

8465 30

DUP 26

# SPIRITUALISM;

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE



ECLECTIC ASSOCIATION OF MELBOURNE,

ON SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1869.

BY

HENRY G. TURNER,

PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

MELBOURNE:

GEORGE ROBERTSON, 69 ELIZABETH STREET.

MDCCCLXIX.

## SPIRITUALISM.

---

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,

When I undertook to open this evening's debate with an essay on what is vaguely called "Spiritualism," I was hardly aware of the extreme comprehensiveness of the theme, and the difficulty which I should experience, in reducing my views into a statement sufficiently concise, to admit of their examination and possible refutation in the course of one evening's discussion.

To do so, I think it would be as well at the outset, to define what I mean by the word Spiritualism:—the sense in which I shall use it—and the conclusions to which I have come regarding it. This will enable the succeeding speakers to concentrate their observations on what is absolutely affirmed, and save us from wandering into debate on the reality or otherwise of some of its lower and more common manifestations.

The meaning, therefore, which I propose to attach to Spiritualism is the power of living human beings to hold direct communion with, and to receive direct revelation from incorporeal, spiritual or supernatural intelligences:—and the position which I hope to maintain is—

1st. That the belief in such a power is not warranted by the results, even accepting them as literally true.

2nd. That the nature of the testimony on which it relies for support is eminently unsatisfactory.

3rd. That its teachings are vague, contradictory, often mercenary, and inextricably confounded with fraud and chicanery.

4th. That its acceptance as an article of belief can only be accomplished by an entire surrender of our reasoning and enquiring faculties, and a practical denial of those fundamental Cosmic laws on which alone true science can rest.

Let me then, first briefly glance at the commonest manifestations of the phenomena, known as spirit rappings, in which I would embrace all unexplained movements of ponderable bodies, and at once admit their existence, as demonstrable to anyone possessing the requisite interest and patience. That is to say, I will grant that under given conditions, a table will rotate, or even move across a room, will tilt and knock with its legs upon the floor, under the hands of persons who are looking for such movements; and I do not think it worth while to pause here to enquire whether Faraday's theory of involuntary muscular action, the operation of expectant attention, or the less understood powers of animal magnetism and electricity, be the immediate cause of such manifestation—though the result of my own investigations confirms me in the belief that the two former are responsible, at least, for the so-called responses to questions asked by this process.

But many of the spiritualist writers go beyond this simple movement, and recount instances of tables moving rapidly about rooms by themselves—standing on one leg without displacing lamps and flower vases resting upon them, and even climbing to the top of other pieces of furniture, and generally outraging the laws of gravity without any apparent purpose, unless it be love of eccentricity. All accounts of such phenomena must be received with great caution, and we may entirely disbelieve the narration, without accusing the narrator of bad faith. They are not manifested to the sceptic, and the devout believer who has sat for a length of time, with his attention concentrated upon the object of his wonder, is in the same state of mind, or rather want of mind, as the subject through whom the marvels of “electro-biology,” so called, are exhibited on the public platform, and who unhesitatingly believes that a stick on the floor, is a river he cannot cross; or the chair on which he sits, the car of a balloon. In addition to this semi-stupefaction, produced by a phase of hypnotism, it has been justly said, that the very disposition to look for something out of the ordinary course of nature, makes one incapable, for the time, of distinguishing what actually happens from what is expected to happen.

Upon this hypothesis only, can we explain the statements of Mr. Robert Bell, in his paper in the *Cornhill Magazine*, entitled “Stranger than Fiction,”—wherein he recounts a series of marvels remarkably similar in their general character, to those exhibited by the Davenport Brothers, whose clever jugglery has been long since exposed;—and, when we consider the discreditable denouement of Mr. Home’s career in England, we are fully justified in charging him too with fraudulent deception, to which the darkened room and prostrated mental condition of his audience alike invited.

That otherwise intelligent people should be prepared to stake their veracity on the fact that Mr. Home floated about in the air of the dark room, and that they not only heard his voice near the ceiling, but even saw something like his figure passing across a window dimly illuminated by a distant street lamp, is, after all nothing so very extraordinary, though the *modus operandi* would be likely to excite the suspicion of the sceptic.

Anyone who consults *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, will find that St. Theresa, St. Catherine, St. Philip Neri, and many others, frequently took these involuntary flights, not in dark rooms, but in broad daylight, in the open air, or in the “dim religious light” of some cloistered cathedral, as has been attested by many learned theologians, without however carrying conviction to the mind of heretical Protestantism.

Now upon the minor matters of manifestations I wish here to be very brief, desiring to treat the question upon the broadest grounds. Without, however, intending to divert the discussion into details, I think it desirable to repeat, that while I believe that the conditions under which ponderable and inanimate bodies are moved may be referred to natural laws, I hold, with Dr. Carpenter,

that the supposed communications made by spirits through their agency, are due, like the actions of biologised subjects, to the mental state of the performers themselves; and that these and many similar wonders are to be ranged under the same category, namely, the possession of the mind by a dominant idea, from which it makes no sufficient effort to free itself.

As a proof of the influence of the performer's own views upon the supposed communications, we have only to notice that the spirits who revealed the future state to Owen described a heaven organised on his own social theory. The Rev. A. S. Godfrey, who published a volume entitled "Table-turning examined and proved to be the result of Satanic agency," had the frankest admission from the evil spirits of the truth of his theory; and cites his wife and curate to bear witness to the fact that in its maddest career, his table was instantly brought into repose by placing the Bible on it, though other books were wildly thrown off. The Rev. E. Gillson, who wrote to a similar purpose, found that his own peculiarly strong Anti-papal views were quite a moving power in the spirit-world—and this list might be extended indefinitely.

The next and higher phase of manifestation is that called spirit writing, performed by the medium involuntarily, either in the form of replies to verbal or mental questions, or in the shape of a special revelation; and this I think may readily be explained upon the grounds just stated. Cases are cited in which direct spirit writing is said to have been obtained on paper, without any human agency; but these are admitted, even by spiritualists, to be extremely rare, and I think we may be justified in concluding to disbelieve in their existence.

Trance-speaking and clairvoyance, spirit influx, and involuntary utterances, may be classed together as the highest manifestations of Spiritualism, and without adducing instances, or entering into details, I may safely say that in the numerous books I have consulted on the subject I have not found anything that needed the intervention of supernatural power to explain it, or that was not referable to the action upon the mind and body of the subject, of Animal Magnetism, Mesmerism, Hypnotism, Odylism, or whatever we call those mysterious phenomena, which have been reduced almost to a science by the researches of Reichenbach, Dr. Gregory, and others; and which, though as old as creation, are now claimed as the miraculous witnesses to the truth of modern Spiritualism.

Before proceeding to adduce general arguments in support of my objections, I think it worth while to call your attention to the wide diversity of opinion which exists among spiritualists, as to the antiquity or otherwise of its origin; and to notice the fact that each side has its special supernatural confirmation of the views advanced by it. A considerable minority of their writers maintain that the present movement is but an active development of a condition that permeates the Biblical narratives, the ancient Hindoo sacred writings, and is found vaguely hinted at by the Greek and

Roman philosophers ; while, on the other hand, the majority claim it as a new and unworn revelation, an exclusive property of the American intellect, and decline to carry back the movement to an earlier date than the visions of Andrew Jackson Davis, the Poughkeepsie seer, and what Hepworth Dixon calls the "happy audacities" of Kate and Caroline Fox.

At the first glance it does appear very strange that a movement like this, so undoubtedly based on superstition, should have arisen in such a country as New England, amidst a people who stand very high in the matter of popular education—who are alike practical, and eminently intelligent, and undoubtedly addicted to taking no new theological, social, or political canon on trust. Yet possibly, the fact of the well-known pride they take in the free exercise of their own judgment, the possession of unbounded liberty of conscience, and the suppression of all ecclesiastical organization, has led them into singular caprices of popular imagination, and betrayed them into many aberrations of mystic fancy, and *quasi* religious excitement.

In no country in the world do we find the counterpart of the wild frenzies that accompany the Methodist camp meetings of the central and western States : no other civilised people can show us a prosperous community based upon the principles of the Shakers of Mount Lebanon, or the Perfectionists of Oneida creek ; and surely the gigantic imposture of Joe Smith could never have developed into a mighty political and social power, in any other country with which we are acquainted. Swedenborgianism transplanted to that appropriate soil has grown as rapidly as it has declined in England ; and the eager acceptance of the tenets of our own half-crazed Edward Irving, in the States, is but another proof of the avidity with which anything professing a supernatural origin is received by that enquiring race. For observe, that all these phases of religious belief profess to be based on special divine or spiritual revelations—their founders have all received visions and direct supra-mundane communications. Most have been intromitted to the spirit world, and held converse with its inhabitants ; and as a rule they claim to have the gift of tongues and prophesying, of healing and exorcism.

When Mr. Andrew Jackson Davis came forward among such a people, and announced his revelations as those of a spirit, freed by a certain physical process from the obstructing influence of the material organisation, and exalted to a position which gave him free access to a knowledge of the structure and laws of the whole material and spiritual universe, his pretensions were not sufficiently novel to startle his countrymen from their propriety, and he revealed away for a few years without evoking any enthusiasm, until the celebrated "Rochester knockings" succeeded in arresting the popular attention, and turned it into so profitable a channel, that now, twenty years after, there are said to be 3,000,000 professed believers in Spiritualism in the United States, and upwards

of 5,000 public advocates of it, as lecturers, prophets, mediums and clairvoyants, earning their daily bread by its practice, and open to be consulted for a fee, upon any of its profoundest mysteries.

It was a tedious business at first, to be sure, and it must have been more than wearisome to spell out the intolerable platitudes of the ghostly communicants by a series of raps on the wall, or the equally absurd kicks of a table; while the strong temptation to imposture, which the very facility for it offered, and the innumerable detections of fraud, came near shipwrecking the cause, but for the timely discovery of simpler modes of communication, such as have now almost superseded the original cumbrous, not to say ridiculous, table turning.

Still it would be interesting to ascertain exactly how that same "table turning" began. For when we come to look closely into the matter, we find that this is the only shred of originality that belongs to the modern manifestations of Spiritualism. Knockings we have had in our own Cock Lane Ghost, and elsewhere:—spirit-writings, trance-speakings, spiritual impersonation and intercourse we have, the common property of the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Swedenborgians; clairvoyance and luminous phenomena have been matters of public exhibition alike by the followers of Mesmer, the professors of animal magnetism, and the strolling conjuror;—spirit influx, gifts of tongues, and involuntary utterances, have formed a characteristic of the Quakers and the Irvingites from their beginning; while apparitions and visionary dreams are confined to no race or country.

Unfortunately in dealing with the professed spiritualist, the unbeliever is placed at a great disadvantage, inasmuch as the former will take up the position that he is dealing with a matter of fact which must be decided upon the balance of evidence, and that the test of recognised laws which the latter may seek to apply to the demolition of his deductions, has no weight with him if opposed to the evidence of his senses. It therefore falls to the sceptic to analyse minutely the strength of his opponents' powers of discrimination; to eliminate from his so-called facts, the weight of inferences by which they are overborne, and then to find that the logical deductions of arguments based on soundly established data, are held to be mere fallible human deductions, which can have no weight against the visible manifestations of a power superior alike to conventional notions of science, philosophy, syntax, orthography, and common sense.

Such a position is undoubtedly a difficult and delicate one. No man likes to fight with shadows, nor to argue with an opponent, who, declining to meet him on the known grounds of controversy, calls to his aid a cloud of shadowy intelligences, the knowledge of whose very existence is denied to the sceptic as a consequence of his unbelief.

The great difficulty in thus securing a common platform has undoubtedly been the cause of so little having been written in oppo-

sition to the growth of this popular delusion. At the time of its inception a few scientific men denounced its pretensions, and destroyed its supernatural by demonstrating its physical basis, leaving it as they assumed to die out after its proverbial nine days notoriety. As it grew in magnitude occasional writers attacked it with trenchant satire, or dismissed it with withering scorn, but these were only in ephemeral magazine or newspaper articles, and generally followed upon the exposure of some outrageous imposture. The great bulk of the men who were capable of expressing an opinion on the subject held aloof from it, however, as unworthy of serious controversy; the more especially as they could not fail to see from the character of its assumptions, it was not amenable and did not profess to be amenable, to human reason.

On the other hand, I find that in the present year of grace Spiritualism counts some 80 magazines and serials devoted to the dissemination of its theories, and has a literature of its own, numbering several hundreds of bulky volumes, and thousands of pamphlets and tracts.

Having said thus much to place the matter fairly before you, I now proceed to take up the position indicated at the outset, and express my conviction—

1st. That a belief in Spiritualism is not warranted by the results adduced, even accepting them as literally true.

In connection with this I will quote the motto adopted by the editor of the *Spiritual Magazine*, an accepted organ of the body, and which may therefore be taken as an epitomised exposition of their views.

“Spiritualism is based on the cardinal fact of spirit communion and influx: it is the effort to discover all truth relating to man’s spiritual nature, capacities, relations, duties, welfare, and destiny, and its application to a regenerate life. It recognises a continuous divine inspiration in man; it aims, through a careful, reverent study of facts, at a knowledge of the laws which govern the occult forces of the universe; of the relation of spirit to matter, and of man to God and the spiritual world.”

Now, in what sense have these aspirations been satisfied? Where are the results of this *careful, reverent study of facts*?—a form of expression, by the way, widely at variance with the pretensions made by many of its professors, who with their ability to draw knowledge from the sublimed intellects of a higher order of being surely need no such study.

Have spiritual revelations added one iota of knowledge to our common stock? Does science, does art, owe them anything? No—unhesitatingly no! And yet I am confronted with Andrew Jackson Davis’s *Nature and her Divine Revelations*, and am bidden to look on a volume written, under spiritual inspiration, by an illiterate youth of two or three and twenty; which contains within its covers an epitome of the knowledge of all times, past, present and future, and has been called by some enthusiasts the Bible of

Spiritualism ! I look ; and what do I see ? A ponderous volume of over 800 large 8vo. pages "full of sound and fury signifying nothing."

Everything is touched off with the master hand of a writer conscious of the superiority of his asserted claims to attention.

Astronomy is followed into the minutest details of the manners and customs of the denizens of the other planets, and we learn with becoming reverence the important fact that an innate sense of modesty compels the inhabitants of Jupiter to go on all-fours !

Geology is made interesting by the most fantastical accounts of animal and vegetable life in the pre-historic era.

The development theory is propounded and explained with an elaboration that must make Darwin think very poorly of the result of his forty years labor in that direction ; while Huxley may take comfort in learning that we came originally from something much more repulsively ugly than the Gorilla, and were thousands of years working our way up from the lowest Quadrumana to the perfect Troglodyte !

Human physiology is discoursed upon in a manner that would make our greatest anatomists stand abashed, until they remember that the seer of the book annihilates all medical and surgical formulæ, and cures all diseases by imposition of hands.

Dr. Latham and Humboldt are confounded and put to shame by the deliverances on the origin of language and the Cosmic theories.

Biblical criticism is illustrated by some of the most astounding statements ever encountered by student, while the knotty question of free-will or necessity is settled for ever by a distinct denial of the possibility of the former condition.

I take this book as a type, because I find that the circumstances under which it is said to have been produced, are cited as sufficient grounds for its unquestioned reception, and its general laudation would imply that it is regarded as a masterpiece. For myself I do not hesitate to pronounce it a farrago of pretentious humbug. With an affectation of scientific nomenclature, and a pretence of metaphysical precision, it contains glaring errors in physical science, abounds in illogical deductions, in wild and baseless assertions, and in hypotheses that are quite beyond the sphere of reason. And this is the great work of that system which has for one of its fundamental principles the acquisition of a knowledge of the laws which govern the occult forces of the universe, &c.

The result is unsatisfactory ; I ask for others. Spiritualism I am told has saved thousands from infidelity and atheism, by convincing them of the truth of the Biblical miracles, and assuring them of a future life.

I do not believe it : for I maintain that the very persons who would reject the miracles of the New Testament, after candid inquiry, would certainly decline to accept those of modern Spiritualism.



The honest objector to the Biblical miracles finds his dissent solely upon the ground of their incompatibility with the known and accepted order of nature; not upon any supposition of their having been disproved, or being immoral in their tendency, or emanations of jugglery and fraud: he simply discredits the narrator. Is it not then monstrous to suppose that such a man could be turned from his unbelief by a series of thaumaturgic wonders, whose very existence is based upon a postulate which he denies? which have not even the object for their performance commonly ascribed to the older ones, and of which probably nine tenths have been exposed as fraudulent and unreliable. While, as to the triumphant claim made for the manifestations as the sure and certain revelations of a future life, I confess to a sense of chill dismay at the bare idea of resting my hopes of a progressive hereafter upon such testimony.

Such a hope is co-existent with mankind; it animates hundreds of millions, who can give no reason for the faith that is in them. I never feel a doubt or hesitancy about it myself until, as Rathbone Greg says, I hear others attempting to assign ostensible and logical reasons for it, or to prove it by arguments which could satisfy no one by whom arguments were needed.

But of all attempted proofs, this modern theory of Spiritualism is the saddest and cruellest. That the wise and good of past ages, from Moses and Jesus Christ, to the philosophers of the last century, should be at the beck and call of every advertising medium whom the love of gain has called into existence, and be prepared with suitable advice and admonition for any and every occasion, in exchange for dollars duly paid, is too painful to contemplate.

That the gigantic intellect of a Bacon should be dwarfed by his spiritual existence to the smug platitudes and copy-book-slip morality of his utterances to Judge Edmonds; and that Swedenborg should himself vouch for the fact that he spent the first sixty or eighty years of his spirit life in untiring and strenuous efforts to bring about a means of communication with mortals, and only hit upon the expedient of the raps through the practical philosophy of the shade of Benjamin Franklin, is melancholy indeed. But that our chief hope of immortality should rest on such assertions as that of the spirit of the Rev. John Pierpoint, who passing into the body of Mrs. Conant, the Boston medium, ten days after his death, proclaimed in a loud voice and before accredited witnesses, "Brothers and sisters, the problem now is solved with me, and because I live you shall live also," is not encouraging outside the members of that gentleman's congregation.

How does this kind of revelation comfort the dying? Better, far better, annihilation in the grave, than that I, if as a sentient spirit I retain a shred of the self-respect that pertains to my human nature, should be liable to be summoned back to earth, to play fantastic tricks with chairs and tables, to float fat mediums in mid air, to play accordions and banjos, and ring mysterious

bells, and generally to conduct myself like a clown in the pantomime, at a time when I hoped to be progressing towards a moral and intellectual perfection.

No! if the power of communication existed at all between the earthly wayfarer and those who have gone before, it would permeate the tenderest and holiest relations of life. How many thousands of human beings since the world began—husbands and wives—dear friends—loving youths and maidens—have thought and talked over their hope of a home beyond the skies, and covenanted with one another that the first to depart should surely, if permitted, “revisit the glimpses of the moon,” and tell the fearful mystery to the survivor! Was it ever done? Alas, no! the world has no record of it. But that which was whilome impossible to love in its highest and purest form is now a daily matter of business, and a thousand mediums stand ready at your word, with rival tariffs, to call before you those whose affections were powerless to seek you out alone.

I pass on to my second position.

That the nature of the testimony on which it relies for support is eminently unsatisfactory.

That this is so is more the fault of the spiritualists themselves than any one else, for when the determined investigator comes amongst them, there is such a fluttering of objections, such a shy reticence of the spirits, and such a demur to any of the conditions essential to a thorough examination of the subject, that science comes not unnaturally to the conclusion, that imposture must be lurking about. Professor Faraday has shown us that many of the lower manifestations are the results of natural causes, and Professor Tyndall, in a most interesting account of a *séance* that he attended, has exposed the utter fallacy of the pretensions of a medium extensively believed in in private circles of repute in London.

Speaking for myself, I may here say that I have sat at tables which obstinately refused to respond to any amount of patience, but which appeared lively enough on my retiring, and have even gone so far as to rap out an intimation that no further revelations would be vouchsafed until I left the room. Now, upon what principle are these convincing manifestations denied to me that they may be made patent to those who believed before they saw?

A writer in the *Cornhill Magazine* on a cognate subject, some years ago, says:—

“In the case of mere marvels reported on good authority, the presumption is always in favor of not believing. It would be a real calamity to believe that a chair walked and talked unless it really did, and it could do but little harm not to believe it if it did, for it is impossible to say what such an occurrence would prove supposing it to be true.”

Since, therefore, we can evidently prove nothing by demonstrating the purposeless aberrations of tables and chairs, let us look at the testimony which is supposed to be borne by the revelation as translated by accredited spirit interpreters.

Of these probably the one most relied on is the deliverance, by writing or speech, of matter far beyond the knowledge of the medium in his normal state, and this frequently takes the form of prophesying, or describing supernatural localities, such as cannot be readily verified.

Another form is the supposed possession of the medium by the spirit of some deceased celebrity, in which condition the peculiar characteristics of the individual represented are developed. Literary men, and especially poets, are the favorites in this form of manifestation, Edgar Allen Poe being always ready to declare himself through any imaginative female medium; while the enormous quantity of spirit poetry which he perpetrates in weak imitation of his earthly excellences in that line, show that *his* fate at least is deterioration in place of progress!

A volume recently lent to me called "Poems of the Inner Life," contains a collection of verses delivered by a celebrated lady-medium in the trance state, as we learn from the business-like attestations of witnesses.

But what do these certificates amount to? Simply that a young lady with her eyes closed, and the appearance of unconsciousness, delivered certain poetical effusions, after announcing the name of the spirit that possessed her.

As imitations they are inferior to the "Rejected Addresses" of the brothers Smith, while their publication in this form is an insult to the memory of the authors named, because it presupposes in them a poverty of language and ideas that necessitates their falling back upon the very phrases and sentiments of their mundane work. This is carried to a ridiculous length in the Shakesperian utterances, which are garnished throughout with whole lines taken at random from his various plays, not always in harmony with the context; while the general versification of the book is such as might be squeezed out of anyone, who, fairly read in poetry, had a musical ear and moderately retentive memory.

Now I cannot admit that these deliverances help the matter to any satisfactory testimony.

Some of the writing under influence appears to present occasional difficulties of explanation, as to how the penman acquired his information, but nine-tenths of all these communications are of such vague general import, that they may be read in any sense, and most of the remainder is made up of statements which it would be as impossible to disprove as to prove.

The power of mediums to hold conversations and make written communications in foreign languages of which they are ignorant, is confidently advanced as convincing testimony. But unfortunately this is a class of evidence that requires to be testified to itself; and that, too, by the very class of men who are denounced as unreasonable sceptics, and refused admission to the sanctuary. Judge Edmonds says his daughter has spoken, and been understood by the persons addressed, in Greek, Latin, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Hungarian, and several dialects of the abo-

riginal Indian; but then the Judge does not pretend to say that he understands the languages himself, so we may easily estimate the value of his testimony. We cannot forget that some hundreds of thousands of people believe to this day in the reality of the golden plates and the Egyptian characters, in which the Book of Mormon was revealed to Joe Smith; and it is well known that Professor Anthon, the celebrated Orientalist, was quoted for years as an authority for the philological genuineness of the characters of the record, though entirely without his knowledge, and in opposition to his views, so difficult is it to overtake error if it get but a good start. It is recorded by Judge Edmonds and Dr. Dexter that communications have been written by mediums in Hebrew and Arabic, without their own comprehension; and that upon submission to competent scholars, the writing has been found wonderfully correct. Now, considering that Confucius and the Apostle Paul have both delivered their sentiments in excellent English, it seems a little like straining after effect, for these lesser lights to require such deference to their philological peculiarities.

In any case where the evidence fails to satisfy the enquirer, the spiritualist has a safe ground to fall back upon in denouncing the motive of the enquiry as unbecoming, too worldly, or irreverent; or if not amenable to that impeachment, the blame may be thrown upon the spirits as undeveloped, false or mischievous, and refusing to yield place to better ones.

Great stress is laid upon the statement of Judge Edmonds, whose adhesion to the movement undoubtedly gave it great impulse in America, that he was a determined sceptic during four months of preliminary investigation, and tried the patience of believers sorely by his obduracy. But though he says so in his "Appeal to the Public," he certainly contradicts himself in the introduction of his great book, and shows plainly that he was a ready-made believer from the beginning.

"My first interview," he says, "was with the rappings, and three things struck me as remarkable. One was that, under the circumstances it was *beyond all cavil* that the sounds were not produced by any person present. Another was, that my mental questions were answered, when I *knew* that no person present *could* know what they were; and a third was, that I was directed to correct a mistake I had made in my memorandum, when I *knew* that no one present was aware that I had made a mistake, or what it was."

Add to this his own statement that at the time of commencing these inquiries, he, a man of delicate organisation and singularly nervous temperament, was withdrawn altogether from society in a condition of hypochondriacal monomania. "I was labouring," he says, "under great depression of spirits; I was occupying all my leisure in reading on the subject of death, and man's existence afterwards. I had in the course of my life read, and

"heard from the pulpit, so many contradictory and conflicting views of the subject that I hardly knew what to believe," &c. (Introd. p. 71.)

Let me ask any candid person if this was the man to investigate calmly a movement in which psychological as well as physiological phenomena were undoubtedly manifested: an investigation requiring a clear cool head,—an unimpressible imagination, considerable scientific knowledge and some logical acumen. Surely, after writing as Judge Edmonds has done in the enthusiastic support of spiritualistic views, his followers must feel a chill at the glimpse they get of the legal mind, which provides a loophole of escape by saying (Introd. p. 72), "If I have been deluded and have not seen and heard what I think I have, my delusion has been shared by many as shrewd, as intelligent, as honest, and as enlightened people as are to be found anywhere among us."

And if the testimony of this champion fails. I can produce no other like him in Spiritualistic literature.

3rd. That its teachings are vague, contradictory, often mercenary, and inextricably confounded with fraud and chicanery.

Thomas Brevior, the author of a book entitled, "The Two Worlds, Natural and Spiritual, their intimate connection and relation illustrated," says, "We must be careful to distinguish between the teachings of Spiritualism and the teachings of Spiritualists—the latter is only another name for a creed. Beyond the common acknowledgement that spirits have always held, and do still hold intercourse with mankind, there is but little necessary agreement; for concerning other important truths, as all have not before them the same range and variety of facts, as they differ in their powers of comparison and reasoning, their education, religion, philosophy, and modes of thought; there will be corresponding divergences in their conclusions even from the same facts; and with the conviction of Spiritualism, there may, in some minds, co-exist notions inconsistent and even logically incompatible with it!"

Now, here we have the most modern revelation, with all the experience of past failures to guide it, giving forth its utterances in such uncertain tones, paltering with us in a double sense, that even its eager disciples come to diametrically opposite conclusions on many points of moment, and may even hold opinions logically inconsistent with their belief in its existence. This certainly does not seem to point to any great improvement upon those sectarian differences which many hold that the new Revelation comes to supersede and abolish; but worse yet remains behind. The same writer also cautions us that we must not confound the teachings of the spirits with the teachings of Spiritualism. The spirits, he tells us, are not a kind of minor gods, but men like ourselves, differing from us only in not having the same visible body; that they are fallible, and no more to be implicitly trusted

than our brother man, and in this view he is supported by Judge Edmonds, though apparently opposed by A. J. Davis and many others.

"In supposing," says Mr. Brevior, "that spirits are permitted to communicate only what is true and of the gravest moment, you are under a delusion. If you surrender yourself to the *ipse dixit* of any spirit, or give up the reins of your own judgment into other hands it is at your peril. \* \* \* I speak now of those facts only in which the falsehood and frivolity of verbal spirit communications are intentional, and unmistakably originate with the communicating spirit. \* \* \* For some physico-spiritual manifestations have been connected with a very palpable dishonesty on the part of the spirits. The true spiritual theory is not necessarily that which spirits teach, but that which commends itself to the deepest intuitions of the spiritual man, and the fullest and freest exercise of his reasoning powers."

Now, what is the meaning of all this in plain language? The teachings of spiritualists are unreliable, because every man's views of the great tenets are warped and twisted by his own mental peculiarities. The revelations of the spirits are unreliable, unless confirmed by your own knowledge or intuition; because the spirits, besides being ignorant like ourselves, are strongly addicted to fraud and lying. True Spiritualism, therefore, it would appear cannot be taught, but commends itself to our intuitions; which means, I suppose, that it is the result of some fortuitous condition of mind that impresses one with a belief in a shadowy something, compounded of the poetical idea of guardian angels and ministering spirits, and a restless craving to know something of that "bourne from whence no traveller returns." But what a sad farrago of rubbish become all these volumes of revealed wisdom under this light. Why not employ the time preferably in the cultivation of our common humanity, and gaining real substantial knowledge, as we all may do, from earthly sources, without fear of deception or delusion? Hear once more how low the spirits are fallen, and note the adroitness with which even their very lies are made to serve the truth as held by the faithful. I quote from *The Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Pastor*:—

"Suppose that raps spell out the sentence,—There is no God, 'no distinction between good and evil, and no moral responsibility. Now, taking this in its merely superficial import, 'it must of course be pronounced totally false. But supposing it 'to be established beyond doubt that this communication actually 'comes from a human spirit, is there not something else that is 'said to us by its means? Most certainly, and *that* after all is 'the chief point of value. It is tacitly said that human spirits 'possess intelligence and ignorance similar to those which characterized them while dwellers in the mortal body: and that there 'are those actually so low in intelligence, in morals and in perception, as to deny the existence of a God, the distinction 'between good and evil, and the moral responsibility of man."

I must hurry on to glance at a few of the contradictory teachings involved in spiritualistic literature: and first as to mediums. Unanimity prevails as to the absolute necessity for a medium for any communications with the unseen world; but as to the qualifications for mediumship the widest diversity obtains. The Rev. Mr. Harris, an eloquent expounder of the doctrines, says any man, good or bad, can become a medium for spirits, and he has seen revelations made through the vilest and most degraded of mankind.

Judge Edmonds, on the other hand, says that the fact of mediumship is the result of physical organisation; the kind of communication is affected by moral causes (observe here the admission of a most important element in the power of the medium over the revelation); the power is possessed in different degrees, and it is capable of improvement by cultivation and study. Thomas Brevior asserts that mediums must be peculiarly constituted, but is unable to say whether the peculiarity is chemical, electrical, magnetic, odyllic, or some combination of all these—or something else!

Among the North American Indians, every tribe had its mediums or medicine men, who exorcised evil spirits and cured diseases by incantations and laying on of hands. They were held in reverence by their fellows, and had the best of everything that was going; but George Catlin says the only peculiarity he ever noticed in them was the cunning which enabled them to disguise the fact that they were too lazy for hunters, and had not pluck enough for warriors. I think if we look at the announcements of some of the American mediums, we shall admit the possession of fully as much cunning in lighting upon an easy and well-paid walk in life.

I quote from an unbeliever, but he in turn quotes from the spiritualist organ, *The Banner of Light*. Mrs. Eliza Williams, a sister of A. J. Davis, announces that she will examine and prescribe for diseases and cure the sick by her healing powers, which have been fully tested. Mrs. Spencer undertakes to cure chills and fevers, by her positive and negative powders; adding "for the prevention and cure of cholera this great spiritual medicine should "always be kept on hand." Madame Gall advertises that she sees spirits and describes absent friends. Dr. George Emerson is advertised as a medium "developed to cure diseases by drawing them into himself," and announces that he is ready to perform this miracle of spirit-art by letter, at any distance, for ten dollars. Mrs. S. W. Gilbert, describing herself as a dermapathist, not only offers to cure disease, but to teach the art in so many lessons, at so much a lesson!

I know I shall be told that fraud and imposture cling about every popular movement; but if we remember what has been said about the false teachings of the writers on Spiritualism, and the lying *penchant* of the spirits themselves, I ask, in despair, if the mediums are so generally discredited, where are we to apply for the truth?

Again, Judge Edmonds, Brevior, and, to some extent, A.J. Davis, with some of the magazines, assert that the teachings of Spiritualism are supplementary to, and, in the main, in support of the generally received doctrines of Christianity. But this view is scouted as derogatory by many of their writers, and it has been held that man is his own judge and saviour; the existence of a personal God, and the mediatory character of Christ being both denied. In Hepworth Dixon's account of the Rhode Island Spiritual Conference, 1866, we find many of the speakers denouncing churches, worship, human laws, the use of the word sacred in any sense, and rejoicing that the old religion was dying out.

M. Allan Kardac, editor of *The Revue Spirite*, says, among other teachings, "Spiritualism confirms and proves the fundamental bases of religion, namely:—

"The existence of an only omnipotent God, Creator of all things, supremely just and good."

"The existence of the soul; its immortality and individuality after death.

"Man's free will and the utility of prayer.

"It contributes to the happiness of man upon earth, in counteracting hopelessness and despair; in teaching man to be content with what he has, and to regard wealth, honor, and power as trials more to be dreaded than desired; and in inspiring him with sentiments of charity and true fraternity for his neighbour."

Now how in the name of common sense can a belief in the existence of spirits, whose communications are no more reliable than those of our next door neighbour, and whose revelations are so palpably a reflex of the mind of their interlocutor, be any assistance in reaching the standard of social morality set up for us by M. Kardac.

I feel that my time is quite inadequate to exhaust the subject, and dismissing all reference to the stupendous frauds and impious juggleries which have and do still disgrace the movement, I come to consider briefly my last position, viz:—

4th. That its acceptance as an article of belief can only be accomplished by an entire surrender of our reasoning and inquiring faculties, and a practical denial of those fundamental Cosmic laws on which alone true science can rest.

At the outset I am placed in this difficulty, that in dealing with matters of spirit utterances, say with Davis's *Divine Revelations of Nature*, if I refuse to accept his description of the inhabitants of Jupiter, I am silenced by being asked what I know to the contrary; but if I take exception to his theory of the seas of the primeval earth being 400 miles in depth, as opposed to the teachings of geology, physical geography, and common sense, I may be told that the inspiration of this particular chapter was by a lying spirit; or, in a general way, that the peculiar bent of Davis' mind being towards big figures, his understanding was misled.



As such discussion is hopeless, I propose now only to look at the unnatural perturbations of inanimate bodies, as said to be exhibited at some spirit *seances*. In doing this I do not abandon my own theory that these movements when beyond natural agency are purely imaginary, but I wish to show how the spiritualist meets the difficulty of their being in opposition to the laws of gravitation.

Professor Faraday, and many able men before him, have laid it down that the laws of nature, as we understand them, are the foundations of our knowledge in natural things, and whatever is inconsistent with these is false. Now, Judge Edmonds and some others profess to abide by this doctrine, omitting the words, "as we understand them," and maintain that none of these manifestations are miraculous, or flow from any suspension of nature's laws; but are on the other hand, in conformity with and in execution of those laws; that like the steam-engine and telegraph they are marvellous only to those who do not understand them, and that those laws, and the means by which they produce such results, are as capable of being found out by human research; and "this knowledge is open to all, wise or ignorant, who will patiently search for it."

This is a graceful concession to science as far as it goes, but is there the faintest shadow of a ground for supposing that a law, apparently so immutable as gravitation, is about to become variable in its operation; or is liable to be negated by influences of which scientific research has no record in all its experiments. Setting aside the recorded vagaries of possessed tables and chairs, can we by any process of analogy or induction arrive at a conclusion that a further development of nature's laws will show us that some of the more important are not constant, or are liable to be counteracted by others of whose existence we are yet ignorant. It is asking us to take too much upon trust and is scarcely preferable to the direct assertion of supernatural interference.

Thomas Brevoir plunges boldly into the attack, and says, when scientific men affirm that certain of the phenomena cannot possibly take place because they are contrary to the law of gravitation, they forget that the evidence of gravitation depends on the same senses as testify to the reality of the levitation, and that if their testimony is rejected as not trustworthy, the proof of gravitation is itself invalidated: an argument, the fallacy of which is too patent to need comment.

But Dr. Brownson speaks the sentiments of the bulk of the writers on this subject when he says of M. Babinet's article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, "Poor man! he reasons as if the phenomena repugnant to the law of gravitation, are supposed to be produced by it, or at least without a power that overcomes it. Why, the very marvellousness is that it is contrary to the law of gravitation, and because it is, we infer that it is supernatural. When I see a man raised without visible means to the ceiling and held there by the feet, head downwards for half-an-hour,

“without visible support, I do not pretend that it is in accord with the law of gravitation, but the very essence of the fact is precisely that it is not.”

This language is re-echoed in various books, and teems in the letters and articles of spiritual magazines, and to admit this form of argument I insist that we must entirely surrender our reasoning and enquiring faculties, and replace them by a blind faith in what we cannot understand.

It has been well said that supernatural incidents fall between two stools; either they violate that course of nature and chain of incident from the classified description of which all our knowledge is derived, and in that case they cannot be described by any terms which we can use, and are therefore incredible; or else they form part of it, and then they are not supernatural.

For those who hold that the experience of science in the immutability of nature's laws affords us no evidence of their permanence in the future:—that the expectation that any part of the course of nature will be the next moment what it has been up to this moment, rests upon no rational grounds, and can be traced to no rational principle—and, holding such views, can maintain a natural basis for floating mediums, bounding furniture, substantial spirit hands, and the power of a medium under spiritual advice to swallow harmlessly 100 grains of arsenic at a dose, as recorded by Mary Howitt;—to all such I would say that their answer will be found in Professor Tyndall's paper on “Miracles and Special Providences,” recently reprinted here by a Society for the diffusion of knowledge.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that what is good in the preaching of Spiritualism is common to all reformers, for to some extent the movement in America comes under that head, as an impatient protest against the abuses and indifferentism of some of the more orthodox churches.

Dr. Holmes says, “The spiritualists have some pretty strong instincts to pry over, which no doubt have been roughly handled by theologians at different times. And the Nemesis of the pulpit comes in a shape that it little thought of, beginning with the snap of a toe-joint, and ending with such a crack of old beliefs that the roar of it is heard in all the ministers' studies in Christendom.”

But apart from what trifling good it may do in awakening the professors of theology from the lethargy which their sleepy security has induced, and from the association of certain philanthropic sentiments, of a politico-economic character with the professions of its expounders, all else appears positively harmful.

It professes to have its own royal road to knowledge, without the healthy discipline of earthly study; it teaches us to pry into the secrets of futurity, which all reason and analogy tell us we cannot know.

It tempts thousands to fraud and imposture as a means of livelihood, and pays them a hundredfold better than honest labor.

*Brockway*

It engrosses men's minds with dreamy speculations, and wastes their time in fruitless investigations ; losing to humanity as much energy as would reform many crying abuses, and time enough to make a mark on the progress of nations.

It debases the intellect of its votaries, and degrades the idea of a future state below the "happy hunting grounds" of the red Indian.

It professes to give us a newer and more perfect revelation, and its deliverances are more obscure and less reliable than that which has split Christendom into a hundred sects.

It offers no solution of the social evils which oppress mankind ; gives no formula for an improved organisation of society ; extends no helping hand to keep poverty from sinking deeper into misery, and conveys to us no information worth having upon the paramount questions of health and happiness, disease and death.

Let us then wash our hands of it, and be up and doing for ourselves. Relying upon no such shadowy aid, let us do with all our might the work that lies before us in the world. If our efforts are unselfishly directed to the amelioration of our race on earth, it needs no spiritual communication to tell us that our reflections in that hereafter will make our own heaven ; while, even in the flesh we know that virtue is its own exceeding great reward.

