

SPIRITUALISM.

MUSICAL AND OTHER MANIFESTATIONS IN BOSTON, U.S.A.

THE following is the substance of a paper published in the *Spiritual Magazine*,* of October, 1864. With some unimportant corrections and additions, it is reprinted in 1873, partly as a contribution to the volume of facts and phenomena which has accumulated in the interval, and to which all who are interested may find ready access, and partly because it is worthy of notice that precisely similar manifestations are now being daily witnessed in England, and may be found recorded and abundantly verified in each of the five or six periodicals devoted to the subject.

Boston, April, 1864.

During a residence in Boston, in February and March last, I had the opportunity of witnessing the very wonderful phenomena exhibited under the mediumship of Mrs. Annie Lord Chamberlain; and seeing no mention of this lady in the *Spiritual Magazine*, you will, perhaps, allow me to put before your readers some of the facts which came under my own observation at six evening meetings which I attended at her residence.

Mrs. Chamberlain is well known to New England Spiritualists, and throughout the States, as a most estimable lady, of the highest character,

* The *Spiritual Magazine* is now—as it was then—edited by a Christian Spiritualist, a man of fine culture and devout habit of thought, and it is especially worthy of the notice of all who desire to study and watch the progress of Spiritualism in England and America, and throughout the world.

and one who, from her childhood, has struggled against the accession of the influences which exercise such extraordinary control over her, and to which she is now entirely passive. A gentle, intelligent, unassuming person, probably not more than 20 years of age,—with fair complexion, regular features, and cheerful expression of face,—there is no indication of any peculiar organization, or special capacity. I observed her for some time previous to each sitting, in familiar intercourse with her visitors, and I feel convinced that the ordinary as well as the most experienced judge of character would unhesitatingly declare that intentional deception is quite foreign to her nature—is, indeed, with *her* an impossibility. The slightest hint of it sadly disconcerts her—as it never does a trained impostor—and she gives to the sceptical every facility for detection and scrutiny.

I speak thus of her personal appearance only to assist the distant reader in forming a more perfect picture of the proceedings I describe.

At the house of Mr. T. Lane, a well-known respectable tradesman in South Maldon, a short ride from Boston, Mrs. C. held meetings every evening during February and March last, giving, by advertisement, especial invitation to those unacquainted with spiritual phenomena to be in attendance half an hour or so before the commencement of the sittings, that every part of the rooms, furniture, musical instruments, &c., might be minutely examined, and such marks placed upon suspected facilities for imposture as might effectually guard against all possibility of deception. I availed myself of this offer, and on the first occasion, as well as on each of my five subsequent visits, I was engaged for half an hour or more, either in unreserved chat with the medium and her visitors, or in a close and careful examination of the room in which the circles were held, the door of which was kept open, and the freest ingress allowed to all from the parlour opposite, in which we were assembled.

At four of the meetings there were from eighteen to twenty-five ladies and gentlemen present, the larger number so completely filling the circle room, that the chairs had to be placed together and close against the wall on both sides and at one end, so that we sat from three to four feet away from the table—a heavy black walnut, without cover, extending two-thirds the length of the room. With the exception of the medium, and two, or sometimes four friends—whose hands were flat on the table, in contact with hers, at the end farthest from the door—none of us touched the table, and our feet had full play, rendering it impossible for any one to pass in front of us without detection. The only door to the room besides a closet door (on

which, after inspection, we were allowed to put a seal) was very securely fastened, locked, and held by any two of the company who chose, their chairs being pressed against it. A smaller table, covered with musical instruments, consisting of an accordion, six or eight hand-bells—some without tongues—a musical box, children's trumpets, and other articles, stood close against the end wall, at the back of the medium's chair, and leaving no room for any one to pass behind her. By the wall, and leaning against this table, were two guitars, a banjo, a violin and violoncello, a tambourine, a tenor drum, and other instruments, and above, was a large bass drum, with a triangle attached, suspended so that it could freely play.

The medium having placed us, as far as possible alternately male and female, and directing us to join hands, with an injunction on no account to break the circle once formed, the light was extinguished, and in a few minutes there was considerable noise and movement amongst the instruments, and they were touched, as if being tuned. On one occasion a string snapped in the process. It would be impossible for any words of mine to describe the music which followed, and which, for upwards of an hour was almost continuous, and of every variety, from the sweet and plaintive chords of the violin and violoncello, and the delicate *Æolian*-like whisperings of the guitar, to the combined *fortissimo*, apparently of every instrument in the room. Familiar airs, such as "Sweet Home," "Auld Lang Syne," and others that were called for, were executed with most touching expression, and in perfect time and tune. Hand-bells, trumpets, tambourine, the small drum, and, in appropriate place and time, thunderings on the big drum, were clearly distinguishable and separable by the ear; never together in one place, but playing in all parts of the room, above and beneath the table, in obvious contact with the ceiling, across our knees, resting one while upon our heads or in ladies' laps, and the room sometimes trembling with the volume of sound. At times we heard the small musical box being wound up and the key thrown upon the table, and it would commence playing in the air and move in circles above our heads, the next moment beneath the table, and often resting upon our feet. Sometimes a guitar and banjo passed with such rapidity about the room, and so close to our faces, that a strong current of air was perceptible to all. I repeatedly made a *mental* request that one of the instruments might rest on my head; a guitar came, in each instance, and played for some seconds, and then descended to the lap of the lady on my right, the end of the instrument resting, in sensible vibration, on my arm. While this was going on, a small tin trumpet was

passed rapidly to the lips of every one present, and was removed only upon each blowing a blast or a squeak. This was done with unerring precision, although in total darkness. At another time a tumbler of water was held to the mouth of each, and during the evening we were repeatedly sprinkled as with a smart shower. Any human being moving in front must have been detected, and, as our chairs touched the wall, there was no possibility of getting at us from behind. At intervals a lucifer match was struck, or the lamp was suddenly relighted, for the purpose of showing us the position of the instruments and of the medium; indeed, it was relighted at any time, at the request of the company, the manifestations ceasing for the moment, to be instantly renewed in the darkness. Occasionally, and when an instrument struck the table forcibly, faint lights were visible. The reality and objectiveness of this were proved by the fact that several of the company who could not see each other, and sitting far apart, exclaimed at the same moment, "Did you see that light?" It is stated that human forms are frequently visible. The faint flashes I saw were similar to those of the electric light in an exhausted receiver, or in highly rarefied air—perhaps more correctly described as phosphorescent. At times I was, with others, gently stroked on the face and forehead by several hands, or playfully poked in the cheek by a single finger, or by one of the small articles from the table.

Without making any special reference to the admiration and astonishment expressed by those of the company who were *musical*, I should like to say here, that, with an intense love of music, and having lived nearly thirty years in London, I am myself pretty well acquainted with oratorio and opera, and have listened to almost every singer of note, English or Foreign, who has appeared in London since 1834. I have many times been bewitched and bewildered by the exquisite voice of Jenny Lind, in her earliest performances, but never in my life before did I experience the real musical exaltation, the indescribably elevating effect produced by these simple instruments, playing, singly or combined, the commonest and most familiar airs. If they were touched by human hands there must have been a dozen, at least, and the deception then is the greatest miracle. I know that much may be said about the heightened perception incident to the position, the darkened room, the joined hands, and the "imagination running riot," but I can assert most truthfully, that, after the first evening (when I confess I entered the circle with some excusable trepidation), I never was calmer or more self-possessed in my life, and it was generally the case, that every lady and gentleman present expressed loud regret that the meeting must soon

come to an end. The anticipation of a renewal afforded me the highest pleasure.*

The music which prevailed at each sitting was brisk and lively, sometimes quite boisterous; but, on one occasion, a lady, a member of a Baptist Church, proposed that we should sing the hymn tune known as *Coronation*, the refrain of which is "Crown Him Lord of all." Several of us sang, and never can I forget the wonderful accompaniment. All the instruments seemed to sound in concert and in exact time to our singing, but the violoncello was very loud, and altogether more prominent and vehement in its *scrapings* than in the secular tunes. I could think only of some departed performer in a village church choir having descended to join in his favourite chorus. The repetition of "Crown Him," was exceedingly impressive, and the effect such as I have often experienced at the performances of the *Hallelujah Chorus* in Exeter Hall.

I could fill your number with details of the marvellous occurrences in addition to the music, at these sittings, our impressions of which we usually compared and discussed with each other for an hour or so before returning home. I will only mention one other incident, more especially interesting to myself, and which I had previously determined should be a test of the acting *intelligence*.

Dr. John Campbell, of London, in writing about Spiritualism some time ago, said:—

"We attach no importance to mere natural movements . . . pieces of furniture being moved or suspended; we set no value on anything apart from *intelligence*. If a harp, a piano, an accordion, or any instrument, shall send forth sweet music apart from human hands, we at once acknowledge the presence of *intelligent power*. The tying of knots on handkerchiefs, and the removal of objects from one place to another, and such like things, in their measure demand the same recognition."

On this, my third visit, before entering the room, I placed a linen handkerchief in the inner breast pocket of my coat, buttoning the coat over it, and mentioning the act and intention to no one. When the instruments

* In describing a sitting in June, 1867, at which some very wonderful phenomena were witnessed, Robert Dale Owen says,—“It is proper I should state here that, throughout the *séance*, though the impression produced was profound, solemn beyond expression, never to be forgotten, yet it did not partake at all of the emotion of fear. The predominant feeling was a deep anxiety that there might be no interruption, and that the sitting might not terminate until I had obtained incontrovertible evidence of the fact that the appearance was of a spiritual character, yet as real as any earthly phenomenon.”

were in full play, and when I fancied there was the greatest amount of magnetic force in the circle, I *mentally* requested that the handkerchief might be removed. Instantly I felt a hand tugging at the buttons, and the next moment a lady on the other side of the room exclaimed, "Here's a handkerchief brought me with a knot in it." This was scarcely spoken before another lady, in a farther position from me, called out "the handkerchief is with me;" and after being passed about in the dark, it was at length returned to me with *two knots* tied in it. On this occasion only thirteen persons were present, and I had the opportunity of sitting on the right side of the medium, my left hand being in contact with her right during the whole of the *séance*. A gentleman in similar position on her left, in addition to the hand contact, requested permission to place his foot upon her dress. This was immediately granted, and he informed us afterwards, that at no period during the evening was his foot removed. Indeed, we had at all times the fullest means of determining, that, with the exception of the continuous vibratory motion of her hands upon ours, she sat still as a statue.

Sitting near her, but not in contact, on a subsequent evening, I *mentally* requested that the same handkerchief might be taken from my inner breast pocket, my coat being buttoned, and it was done as rapidly as before, and given to a person opposite. A gentleman, well known in Boston, having been gently tapped on the head once or twice with the guitar, asked laughingly to have a knock which he should not forget, and immediately, a smart blow was given, which we all heard, and at which he loudly exclaimed. In no case was anyone hurt in the slightest, except at his own request, while the heaviest articles in the room were continually being thrown violently at our feet, without or with only the lightest contact.

The last act of the invisibles was to lift the small table over the head of the medium, and place it on the larger one. Understanding that this was usually effected at the close, the persons sitting on each side of her made the greatest effort, without disjoining hands, to detect the passage of the table, but in no instance could this be done. When the light was called for, most of the instruments were seen lying in various positions on the large table, the smaller table being near the centre, with its legs uppermost.

Assuredly, Spiritualism in America has "grown too large to be laughed at." The rapping and table-turning, apparently so full of absurdity, and even these musical manifestations, excite but little interest now, in the presence of higher phenomena, and more spiritual demonstrations. It always appears

to me, that these first appeals to the senses stand in much the same relation to advanced or advancing Spiritualism that the elementary ceremonial of Judaism did to Christianity,—serving but to awaken the attention of the multitude to the underlying revelation, and disappearing in the presence of higher light. I have satisfied *myself* there can be but one explanation of these exhibitions of “intelligent power,” and from all I have seen, and the abounding and substantial proofs of the presence of those who, it was assumed, were gone from us for ever, I can no more doubt the power and the disposition of many of the departed to return and minister to our wants and our progress here, than I can doubt that I myself live, or that the sun shines. The facts are now patent, and easy of ascertainment, and all who will take the trouble to investigate—as I have done, *outside of public* lecturers and professed mediums—in the quiet of their own rooms, may be assured, at least, of the *reality* of the phenomena, and can draw their own inferences. I would not disparage or discourage the efforts of sincere and honest *public* mediums—and there are many here—but after all, the satisfactory proof is not with them. The *public* exhibition may serve to confirm much that is presented in private to the awakened and recipient faculty, wherein consist the true evidence, but conviction does not in this way come to those who absurdly believe that thousands of serious Christian men and women meet to operate by concealed machines, and take immense pains to cheat and deceive each other; and far less does it satisfy those who honestly inquire and doubt. I regard the investigation as strictly scientific, and prefer to accumulate facts,—to be *sure* that I have them,—and to listen attentively to the interpreter, and to the whisperings of that distant “wind” which will doubtless bring to us, in due time, the true explanation, and reveal to us the clear and unquestioned *law*.

A CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALIST.

The following is from “The Claims of Modern Spiritualism upon Public Attention.” By GEORGE SEXTON, M.A., LL.D.

“The great objection urged against Spiritualism is, that it is opposed to the laws of nature. What laws of nature? The people who talk thus would seem to wish to have it thought that they had explored the profoundest depths of the universe, and were conversant with every law that operates that mighty domain. Human experience of laws of nature is exceedingly limited, and no one can tell how numerous or how powerful are those that are in action outside the precincts of the general knowledge of mankind.

When a man talks about certain phenomena being opposed to the laws of nature, he assumes that he knows the whole of such laws; because if there be one with which he is not acquainted, that very one might perchance be at the bottom of the facts in question. The opposition offered to Spiritualism on this score is precisely the same as that which has been raised against every fresh discovery in science. In the history of the past, whenever a new theory has been propounded with regard to natural phenomena, or a new discovery made, the objection urged has always been that it was at variance with the laws of nature, which simply meant that it was opposed to previous experience and to the preconceived opinion of the objector as to what the laws of nature were. When we hear a man declare that Spiritualism is opposed to the laws of nature, we take it to mean that the phenomena are outside the domains of his experience—in other words, that he knows nothing whatever about the subject, and that his preconception of nature's laws does not include these manifestations. The term 'laws of nature,' hangs most glibly on the lips of those who hardly know the meaning of the words. Such people speak of laws as though they were powers, forces, or even entities, whereas they are nothing more than observed orders of sequence. A law of nature is not an entity, neither is it a power; it can do nothing whatever. It is simply the mode of action of a force that lies behind it—that is all, and hence must not be referred to as though it were capable of producing results, much less quoted as a something on whose behalf even facts must be rejected. As a modern poet has said, addressing God—

“ ‘The laws of Nature are but Thine,
For Nature! Who is she?
A name—the name that men assign
To Thy sole alchemy!’ ”

Besides, the facts and phenomena of Spiritualism are in no sense opposed to the laws of nature; they only show the operation of higher laws and forces than those which modern science is acquainted with. These do not oppose, but only subjugate the others. . . . Spiritualism in no sense sets aside and opposes laws of nature; all that it does is to bring to light other and more powerful agencies than those usually recognised, and to make manifest higher laws than those laid down in the code of Materialism.”

“In Scripture we are perpetually reminded that the laws of the spiritual world are, in the highest sense, laws of nature, whose obligation, operation, and effect are all in the constitution and course of things.”—*The Duke of Argyll*.