

# SPIRITUALISM.

*My friend  
J. B. Lippincott  
" Wallace*



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# SPIRITUALISM.

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**Spiritualism** (on the Continent usually termed Spiritism) is the name applied to a great and varied series of abnormal or preter-normal phenomena purporting to be for the most part caused by spiritual beings, together with the belief thence arising of the intercommunion of the living and the so-called dead. The following is a definition given in the London *Spiritual Magazine*, for many years the best exponent of the subject in Great Britain: 'Spiritualism is a science based solely on facts; it is neither speculative nor fanciful. On facts and facts alone, open to the whole world through an extensive and probably unlimited system of mediumship, it builds up a substantial psychology on the ground of strictest logical induction. Its cardinal truth, imperishably established on the experiments and experiences of millions of sane men and women, of all countries and creeds, is that of a world of spirits, and the continuity of the existence of the individual spirit through the momentary eclipse of death; as it disappears on earth reappearing in that spiritual world, and becoming an inhabitant amid the ever-augmenting population of the spiritual universe.'

The movement known as 'modern spiritualism' is usually considered to have commenced in the year 1848, with certain mysterious noises and movements occurring in a house temporarily occupied by Mr Fox and family at Hydeville in the state of New York; and his two daughters, Margaret and Kate, aged twelve and nine years respectively, were the first individuals recognised as mediums, in whose presence the phenomena more particularly occurred. It must not be supposed that the phenomena themselves were at all new. Throughout all history

there are records of similar occurrences. Such were the disturbances at the ancient palace of Woodstock in 1649; at Mr Mompesson's at Tedworth in 1661; at Epworth parsonage in 1716, in the family of Mr Wesley, the father of the founder of Methodism; the Cock Lane ghost in London investigated by Dr Johnson, Bishop Percy, and other gentlemen; the extraordinary occurrences in the house of Mr Jobson in Sunderland in 1839, which were investigated and published by Dr Clanny, F.R.S., and authenticated by sixteen witnesses, including five physicians and surgeons; and numerous less important cases recorded in the works of William Howitt, Robert Dale Owen, Dr Eugene Crowell, and many older writers. But none of these occurrences attracted much attention or led to any systematic investigation of the subject. What especially distinguishes the year 1848 is that it was the starting-point of a movement which has grown and spread continuously, till, in spite of ridicule, misrepresentation, and persecution, it has gained converts in every grade of society and in every civilised portion of the globe. Spiritualism is now to be found as frequently among the highest aristocracy as among the middle classes and the poor. It has its full proportion of believers in the foremost ranks of science, literature, and art, and in all the learned professions. In every European country, in America, and in Australia there are numerous periodicals which diffuse a knowledge of its phenomena, its teachings, and its philosophy; while it claims to have profoundly modified the teaching of some among our clergy as to the nature and purpose of the future life. These facts and characteristics broadly distinguish modern spiritualism as being very different from anything that has preceded it, and claim for it a respectful consideration.

When the knockings and movements of furniture were first heard and seen they were assumed to be due to some trick or other natural cause, and there was in every case and throughout the whole course of the movement a strong prejudice against any other explanation of them. When the Fox family could not detect this cause the neighbours were called in, but equally without result. It was soon observed that the more violent sounds or motions occurred in the presence or in the immediate vicinity of one or other of the little girls, and every precaution was taken against possible trick on their part. They were closely watched, were

held hand and foot, were tied in bags or put to stand barefooted on pillows, but all in vain. The raps or loud knockings on doors or tables, on floor or ceiling, occurred just the same. But this was only a part of the phenomena. It was observed that the noises occurred at request, or as if in reply to observations. Then the alphabet was used, and questions were answered by raps at certain letters which, when written down, formed connected words and sentences. In this way the statement was elicited that the sounds were made by the spirit of a man who had been murdered in the house and buried in the cellar. After several explorations human bones with charcoal and lime were discovered there. Some confirmatory evidence as to this murder was obtained, and some of the previous dwellers in the house stated that they also had been disturbed by unaccountable noises. The excitement caused by these occurrences was so great that in order to satisfy the curiosity of visitors the Fox family were obliged to submit to public exhibitions and tests of the remarkable phenomena occurring in the presence of their children, and thus public mediumship began. But at the same time other mediums were discovered in different parts of the country, as if a special development of this abnormal power were then occurring. A few of the more remarkable of these mediums may be here briefly referred to.

In 1845 an altogether illiterate youth, Andrew Jackson Davis, the son of a poor weaver and apprenticed to a shoemaker at Poughkeepsie, New York, began to exhibit remarkable powers as a trance speaker and a clairvoyant healer of diseases. During his trances he exhibited such extensive knowledge of subjects quite beyond his waking abilities or acquirements as to attract the attention of learned men, and under their auspices he delivered in New York 157 lectures which were afterwards published in a volume of 800 pages. These powers have continued to be exerted during a long life. One of his disciples was Thomas Lake Harris (q.v.), whose *Lyric of the Golden Age*, a poem of 384 pages, was dictated in ninety-four hours, and in the opinion of William Howitt deserves the praise that has been given it of possessing almost Miltonic grandeur. Just about the same time (1846-50) the Davenport brothers began to exhibit the remarkable physical phenomena that puzzled so many observers in every part of the world; and it was about the year 1846 that the celebrated

medium Home, then thirteen years old, had his first vision of a boy friend, 300 miles away, who intimated to him that he had died three days before at a certain hour, which was afterwards found to be perfectly correct.

*Nature and Range of the Phenomena.*—In almost every case the medium is a person who in youth sees visions and hears voices which often communicate intelligence of distant and sometimes future events quite unknown to himself or family. Following such phenomena, and apparently to attract the attention of other persons, noises usually occur; sometimes voices are heard, and sometimes musical sounds. Then follow movements of material objects, either visibly or more often in the dark, or in such a way that the result only is seen. Rooms and even houses are sometimes shaken; bells sometimes ring violently without material cause; flowers, fruits, or other objects are brought from a distance into closed rooms, sometimes of particular kinds as desired at the moment by those present. Another curious phenomenon is the tying and untying of knots. Sometimes the medium is tied in such a manner that it is plainly impossible he could have so tied himself; sometimes when tied by other persons, and the knots and ends of the cords out of his reach, he is almost instantaneously released. Knots are sometimes tied on endless cords in a manner impossible by human agency, as in the experiments of Professor Zöllner.

A frequent phenomenon is the playing on musical instruments without human agency, as on an accordion held by the medium by one hand, and sometimes when held by spectators. Closed pianos are sometimes played on, while accordions or tambourines are, as it were, floated in the air and played upon at the same time.

Writing or drawing is often performed without human agency. Sometimes the writing occurs on papers held or thrown under the table, or when placed in locked drawers, or enclosed between slates tied or screwed together. Sometimes the writing thus obtained is in answer to questions which may be spoken or written, and either known or unknown to the medium. The drawings are of various kinds. Some are on slates with pencil or chalks, some on paper. Very effective drawings in crayons, water-colours, or oils are produced with extreme rapidity and under conditions which render normal human agency impossible. A Scottish

medium was accustomed to produce small landscapes in oils on cards privately marked by the witnesses and in total darkness, the result being seen with the paints still wet. These were usually effective and artistic works. In another case the space under a table was enclosed by a large shawl hanging to the ground. Marked cards were thrown underneath, and in from ten to fifteen seconds the drawings were complete. A number of these drawings were in the possession of the late Mr Benjamin Coleman, and were shown to the present writer. One in particular was on paper marked by Mr Coleman with two pin-holes by pins which were stuck through a small strip of paper which was kept as a proof of the identity of the paper so marked. The drawing that was made on this paper consisted of two birds holding a garland of flowers in their bills, and was so executed that the two pin-holes which had been made on the paper formed the eyes of the two birds, while their exact correspondence with the strip kept with the pins in it showed that the very paper Mr Coleman had so marked had been used. Lord Borthwick was present when these drawings were described, and confirmed Mr Coleman's account of them before the committee of the Dialectical Society in 1869.

One of the most striking of the physical phenomena is the levitation of the human body, which has occurred with many mediums, but has never been more thoroughly tested than with the late Mr Home. The extraordinary elongation of his body was also tested by many competent observers; while in his presence, as in that of some other mediums, heavy tables were often raised to a considerable height, or inclined at an angle of nearly 45°, without the numerous objects on the table, as books, glasses, lamps, &c., falling off.

A very marvellous phenomenon exhibited by Mr Home, and a very few other mediums, is the power of neutralising the action of fire, both in their own persons and in that of some of the spectators. Lord Lindsay (since 1880 Earl of Crawford) made the following statement before the Dialectical Society: 'I have frequently seen Home when in a trance go to the fire and take out large red-hot coals and carry them about in his hands, put them inside his shirt, &c. Eight times I have myself held a red-hot coal in my hands without injury, when it scorched my face on raising my hand. . . . A few weeks ago I was at a séance with eight others. Of these seven held a red-hot



coal without pain, and the two others could not bear the approach of it.' Lord Adare, Mr Jencken, and several others saw Mr Home stir the fire with his hands and then put his face right among the burning coals, moving it about as though bathing it in water. Mrs S. C. Hall, the Earl of Crawford, and several others saw Mr Home place a large lump of burning coal on Mr S. C. Hall's head and draw up his white hair over the red coal. It remained there several minutes. After it was taken away it burned the fingers of some who attempted to touch it. A number of other persons of the highest character have testified to similar occurrences with Mr Home.

Even more extraordinary, and still more remote from the normal powers of mankind, is the production of visible and tangible hands—which lift objects, and sometimes write, and then dissolve away—of faces, and even of entire figures, all under conditions which render imposture impossible. Both visible and invisible phantoms have had their objectivity proved by being photographed, and this has been done by experts who are above suspicion and under conditions which render the reality of the phenomena demonstrable. Both hands, feet, and faces of these phantom forms have produced moulds in melted paraffin, again under conditions which render imposture on the part of the mediums out of the question.

Yet another and final series of phenomena, which may be termed psychological or spiritual, are the seeing of spirits or spiritual forms invisible to others, hearing their voices, and by this means obtaining knowledge of circumstances occurring at a distance; or of facts unknown to any one present, but afterwards verified; or of future events which afterwards happen as predicted—of all of which there is ample evidence. Persons gifted with this power often give long and eloquent addresses, or have elaborate essays written through their hands, but without any conscious mental agency on their part; and it is from these communications that we acquire our most complete knowledge of the teaching and philosophy of modern spiritualism.

*Some Characteristics of Mediums.*—These numerous distinct classes of phenomena exhibit endless modifications in detail with different mediums, and there are several important considerations which are inconsistent with their being, to any considerable extent, due to imposture. In the first place, almost every medium exhibits his powers in youth or even



in childhood without any opportunity of learning the methods employed by professional conjurers. In the second place, each medium exhibits considerable individuality, and rarely, perhaps never, offers an exact reproduction of the phenomena occurring with other mediums. In the third place, all the phenomena occur sometimes in private houses, to which the medium comes without any apparatus whatever. In the fourth place, every class of phenomena has occurred with unpaid mediums, as well as with those who make mediumship a profession. And lastly, many of the most remarkable mediums have submitted to elaborate and careful tests by scientific and intelligent observers with results wholly beyond the powers of professional conjurers.

*Notable Investigators of the Phenomena.*—In order to appreciate the important bearing of such investigations on the theory that the whole body of spiritualistic phenomena are due to delusion or imposture, a few of the best known of these inquirers must be referred to. Perhaps the earliest scientific investigator was Dr Robert Hare (q.v.) of Philadelphia, an eminent chemist, especially known for his invention of ingenious apparatus. He, like all other earnest and patient inquirers, began under the impression that he would be able to expose a delusion; but all his experiments and tests, with apparatus of his own devising, proved that he had to deal with a great reality. He accordingly tried to induce the legislature to appoint a committee to examine and report on the experiments, and failing to succeed in this published his results in a volume entitled *Experimental Examination of the Spiritual Manifestations*.

Judge Edmonds, one of the most acute and painstaking of American lawyers, devoted years to a thorough examination of the phenomena, with the assistance of the most intelligent men of science and education among his acquaintance. He himself became a medium, as did his daughter; and this young lady, though possessing only the ordinary American school acquirements, was able when in a trance to speak many foreign languages, including modern Greek, and to hold conversations in them with natives.

Professors Mapes and Loomis, both chemists, assisted by two physicians and other friends, tested the Davenport brothers, and found that the phenomena occurring with them were in no way due to conjuring. This verdict was confirmed by

many inquirers in England, among others by the late Sir Richard Burton, the last man to be imposed upon by conjuring, and to endorse it as reality. Yet he says, in a published letter, 'I have now witnessed four of the so-called dark séances. These were all in private houses—one of them in my own lodgings. We rejected all believers, and chose the most sceptical and hard-headed of our friends and acquaintances, some of whom had prepared the severest tests. We provided carefully against all possibility of confederates, and brought our own cords, sealing-wax, tape, diachylon, musical instruments, and so forth. . . . Sparks of red and pale fire have fallen from the ceiling, sometimes perpendicularly, at other times crossing the room. Mr Fay's coat was removed whilst he was securely fastened hand and foot, and a lucifer match was struck at the same instant showing us the two gentlemen fast bound and the coat in the air on its way to the other end of the room. . . . I have spent a great part of my life in oriental lands, and have seen there many magicians. . . . I have read and listened to every explanation of the Davenport "tricks" hitherto placed before the public, and if anything would make me take that tremendous leap "from matter to spirit," it is the utter and complete unreason of the reasons by which the manifestations are explained.'

Among other investigators of known integrity and ability are Robert Dale Owen and Dr Robert Chambers, who investigated the phenomena with Kate Fox in New York, while the latter was the friend of Home, and wrote for him the introductory chapter and the appendix to his *Incidents of my Life*. Dr George Sexton, an earnest secularist teacher and lecturer, was converted by phenomena occurring in his own house and through mediums who were members of his own family or personal friends; and he afterwards investigated the materialisation phenomena occurring through Miss Cook. Mr Cromwell Varley, the electrician, tested the same phenomena by means of electrical apparatus. Dr Lockhart Robinson, after a long experience in the treatment of the insane, and having been a violent opponent of spiritualism as wholly founded on imposture and delusion, was converted by phenomena occurring in his own house in the presence of the American medium Squire. Professor Zöllner of Leipzig, in his work *Transcendental Physics*, has described the most marvellous phenomena occurring in his own study and under the

strictest test conditions, in the presence of the medium Slade with some of his fellow-professors as witnesses. And lastly, we have Mr William Crookes, one of the first chemists and physicists in Europe, who for several years (from 1870 to 1874) devoted a considerable portion of his time to the investigation of the phenomena, and had the courage to make public these experiments and their results. With several different mediums, in his own house and subject to the conditions of scientific experiment, he satisfied himself of the reality of the whole range of the phenomena here briefly described. So recently as 1889 he has published his notes of several sances with Mr Home, in the introductory observations to which he makes this important statement: 'Their publication will at any rate show that I have not changed my mind; that on dispassionate review of statements put forth by me nearly twenty years ago I find nothing to retract or to alter. I have discovered no flaw in the experiments then made, or in the reasoning I based upon them.'

*The Value of these Phenomena.*—In view of this long series of investigations by men of special training in science and of the highest reputation, spiritualists urge that the facts on which their beliefs are based are proved to be realities beyond all reasonable doubt. It may be asked, however, as many do ask, what is the meaning or the use of these strange phenomena? We feel no interest in moving furniture, floating bodies, fire-tests, or slate-writing. The answer is that to a very large number of minds these physical phenomena, however low and trivial they may seem, are the most effectual and often the only means of compelling attention to the subject, and this is more particularly the case with those imbued with the teachings of modern science. The moment such persons are really convinced that physical phenomena occur which they have always held and declared to be impossible, they see that there is something more in the matter than imposture or delusion, and further inquiry shows them that this class of facts constitute the mere outskirts of the subject. Almost all the agnostics and students of physical science who have become spiritualists—and they are to be counted by hundreds in every civilised country—have begun the investigation because they have been convinced that some of these lower physical phenomena are realities; and this fact is a complete answer to those who urge

that such phenomena are trivial, degrading, and unspiritual. If they are so, it shows that men of the highest education and greatest knowledge are attracted by these very qualities.

*The Teaching and Philosophy of Spiritualism.*—

But whenever we pass beyond these phenomena, and carefully examine the teachings and the philosophy to be found in the deliverances of automatic writers and trance-speakers, as well as in the normal writings of those who have long accepted and thoroughly assimilated these teachings, we enter upon a phase of the subject which no unprejudiced person will pronounce to be either useless or commonplace. The universal teaching of modern spiritualism is that the world and the whole material universe exist for the purpose of developing spiritual beings—that death is simply a transition from material existence to the first grade of spirit-life—and that our happiness and the degree of our progress will be wholly dependent upon the use we have made of our faculties and opportunities here. It is urged that the present life will assume a new value and interest when men are brought up not merely in the vascillating and questionable *belief*, but in the settled, indubitable *conviction*, that our existence in this world is really but one of the stages in an endless career, and that the thoughts we think and the deeds we do here will certainly affect our condition and the very form and organic expression of our personality hereafter.

As an example of the teaching of modern spiritualism as actually given through one of the most intelligent spiritualists and most trustworthy mediums, the following short passages from *Spirit Teachings*, by M.A., Oxon., must here suffice: 'As the soul lives in the earth-life, so it goes to the spirit-life. Its tastes, its predilections, its habits, its antipathies, they are with it still. It is not changed save in the accident of being freed from the body. The soul that on earth has been low in taste and impure in habit does not change its nature by passing from the earth-sphere any more than the soul that has been truthful, pure, and progressive becomes base and bad by death. . . . The soul's character has been a daily, hourly growth. It has not been an overlaying of the soul with that which can be thrown off; rather it has been a weaving into the nature of the spirit that which becomes part of itself, identified with its nature, inseparable from its character. It is no

more possible that that character should be undone, save by the slow process of obliteration, than that a woven fabric should be rudely cut and the threads remain intact. Nay more; the soul has cultivated habits that have become so engrained as to be essential parts of its individuality. The spirit that has yielded to the lusts of a sensual body becomes in the end their slave. It would not be happy in the midst of purity and refinement. It would sigh for its old haunts and habits. They are of its essence' (p. 13).

'Immutable laws govern the results of deeds. Deeds of good advance the spirit, whilst deeds of evil degrade and retard it. Happiness is found in progress, and in gradual assimilation to the God-like and perfect. The spirit of divine love animates the acts, and in mutual blessing the spirits find their happiness. For them there is no craving for sluggish idleness, no cessation of desire for progressive advancement in knowledge. Human passions and human needs and wishes are gone with the body, and the spirit lives a life of purity, progress, and love. Such is its heaven. We know of no hell save that within the soul: a hell which is fed by the flame of unpurified and untamed lust and passion, which is kept alive by remorse and agony of sorrow, which is fraught with the pangs that spring unbidden from the results of past misdeeds; and from which the only escape lies in retracing the steps and in cultivating the qualities which bear fruit in love and knowledge of God' (p. 77).

'We may sum up man's highest duty as a spiritual entity in the word Progress—in knowledge of himself, and of all that makes for spiritual development. The duty of man considered as an intellectual being, possessed of mind and intelligence, is summed up in the word Culture in all its infinite ramifications, not in one direction only, but in all; not for earthly aims alone, but for the grand purpose of developing the faculties which are to be perpetuated in endless development. Man's duty to himself as a spirit incarnated in a body of flesh is Purity in thought, word, and act. In these three words, Progress, Culture, Purity, we roughly sum up man's duty to himself as a spiritual, an intellectual, and a corporeal being' (p. 154).

The following works have been consulted in writing this article: *The History of the Supernatural*, by Wil-

liam Howitt (2 vols.); *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* and *The Debatable Land between this World and the Next*, by Robert Dale Owen; *Planchette, or the Despair of Science* and *The Proof Palpable of Immortality*, by Epes Sargent; *Report on Spiritualism of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society*; *Primitive Christianity and Modern Spiritualism*, by Eugene Crowell, M.D.; *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, by William Crookes, F.R.S.; *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, by the present writer; *Transcendental Physics*, by Professor Zöllner (trans. by C. C. Massey); *Spirit Teachings*, published by M.A., Oxon.; *D. D. Home: his Life and Mission*, by Mme. Dunglas Home; and a review of this work by Professor W. F. Barrett and F. W. H. Myers, in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, July 1889.