that beautiful summer-land, and enables us to see its glories, its work, its happiness.

Spiritualism has come to the true Christian, and strengthened him in his faith, stimulated him to work harder for truth. It has given confirmation to the great precepts taught by the “Son of God.” Robert Chambers, speaking of Spiritualism in America, says, “I have studied the question of Spiritualism wherever I have gone, and the result is most satisfactory. Here the fight is over, and you hear

* “Millennial Rest,” by Dr. Cumming.

little comparatively said of it, *but you find it in all the churches.* It has given *new evidence, new life, and a new heaven to Christianity here.*"

What good is Spiritualism? Oh, have you ever stood by the death-bed of a loved one?—have you ever felt the pulse gradually cease, and the heart-throbs decrease, and not felt that you would like to believe in this truth? Mourner, cast aside thy garb of sorrow, for the dear ones are not dead, but still living, and waiting to converse with you. Widow, that husband who was thy protector on earth, has not left you, he is still watching over you. Child, that mother, whose body you have laid in the cold earth, is still the same kind, loving one, and forms one of that band of "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation."

The loved ones, whose presence we have so much missed on earth, are surrounding us as "a cloud of witnesses." What good is it? Oh, is it not good and useful to know that the dear ones are still with us, leading our wandering steps nearer to our God; helping us to fight the battle of life, and even feeling a sympathy, but not a painful one, in our every-day life. Anything that will lead us to a "closer walk with God," must be good. Spiritualism has brought consolation to the mourner, joy to the sorrowful, and comfort to the oppressed one. Oh, that the time may soon come when all shall know of the great and beautiful truths of Spirit intercourse.

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