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# SPIRITUALISM.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE

MELBOURNE FREE DISCUSSION SOCIETY,

**SUNDAY EVENING, JULY 9<sup>TH</sup>, 1871.**

BY E. W. C.

THE fundamental idea of Spiritualism is that the inhabitants of the Spirit-world *can* and *do*, under some circumstances, communicate with persons still in the flesh. Whoever believes this is a spiritualist; no matter what else he believes or disbelieves. This idea has been a vitalizing principle in all the Religions of which we have any record. Its ORIGIN we know not, we can trace its course back through all history, until it is lost in the dim twilight of ancient tradition. It has assumed various outward forms; but its essence has ever been the same; whether in the form of oracles, visions, or the inspired utterances of prophets and seers. The ancient literature of India, Egypt, China, Persia, Judea, Greece and Rome, is permeated and enriched with this thought. The Christian Church teems with it, from the day of pentecost downwards until the days of Luther, by which time it had become so degraded by superstition, imposture, and priestly avarice, that a violent reaction set in; and both true and false were condemned by the reformers. From this time the belief, in what is erroneously called the Supernatural was gradually submerged under a flood of disbelief, which was intensified by the increasing tendency towards scientific modes of thought. This went on until about 1848, when the belief emerged, and being purified from its former superstition, it has since progressed with a rapidity *unparalleled* in the world's history until to-day we find it numbering its adherents by millions, and that too in this *scientific* age, and principally among hard practical matter-of-fact English and Americans. And when we remember that spiritualists were not born such, but have been compelled by the irresistible logic of facts to believe in it, in spite of their educational prejudices, the movement assumes an importance that challenges serious attention.

The time has arrived when it can no longer be ignored; if it is *true*, it must be placed upon the scientific basis which its adherents claim for it, but if it is *false* it must be *proved* so, and then relegated to the superstitious past, from whence it sprang. In whichever way regarded, it is fraught with vital interest to mankind; hence it becomes the duty of all who claim to be truth-seekers to thoroughly investigate the subject. And the object of this paper is to show, that it is *well worthy* of the most searching investigation that can be bestowed upon it.

William Howitt, towards the end of his "History of the Supernatural," after showing that the belief in it has prevailed in all places, and through all recorded time, says, "We have now traversed all ages and all countries, and everywhere we have found the faith and the *facts* of supernaturalism existing in all classes of men—in the highest philosophers as in the simplest individuals; nay, they *are* the highest philosophers, and the most illustrious apostles of religion, who have been the boldest and firmest assertors of them. Wherever literature extends it stamps the page in the face of all opposition, wherever man lives with instructed or uninstructed nature, it lives with him. With the Platos, the Socrateses, the Aristotles, the Senecas, Tacituses, and Ciceros of antiquity—with those men worshipped for their mighty intellects by the learned of all succeeding ages—it was itself a worshipped guest and power."

He goes on to say that—"the evidence on this subject is so voluminous, that no one work, no, nor a dozen large volumes, could contain it. Men of all nations, and all religions, of all grades of education, and every rank of intellect, pressed on to put in their claims as witnesses. In the heart and soul of mankind the great truth is found to be rooted inextricably with the roots of life, and of all consciousness. It is no longer what some would fain call it, the belief of a few weak or visionary individuals; we may boldly pronounce it the faith of all the race, the contrary being only the exceptions. The *greatest* names in the history of intellect and of human achievement are the prominent names in this cardinal faith. The list of these names, and the *proofs* of this *fact* 'in extenso,' would make a large volume of itself. We must go on numbering the princes and chieftains of mind through all time. Like Scott's clans, they come thronging over the hills—

'Still gathering, as they pour along,  
A voice more loud, a tide more strong.' "

The accounts of apparitions alone, are so numerous and so well attested, and that too in this sceptical age, that it is very difficult to account for them on any supposition, except that there is *some truth* in them, however little. Apparitions appearing to friends at the moment of death, are the cases most commonly recorded. (Several of this kind have been published lately in the Melbourne 'Daily Telegraph.' Notably one recorded by Lord Brougham, as having appeared to himself).

"The Cambridge Association for spiritual enquiry, familiarly called the Ghost Club, consisting of eminent members of the university, have stated that their carefully conducted researches on the subject of apparitions have led them to regard such appearances as a settled fact. A member of this association informed Mr. Dale Owen that he had collected 2,000 cases of them."\* In fact apparitions, and a variety of phenomena, that can be explained by *no known* laws of nature, rest on evidence which in its cumulative character is almost irresistible.

Now I put it to the good sense of this meeting, and let each one decide in his own mind, whether the *probabilities* are not in favour of the supposition, that there is *some* truth underlying all this belief in what is erroneously called the supernatural, *some law*, as yet unrecognized by science? And whether we are justified in rejecting such a vast amount of human testimony? But the objection may here be raised, that by admitting these probabilities we open the door for all the superstitions of the past to come trooping back again. This, however is not so, we only open the way to their thorough investigation, and by recognising the true and rejecting the false, we make superstition thenceforth impossible by showing all to be the result of laws hitherto unknown.

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\* Howitt.

It is not recognized *so clearly* as it should be, and the prevailing belief in "supernaturalism," is a *re-action* from the credulity of the past : this being so, it is highly probable, from the well-known tendency of re-actions to go to extremes, that the truth lies *between* the present scientific scepticism and the old belief in spiritual manifestations, and this is where modern spiritualism is seeking it, with what success I will now endeavour to show. Before doing so, however, let me state that the spiritualism of the past bears the same relation to modern spiritualism, that Alchemy bears to Chemistry, or Astrology to Astronomy. In each case the one has naturally led to the other.

Modern Spiritualism is essentially a scientific, rational, and progressive religion, "based upon present tangible facts and past historic records ;" demonstrating the reality of a future state of existence. It is stated that "Spiritualism considered from its philosophic side is Rationalism, from its scientific side Naturalism, and from its religious side the embodiment of love to God and man. It spans all human interests and seeks to reconstruct society upon the principles of a universal brotherhood—and the strict equality of the sexes."

"Desirous of greater knowledge touching the relations of spirit with matter, and of men with God and the intelligences of the surrounding world of spirits, Spiritualists study and reverently interrogate the laws and principles that govern the phenomena and occult forces of the universe ; the histories of the past, and the experiences of the present, anxious to rightly solve those psychologic and spiritual problems of the ages—man's origin, capacity, duty and final destiny." Spiritualism is eminently adapted to the spirit of the age, and the human constitution. It addresses the intellect, the affections, and aspirations of all. Broad, unsectarian and democratic, it is in unison with all the advanced movements of the day. It exercises a "divine eclecticism" uniting in one harmonious whole, the truths contained in all preceding religions ; and thus appealing to the universal consciousness of mankind. But its distinguishing feature is its claim to the power of scientifically *demonstrating* the reality of a future state of existence. In this it meets the last requirements of the age.

Of all the great questions that have engaged the human mind, none are fraught with more momentous interest ; and none are more difficult of solution, than the question of human immortality ; bound up as it is so indissolubly with our hopes and aspirations. The *belief* in it has been almost universal ; but (apart from modern spiritualism) we have, unfortunately, no *proof* of it. In this age of transition when creeds, which have passed current for centuries, are being so sternly questioned and found wanting ; when theological systems are crumbling away so surely before the onward march of exact knowledge, it is absolutely necessary that the cheering belief in a future state of existence should be rescued from the decaying theologies and placed upon a sure foundation. This is the mission of Spiritualism. The most beautiful of the speculative systems, such as that taught by Theodore Parker, appealing as it does to the reason and intuitions of mankind, is powerless to convince the materialist. Wearied of belief and speculation he demands something more tangible, and this neither theology nor physical science can give.

Science says—we have no *knowledge* of the existence of life apart from organization : and as it is seen that life and organization are so closely connected and so mutually dependent ; it is argued that life and intelligence are only the *result* of material organization, and cease on the dissolution of it.

It is manifestly useless to meet this argument by a confession of faith ; it can only be met by tangible facts proving the existence of life and

intelligence *outside* of any *known* organisms. This brings us to a consideration of the spiritual phenomena, as it is claimed that they effectually meet the case.

Time will not permit me to describe even a tithe of these phenomena; but I may state generally, that if they do occur as stated, they prove conclusively, that individualized intelligences exist apart from human or visible organisms, that these intelligences can, under certain conditions, exercise a force capable of moving heavy bodies and producing audible sounds, and that these intelligences when questioned *invariably* assert themselves to be the spirits of departed human beings. That this force *is* exercised under certain conditions, and that intelligence is displayed, is testified to by thousands of witnesses, whose testimony on any other subject would be considered conclusive.

This, which is the starting point and foundation for all the other phenomena, has lately been thoroughly investigated by one of the most learned and philosophical societies in London; and has been pronounced by its investigating sub-committee to be an absolute *fact*. I will read a few extracts from the report of this learned body, the London Dialectical Society, as lately published in some of the Melbourne papers.

"Your Committee have confined their report to *facts* witnessed by them in their collective capacity; which facts were *palpable to the senses, and their reality capable of demonstrative proof*.

"Of the members of your sub-committee, about *four-fifths* entered upon the investigation wholly sceptical as to the reality of the alleged phenomena, firmly believing them to be the result either of *imposture*, or of *delusion*, or of *involuntary muscular action*. It was only by irresistible evidence, under conditions that precluded the possibility of either of these solutions, and after trial and test many times repeated, that the most sceptical of your sub-committee were slowly and reluctantly convinced that the phenomena exhibited in the course of their protracted inquiry were veritable facts.

"The result of their long-continued and carefully conducted experiments, after trial by every detective test they could devise, has been to establish conclusively—

"First—That, under certain bodily or mental conditions of one or more of the persons present, a force is exhibited sufficient to put heavy substances in motion without the employment of any muscular force, without contact or material connection of any kind between such substances and the body of any person present.

"Second—That this force can make distinctly *audible* sounds to proceed from solid substances not in contact with, nor having any visible or material connection with, the body of any person present; and which sounds are proved to proceed from such substances by the vibrations which are distinctly felt when they are touched.

"Third—That this force is frequently directed by intelligence.

"At *thirty-four* out of the forty meetings of your committee, some of these phenomena occurred."

This however is only the lowest and least interesting phase of the phenomena, the higher branches are testified to by witnesses almost as numerous and quite as reliable as those testifying to the physical manifestations, and as *these have been proved* true, it is but rational to suppose that the higher will be proved true also; but if only one-third of them are true, it is impossible, at present, to account for them by any theory except the spiritual one. These phenomena are so varied that I can only enumerate a few of them

From a periodical called "Human Nature" I extract the following. In reply to the question "How are the existence and power of spirits shown?" it replies:

1st.—By moving tangible articles when asked to do so.

2nd.—By producing sounds of various kinds, on tables, chairs, walls, etc., when asked so to do.

3rd.—By consecutive sentences of advice, reproof, etc., produced by sounds, when a pencil is passed over an alphabet.

4th.—Premonitions.

5th.—By using the voice of a person, and uttering words the person acted upon has not in his mind.

6th.—By using the arms and hands of susceptible persons to write prescriptions—

give information—give warning of a personal and relative character—and inculcate purity of life, and prayerfulness of inclination; the person acted upon simply consenting to let the hand be used, but totally unconscious of what is to be produced.

7th.—Audible voices heard, and conversation so carried on by mediums.

8th.—Apparitions of the whole body, or part of the body.

9th.—Spirits touching the human body, sometimes gently, sometimes roughly.

10th.—Musical instruments used, and exquisite melodies produced on pianos, accordions, etc., no seen hand touching the instruments.

11th.—Curing the sick, by the hand of the medium being floated to the patient by a power *felt* but not seen; and placed on the diseased part of the body; the medium till then not knowing where the diseased part was.

12th.—By taking up persons, and heavy substances off the ground into the air, and that in the presence of many witnesses.

Many other and more wonderful manifestations could be added if time would permit. Trance speaking and clairvoyance are among the more important: by these, and similar means, thousands have been convinced of the identity of their spirit friends. It is stated that "Answers have been given to questions which could not possibly have been previously known to the medium. Husbands have had questions answered which only their deceased wives could possibly reply to. Fathers have received messages from sons, and sons from fathers, giving information that has been afterwards verified." Many remarkable cures are recorded as having been effected by media, who had no medical knowledge except what they received from these unseen intelligences. "Unlearned men and women are enabled to speak in languages of which they are entirely ignorant; they are enabled to pour forth torrents of fervid eloquence and profound philosophy, on the most scientific and metaphysical subjects. Others are made to write involuntarily upon topics far beyond their natural comprehension or their acquirements, while others can execute beautiful paintings without previous study of the art. All these, when asked, positively assert that they are not the only agents in the work; but that there is a higher power and intelligence directing and originating the whole. And when these intelligences are appealed to, they invariably affirm that they are spirits of departed friends."

The testimony in support of these extraordinary statements is almost irresistible. The published testimony, which is by far the smallest part of it, fills volumes. It comes from all classes of society, and from nearly every part of the world. The following extract must suffice, as a specimen of thousands that could be brought.

W. Crookes, F.R.S., editor of the *Chemical News*, discoverer of the new metal Thallium, and one of the most accurate observers connected with the Royal Society, frankly acknowledges the physical phenomena of Spiritualism to be true. C. F. Varley, F.R.S., eminent in natural philosophy, science, electricity, &c., says:—

"My authority for asserting that the spirits of kindred beings do visit us, is—1. I have on several occasions distinctly seen them. 2. On several occasions, things known only to myself and to the deceased person purporting to communicate with me have been correctly stated, while the medium was unaware of any of the circumstances. 3. On several occasions, things known only to our two selves, and which I had entirely forgotten, have been recalled to my mind by the communicating spirits; therefore, this could not be a case of mere thought-reading. 4. On some occasions, when these communications have been made to me, I have put my questions mentally, while the medium, a private lady in independent circumstances, has written out the answers, she being quite unconscious of the meaning of the communications. 5. The time and nature of coming events, unanticipated, have on more than one occasion been accurately made known to me several days in advance. As my invisible informants told the truth regarding the coming events, and also stated that they were spirits, and as no mortals in the room had any knowledge of some of the facts they communicated, I see no reason to disbelieve them. Mrs. Varley very frequently sees and recognises spirits; especially is this the case when entranced. She is a good trance-medium."—*Spiritual Magazine*.

Professor Mapes thus sums up the uses he has evolved from Spiritualism:

"The manifestations which are pertinent to the ends required are so conclusive in



men character as to establish in my mind certain cardinal points. These are:  
1st, That there is a future state of existence, which is but a continuation of our present state of being, devoid of such portions of our organism as are now denominated material.

2nd, That the great aim of nature, as shown through a great variety of spiritual existences, is progression, extending beyond this mundane sphere.

3rd, That Spirits can and do communicate with mortals, and in all cases evince a desire to elevate and advance those they commune with.

4th, That spirits have, in a *vast* number of well-attested instances, proved their will and ability to ward off dangers, cure sickness, prevent crimes, reform criminals, and communicate many useful, scientific, and some highly-occult and novel ideas to mankind."

Testimony of this sort, from men of high standing, could be multiplied ad-infinitum, showing that the phenomena are capable of but *one* explanation in the present state of our knowledge—that is the one given by the Spiritualists. If any other *can* be given, that will *rationaly* account for the phenomena, the majority of Spiritualists will be most happy to receive it. Because most of them are Spiritualists, simply because they cannot help it. They have been compelled to believe by the cogency of *facts* and testimony; and that too, often in spite of the most violent prejudice against it. From the present aspect of the question, however, it seems very improbable that any other explanation will be forthcoming; as every fresh phenomenon points more clearly to the one conclusion.

If, after a thorough investigation of the subject in all its bearings, it should be ultimately proved that these manifestations are not produced by disembodied spirits, it will be still more wonderful than if they are.

The investigation will be profitable either way, because *if* it is not the work of spirits, and we have to retreat from that position, we shall still be in possession of the most advanced form of religion and philosophy that the world has yet seen, we shall have proved the existence of forces in nature hitherto undreamt of, and we shall have proved the human mind to possess faculties far more glorious than our ordinary senses, therefore I say again, that if it is not the work of spirits, it is something a great deal more wonderful. The position taken up by Spiritualists is often quarrelled with by persons imperfectly acquainted with the subject: but I maintain that our position is analagous to that held by scientific men. They state the results of their investigations and calculations, which are generally accepted, because, anyone who doubts their correctness, can, by going through the same amount of patient labour, verify them to his own satisfaction. We are in the same position. That certain things do occur that are capable of but one explanation, is a matter, not of belief, but of actual knowledge to the majority of Spiritualists, and anyone who doubts that this is so, has only to investigate as carefully as they have done to come to the same conclusion. And there is not a single case on record of anyone having so investigated and come to a different conclusion.

It is frequently asked—"what *good* is it, even if it is true?" Others urge that they have no desire for an after life, therefore any arguments based upon this desire has no weight with them. These and all similar objections are scarcely worth serious consideration. For there are very few, I imagine, in whom this desire for continued being does not exist; and whose social feelings are so dead, as not to have some longings to re-join those they have loved and lost on earth; and very few whose thirst for knowledge is so small that they are content with the mere fragment of knowledge of this glorious universe, which can be gained from this tiny world, and who would not gladly embrace an opportunity of exploring the boundless realms of nature. The cold, chilling representations of the after life, given by the orthodox, can have no attraction for the man of culture: one whose intellectual cravings are but *stimulated* by the knowledge gained in this life. An eternity of idleness, or harp playing and

hallelujahs, has no charms for him ; and although human intuitions have far outrun this primitive conception of heaven, they have been mistrusted as mere dreams, too beautiful to be true. But Spiritualism comes and confirms them, tells us that the ideal is the prophetic and will be attained, that the next world is but a vaster field for the exercise of the increased and ever increasing powers of the human mind.

Whatever may be the merits and defects of Modern Spiritualism as a religion, it will, I believe, inevitably become the dominant system of the civilized world, for it is progressing calmly and irresistibly. Received at first with shouts of derision, indignation, and ridicule, it urges onward until ridicule is being replaced by curiosity. Men investigate that they may the more effectually denounce it, but only to find they have been laughing at their *own ignorance*, when they thought they were laughing at spiritualism. Others have denounced spiritualists as fools and impostors, until they have stumbled across the knowledge that some of their dearest and most respected friends were firm adherents to the belief. The utmost ingenuity has been exercised to vilify and misrepresent it ; but nothing can crush out its irrepressible vitality. It meets the demands of the age, it satisfies the reason, the affections and aspirations of mankind. It asks not faith, but investigation. It claims to have removed the uncertainty about a future state, and presents death as promotion, the beginning of another and more glorious life, the first step of the soul's destiny, which is infinite progression.

From this very imperfect sketch of this great subject, it will be seen that it is at least worthy of investigation. This is all we ask ; and the only qualifications necessary for its investigation, are simply patience and common sense.

Of course we shall receive great opposition to the establishment of our principles ; this we expect, as every great movement that has benefited mankind has been so opposed, and unfortunately our opponents have *not yet* learned the lessons which history should teach them. So to Christians I would say, be careful, lest you find yourselves holding the same position with regard to Spiritualism, that the ancient Pharisees held towards the higher and purer teachings of Jesus. To Protestants I would say, be careful, lest you find yourselves in the same position as the Roman Catholics were with regard to the reformation. And to all would-be scientists, I would say, look well to it, lest you find yourselves in the position of those learned men who proved the earth could not be round, because the people on the other side would tumble off !

From what has been advanced we find—First, that a belief in what is called the 'supernatural' has been almost universal through all ages of the world's history ; that the present scientific scepticism, is a *re-action* from this belief ; consequently, it is extremely probable on these grounds alone, that the truth lies *between* these two points. In this direction, Modern Spiritualism is seeking it.

Secondly—That Modern Manifestations are so well attested that they demand the most serious attention and thorough investigation by all earnest *truth-seekers*.

Thirdly—These manifestations are of such a character as to admit of but *one* explanation, and that is the spiritual theory. Therefore the spiritualists are acting consistently with the true scientific method, in holding this theory until another, capable of explaining the phenomena, is discovered.

If these deductions are correct, then it follows that the abuse and contempt that have been, and are still being thrown upon Spiritualism and Spiritualists, are *irrational* and utterly unworthy of this comparatively enlightened age.

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