

PROCEEDINGS OF THE GENERAL MEETING ON

Monday, May 3, 1886.

The twentieth General Meeting of the Society was held at the Rooms of the Society of British Artists, Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, on Monday, May 3, 1886.

F. W. H. MYERS, Esq., IN THE CHAIR.

The following paper was read:—

III.

RESULTS OF A PERSONAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE
PHYSICAL PHENOMENA OF SPIRITUALISM.
WITH SOME CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE EVIDENCE FOR THE
GENUINENESS OF SUCH PHENOMENA.

BY MRS. HENRY SIDGWICK.

By the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, I mean those which, if correctly described, and not due to conscious or unconscious trickery, nor to hallucination on the part of the observer, exhibit a hitherto unknown force acting in the physical world, otherwise than through the brain or muscles of the medium. They are thus distinguished from the automatic phenomena, of which writing by the medium's hand, trance-speaking, and table-turning with contact are examples.

The physical phenomena alleged to occur consist in raps, or, as Mr. Crookes calls them, percussive sounds; in movements and levitation of furniture and other objects without contact; the playing of musical instruments, the appearance of lights, the human voice and musical sounds produced without instruments; the materialisation of human hands, faces, and complete figures; psychography, or direct writing and drawing without human intervention; spirit photography, or photographing of human and other forms invisible to all but specially endowed seers; unfastening of cords and bonds, elongation of the medium's body, the power of handling red hot coals, and the passage of solids through solids without disintegration.

My own experience does not include the whole of these phenomena, and is entirely inconclusive as to the genuineness of any, except, I

regret to say, in certain cases where I clearly ascertained them to be spurious and fraudulent. In the first part of my paper I shall give an account of some of this experience. It is, of course, but one small contribution to the discussion, and does not in any way settle the important question whether the physical phenomena of Spiritualism are ever genuine. Many other witnesses have given their testimony, and there is a mass of literature on the subject. A good deal of this, however, seems to have been written rather in order to call attention to the subject than to convince, and at any rate gives so little detail either as to the Phenomena themselves, or as to the precautions taken to avoid deception and mistakes, that it can scarcely claim any scientific value. As regards the rest, I shall endeavour to show, in the second part of my paper, that the difficulties of the investigation have been underrated, and that, consequently, tests have been too easily accepted as decisive. On this ground much even of the remaining evidence—though not all—has also, in my opinion, to be rejected. I shall, however, only enter into general considerations, without giving the results of my examination of particular cases, since it would require a volume to do this in detail.

I.

My own practical experience in Spiritualism began in 1874, at a séance with Miss Showers, which I well remember on account of the interest excited by the idea that, notwithstanding the very inconclusive character of the phenomena that occurred, we might possibly be communicating with beings belonging to another world.

But my first séance of any importance was with Mrs. Jencken, formerly Kate Fox, one of the three sisters who started modern Spiritualism. The most striking séance I had with her was the fourth of a series held at my own residence, when we obtained a word written on a sheet of our own paper, under the table, in light which I believe would have been good enough to read ordinary print by. We thought that Mr. and Mrs. Jencken both had their hands above the table, and we could not detect any movement of their legs. But we were not well placed for observing this, as we were continually instructed by the "spirits" to lean over the table. The séance must have very much resembled one with Mrs. Jencken's sister, Mrs. Underhill, described by Mr. Dale Owen in the *Debateable Land*, p. 298. It impressed me a good deal, though even at the time—in those early days of our investigation, when our experience was less than it is now—we thought that Mrs. Jencken might have written the word with her foot, and the writing is just of the quality which can be so written without much difficulty.

Within the last three years I have again had two short series of séances with Mrs. Jencken; but again with no conclusive results, except the discovery that she or her "spirits" are willing to claim, as Spiritualistic phenomena, accidental occurrences quite unconnected with her presence, and that she endeavours, as far as possible, to obtain from oneself the information required to answer one's question.

The raps that occur with Mrs. Jencken are, as is well-known, peculiar—quite unlike what one can produce oneself by rapping with the foot. They are loud double knocks, acquiring a special sound from the table, floor, door or other object on which they appear to be made. They will occur on the floor, causing it to vibrate, when she is standing up and her hands and the front part of her feet are visible and apparently motionless, and they will occur, if I remember rightly, both when her shoes are on and when they are off. In short, they are distinctly puzzling. As early as 1851, however, three medical professors of the University of Buffalo in America, Drs. Flint, Lee, and Coventry, investigated the double rap occurring in the presence of Mrs. Jencken's sisters—(Margaretta Fox now Mrs. Kane, and Mrs. Fish now Mrs. Underhill)—and concluded that they were produced by rapid partial dislocation and replacement of the knee joints and perhaps others.¹ They stated that they had experimented with another lady who could "exhibit all the phenomena of the sounds belonging" to what were then known as the Rochester Knockings (from the place where they first became known). She did it by partially dislocating the knee joint by an act of the will without any obvious movement of the limb, occasioning a loud noise; the return of the bone to its place giving a second sound and thus making the double rap. Challenged by Mrs. Fish, they tried some experiments with her and Margaretta Fox, which strongly supported their view. When the mediums placed themselves as they pleased, raps occurred as usual, but when they were placed by the Professors with their legs extended in front of them, their feet not touching each other, and their heels resting on cushions, in which position the necessary leverage was unattainable, no raps occurred. Nor did they when Miss Fox had her feet down, and Dr. Lee held her knees at the side over her dress, except when he intentionally relaxed the pressure, when two or three faint raps were heard. Knockings went on as usual when these precautions were not taken, but stopped the moment the knees were seized hold of. Mrs. Fish did not deny that the raps failed to occur under the conditions imposed by the Professors while they were present, but she asserted that they had occurred afterwards under the same conditions in the presence of other gentlemen

¹ See E. W. Capron, *Modern Spiritualism*, Boston, 1856.

whom she named, but who do not seem to have come forward with their testimony. I regret that I was unaware of this explanation when I saw Mrs. Jencken, but our own experiments to some extent supported it, though not directed to that object, for no raps occurred when Mrs. Jencken sat with her feet in my lap, nor while she stood on a hassock with her hand on the door on which the raps were to be made, while I held back her skirts with a shawl; nor when she stood on the floor and I clasped her round the knees; but I do not lay stress on this last case as I do not think the pressure was of the kind required to prevent the lateral displacement of the joints described.

Our next medium was again an American—a professional medium—Mrs. Eva Fay. Besides a dark séance of an utterly inconclusive character, Mrs. Fay's ordinary performance consisted in a séance, during which she sat with her hands tied together behind her back to a staple in the wall, and her neck tied to another staple. Various objects were placed on her lap, a curtain held up in front of her, and immediately the objects on her lap were moved about in various ways, a glass of water drunk, a pattern cut out of paper with scissors, &c. Without quite understanding how she did these things, we thought a simpler mode of fastening would be more satisfactory, and accordingly carefully sewed a tape or ribbon tightly round each wrist and fastened them to two separate staples, one on each side of her.¹ This position must have been much more comfortable than the one she prescribed, but no phenomena occurred, and she declined a proposal for further experiments. Later on we were shown by a conjurer a trick by which her own method of tying might have operated.

So far our experiences were not very encouraging, but in the autumn of this year, 1874, our hopes were considerably raised by hearing at first-hand of some remarkable physical phenomena—raps, levitation of the table, transportation of objects which took place in a party consisting entirely of friends. Unfortunately these sittings were discontinued by the medium of the party, on account of health, after a very short time.

I now come to what was by far the most important series of experiments we have made, those with Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb (now Mrs. Mellon), of Newcastle, who, I believe, first developed as mediums for materialisation in the summer of 1874. Our attention had been called to this branch of the subject by Mr. Crookes's experiments with Miss Cook, accounts of which were published in this same year. I need hardly explain to my present readers that in a

¹ I write this from recollection, having kept no notes of séances with Mrs. Fay. Almost all the other experiences I describe were recorded in note-books immediately after their occurrence.

materialisation séance the medium generally sits apart from the rest of the circle in what is technically called a "cabinet," but may be an adjoining room, or any portion of the séance room suitably screened off from the rest, so that he or she may be in almost total darkness, while the remainder of the circle enjoy a subdued light—usually *very* subdued. It is the business of the investigators to satisfy themselves that any figure which may come out of the cabinet is neither a made-up figure, nor the medium, nor a confederate. While the materialisation goes on the medium is usually supposed to be in a trance and unconscious.

Mr. Sidgwick, Mr. Myers, and Mr. Gurney had a series of séances for materialisation with Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb in January, February, and March, 1875, at Newcastle. I was not there myself nor at six séances held in April, in London, at the lodgings of one of the party. The precautions taken to prevent the medium coming out of the cabinet consisted in various modes of tying and sealing, to the wall and into bags. They seemed pretty complete, the hypothesis of confederacy was difficult, and living figures undoubtedly came out into the room. Still, though we did not see how the thing could be done by trickery, we did not consider that decisive evidence had yet been obtained. The séances were now adjourned to the house where I lived. It was decided to discard the bag as too complicated, and tying round the neck with silk and sealing because it had so often been necessary to cut the silk, and because it seemed better to dispense with seals, which might, we thought, in the long hours spent by the mediums in the dark cabinet, be undone and reproduced by means of impressions taken in clay or bread. It would have been difficult to use a light for this purpose without detection, but perhaps not impossible, and I am not sure that seals cannot be manipulated without a light. In all our tests from this time forward we aimed at avoiding all possibility of physical discomfort to the medium. Long leather straps, cut out of single hides, so as to have no joining in them, were first used to secure the mediums, and were fastened round their waist and ankles by means of letter padlocks, which were thought superior to ordinary locks as avoiding the possibilities of duplicate keys and of picking. The other ends of the straps were similarly attached to marble pillars that supported the mantelpiece in the room which was used as a cabinet,—a small boudoir opening out of the drawing-room where the investigating circle sat. A door opening from this boudoir on to the landing was carefully secured to avoid all danger of confederacy. It was not only locked in the usual way, but a leather strap was passed through the keyhole and through a hole in the door-post and fastened with a letter lock. Of course the words used for the different letter locks were different, and were changed every day.

I may here remark parenthetically that I have been very much surprised in reading accounts of séances at the confidence sometimes placed in locks, in cases where the medium could have no difficulty whatever in possessing himself of a duplicate key. Some other precautions taken to secure doors and other fastenings seem very inadequate; for instance, the gummed paper recommended by some mediums, which, in most cases, could easily be removed and replaced without detection.

Having arranged our tests as described, we began a series of four séances. At the first a vague white figure, which might have been a doll or perhaps mere drapery, appeared at the doorway, but did not come out. The second was a complete failure. At the third a small vague figure again appeared, and raps were made in places beyond the reach, we thought, of the hands or feet of the medium, but of course she might have brought something with her to make these with. We were getting depressed, especially as on this last occasion the disenchantment took a very long time, and finally left Miss Wood talking wildly, and apparently under the delusion that she had shot some one and was in gaol. We tried to get her upstairs to bed in the house, but she resisted so much that we had to give it up, and finally she was taken home to her lodgings about 6.15 in the morning, quiet, but still seemingly under the same delusion. The séance had begun at 7 p.m. She did not apparently recover her sanity till the following day. Whether all this was simulated it is difficult to say. There is some evidence on both sides. Somewhat similar phenomena, long entrancement, &c., occurred on other occasions. Once Miss Wood remained apparently in a sort of trance for about 51 hours, but the doctor who was called in thought it probable that she was pretending, as she would not allow him to feel her pulse. On the other hand, Miss Fairlamb had once to be brought out of the cabinet in a state which a doctor who was present said was a real faint—low fluttering pulse, &c.—impossible to simulate, though not impossible to induce artificially.

But to return to the séances I was describing. At the fourth Miss Fairlamb was the medium—Miss Wood not present at all—and an undoubtedly material human figure came to the doorway, stood there with its right foot on a chair, and allowed two members of the circle to come close to it and touch it. The only question was as to the sufficiency of the tests. The medium had been fastened round the waist and the left ankle, and when we experimented with the same fastenings ourselves, we found that she had come forward exactly as far as the ankle fastening would allow, supposing she had got free from the waist fastening. The left ankle—the one that was fastened—had not been shown. All therefore turned on the waist strap, and this we

reluctantly concluded on examination, had not been so tight as to make it certain that she could not get out of it. This was not creditable to me, who helped to fasten her, but in my defence I must say that she was intentionally not fastened very tightly, in order to avoid the plea of discomfort which had been urged on previous occasions as a reason for removing certain fastenings, or as interfering with the manifestations, and the margin in the case of the waist is small.

So ended this series; and at the next, which was held at the same place in the following July, and lasted three weeks, a different test was used. The medium lay, without any fastening, in a hammock which was suspended over a pulley fixed to the ceiling of the cabinet, the other end of the suspending rope being attached to a spring balance which recorded¹ the weight of the hammock and its contents, and which was watched by one of the circle. There was an arrangement by which the member of the circle sitting by the spring balance could lower the hammock while the form was out (should one appear), so as to defeat any attempt to produce a constant pull on the balance by fastening the hammock to the floor or other part of the cabinet. The sésances were nearly unsuccessful until the last. On the Friday and Saturday preceding the sitters had been brought up one by one to what purported to be materialised forms, but the face was not in a place in which it would have been impossible for the medium's face to be, and on the Friday it appeared to some members of the circle that the face was not satisfactorily connected with the drapery that purported to conceal the body. On Saturday, the 24th, at the last of the series of twelve sésances, Miss Fairlamb was placed in the hammock, and Mr. Sidgwick observed the indicator of the balance. After some time Miss Wood went into the cabinet for a few moments "to give power," as it was said, and took in a light chair with her. Of course the cabinet was, to the best of our belief, destitute of furniture, or of any objects which could be placed in the hammock, and so far as we knew the mediums were never alone there before the sésance began. After Miss Wood had joined the circle again, the weight went down to about 60lb.—a very little over. Then a form came out and kissed me through the white veil in which it was wrapped. Miss Wood was still in her seat, and this kiss could not have been given by Miss Fairlamb without leaving the hammock, and at the moment it was given Mr. Sidgwick lowered the hammock a few inches without producing any change in the weight indicated. So far things looked promising, for a certain fall of weight was not to be taken in itself as a presumption against the genuine-

¹ The apparatus was self-registering so far as the extreme changes of weight were concerned, but did not record the times at which the changes took place. It was for this reason that it required watching.

ness of the phenomena, since it is thought by some Spiritualists that the medium may lose weight during a materialisation. Afterwards Miss Wood was called up to the form, which looked small and did not move very easily—it might have been a woman on her knees—and led it to various members of the circle. Two other forms afterwards came out in succession; the weight remaining approximately constant. When the last had retired, the disenfranchisement began, Miss Wood going again into the cabinet to help it.

After the séance I asked leave to search Miss Fairlamb. This she sharply and decidedly declined. She was reminded that she had agreed to be searched, but she said that was before not after the séance. This refusal produced an unfavourable impression on us, and left the evidence at best inconclusive. It was not impossible, though rather remarkable, that the amount of weight required should have been brought in to the cabinet by Miss Wood when she went in "to give power," and the idea that extra weight had been carried by the girls was rather supported by the fact that they had that day come in a cab instead of walking, as I believe they usually did.

However, we still did not think it right to drop the investigation, and as some friends of the mediums at Newcastle offered a more or less plausible explanation of the refusal to be searched, another series of séances was held with them through a period of three weeks, in August and September, 1875, at Cambridge. The results were again inconclusive, and in some respects suspicious. For the form came out of the cabinet three times, and it was found by trial afterwards that the medium could each time have come just so far without breaking loose from the fastenings. This coincidence was suggestive.

In the following October Mr. Myers had some further séances with the two girls at Newcastle, and once saw Miss Wood come out of the cabinet accompanied by a form, which, if not a materialised spirit, was an accomplice, and it was difficult to suppose that an accomplice could have got in without detection, though not absolutely impossible. This was again encouraging, and in January, 1877, we tried a final series of séances for materialisation at Newcastle. Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb had by this time quarrelled, and used to sit separately. We first used, as a means of securing Miss Wood, a long bag of machine-made white net, which she got into head and all. The bag was so long that the end could be brought *outside* the cabinet, where it was drawn together with tape, and the ends of the tape nailed and sealed to the wall close to the mouth of the bag. We held four séances in this way with no result, and then the "spirits," through Miss Wood, told us to give up that test. Then we substituted a graduated tape, tied round the neck, and another round the ankle. The tape was sealed below the knot on to a piece of paper, and the seals traced round with pencil, and

later with sympathetic ink, which we thought would betray the fact if heat were applied to the seals. The ends of the tapes were brought out of the cabinet, nailed through large sheets of white paper to the floor, and sealed over the nails. The light allowed at these séances was exceedingly poor. A small white figure came to the entrance of the cabinet—a brightish but irregularly shaped object, which on one occasion danced up and down, and which I remember thinking at the time might be the pillow provided for Miss Wood's head. This occurred at three successive séances. At the fourth we were told by raps that the medium was choking. I went to examine, and found that the knot had been moved an inch or more away from the seal, and close up to the neck, so that the tape appeared too tight. The "spirit," speaking through Miss Wood, claimed to have done this in playing with it. After vainly attempting to loosen the knot, which I could not do in the bad light, I cut the tape and removed it, leaving the ankle tape as the only security. We heard a good deal of rustling of the paper to which this was sealed, more than at any previous séance. After a considerable time, and much singing and talking, a figure—apparently that of a full-grown woman—draped in white, came out. The light was too low to distinguish anything but the general outline of the figure. I think the face was veiled, and when she touched my hand I could feel something like soft muslin between her hand and mine. The figure (twice at least) came out too far from the point where the tape was attached to the floor for it to be possible that it could be Miss Wood, with her ankle still bound. When the figure had finally retreated, we were kept a long time waiting and singing, before the séance was declared at an end. We then examined the fastening, and found the attachment to the floor intact, but the seal near the knot torn from the paper and split, one half remaining attached to each tape. A slight strain required to bring the two halves of the seal together showed that the knot was not exactly as it had been, and judging by knots made on other nights which I had kept, it was much tighter than I had made it. Also the part of the tape round the ankle was creased, strained, and dirty all over, as if it had been much handled and pulled, while after the previous séances it had been quite flat and unstrained, only dirtied in some spots obviously by the blacking on the boot, not by handling. We felt sure that either it had been forced over the heel, or that a loop large enough to pass over the foot had been obtained by moving the knot to a place below the seal,—an operation which the splitting of the seal rendered just possible. At any rate the indications of deception were palpable and sufficient, and we were not surprised to hear a few months later that a more aggressive investigator had violated the rules of the séance, and captured Miss Wood personating the "spirit."

Some persons may perhaps wonder why we had not adopted such summary methods of investigation ourselves, but there was an implied understanding with the medium that we should not do so, which we should not have felt justified in breaking. It used to be alleged, too, at that time, that great injury to the medium, and even death might ensue from interfering with the materialised form; but though such seizures have now been very numerous, no permanent injury has ever been done by them to a medium, so far as I have been able to learn. Temporary disturbance seems to have occurred, but not more than might be expected as the result of a sometimes severe struggle with the captor, or of the shock and annoyance of exposure. For my own part, though I have no wish myself to adopt such methods of investigation, I think that both Spiritualists and non-Spiritualists ought to recognise that "exposers" have thrown valuable light on the subject.

While these final séances were going on with Miss Wood, we were also holding séances with Miss Fairlamb under different conditions, but with the same general result, namely, that all that occurred was within the power of the medium. We were also then concluding a series of collateral investigation with some other Newcastle mediums—the Petty family, who exhibited somewhat similar manifestations. This investigation had been carried on as long as those with Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb, and with equally unsatisfactory results; but it would be tedious to go into details.

I have abandoned chronology in following our experiences with the Newcastle mediums. I have now to observe that several other unsuccessful and unsatisfactory series of séances contributed to the thoroughly unfavourable impression left by that last set at Newcastle. Thus, in the summer of 1876, we had an instructive series of four séances with a medium named Edward Bullock. At the first three very little occurred. The medium was accompanied by his mother, and perhaps she perceived that the conditions were not sufficiently favourable for fraud, and warned him. To the fourth séance he came alone. For the first part of the séance darkness was required, but as it was afternoon it was difficult quite to exclude the daylight, and, as a matter of fact, a little got round the curtains and faintly illumined the wall of the room behind the medium, enabling my sister and me to see him as a dark figure against a comparatively light background. Mr. Sidgwick and another gentleman who completed the circle faced the source of light, and could not see him. We all held hands round a Pembroke table, the medium's hands being held by me on one side and by the gentleman already mentioned on the other. The medium made slight twitching movements as on former occasions. Presently I saw him lean forward over the table with his head low

down, but carefully keeping the hand I held in the same position as before. On the table were a musical box, a tambourine, and a bell. The two former were moved about and raps made with them, and both lids of the musical box were opened and shut. But none of these things occurred except when the medium was leaning over the table sufficiently to enable him to reach them with his nose and teeth. The bell was quite out of his reach, and was not moved at all. Sometimes he seemed almost to stand with a view to leaning over further, and when anything occurred that would require considerable exertion, I felt his hand grasp mine more tightly. The tambourine also floated about in the air. When this happened we saw the medium's head and body moving from side to side with an object like a tambourine projecting horizontally from his mouth. The tambourine was finally dropped on my lap, where it remained. The medium was not entranced, and was undoubtedly cheating deliberately, for he volunteered remarks about the phenomena, *e.g.*, about the tambourine touching him in its passage through the air. The gentleman who held the medium's left hand, and who was not placed so as to be able to see what was going on, was of a sensitive organisation, and felt during the performances the sensations which he always experienced at successful spiritualistic séances—shudderings and convulsive movements of the arms, I think they were—which shows that sensations of this kind afford no evidence of the genuineness of the manifestations.

This dark séance was followed by a so-called light one. The light allowed was feeble, but as will be seen it was too strong for the medium's purpose. He sat behind curtains which were pinned in front of his body so as to allow his legs, with his hands resting on his knees, to be visible. The light was sufficient to enable us dimly to see the hands. Presently we perceived that a handkerchief was placed on the left knee so as to bear a coarse resemblance to a hand, and subsequently by looking closely, the hand on the right knee was discerned to be a left hand. Lights then appeared, tambourine and bell were vigorously moved about in the cabinet, &c. Afterwards, in the course of futile attempts to draw the musical box into the cabinet, an arm was exhibited with a sleeve very like the medium's. We then observed the handkerchief slowly removed and the hand substituted, and the séance was declared at an end. Just before the removal of the handkerchief, it was observed that the hand on the right knee was now a right hand.

Probably Mr. Bullock was not a really skilful performer, and he may have acted wisely in his own interests when he gave up the career of medium and took to that of exposé of Spiritualism, as he did six or seven months later. We never told him what we had seen. Even Mr. Bullock, however, took in some people and enjoyed a brilliant, though

brief career as a medium. Wonderful accounts of him may be found in the *Medium* newspaper for 1876. At our séance the gentleman whom I have already spoken of as present saw none of the indications of the medium's own agency, except a movement which he thought suspicious when the handkerchief was first placed on the knee.

About this time we had some private séances with Mr. Williams, but nothing of the least interest occurred. These with some in 1874 made up about eight or nine séances which Mr. Sidgwick has had with Williams. Only one manifestation of any importance took place, and that was the transference of a chimney ornament from the mantelpiece to the table, which happened at the very moment when Mr. Sidgwick jumped up to meet a late arriving member of the circle, and in doing so let go of the medium's hand, so that the solitary phenomenon coincided with a solitary opportunity for performing it by natural means.

I pass over several single séances of an inconclusive character with various mediums, of which the chief value was the experience gained at them, and come next to Dr. Slade's visit to England in 1876. We had about ten séances with him for slate-writing chiefly at his lodgings, but once in our own room and with our own table. We always obtained writing, but never under circumstances which appeared to us completely satisfactory, and when at the last séance he presented to us unasked, and under circumstances peculiarly favourable to a change of slates, a slate full of conversation-book phrases in five languages, and a text out of the Greek Testament, we had no longer any hesitation in drawing up a report to the effect that we thought he was probably merely a conjurer.

I give this report, which is dated September 10th, 1876, in full, though it is not written exactly as, in the light of further experience, I should have written it now.

The impression on my mind after about 10 séances with Dr. Slade—(about five in July and August, and five last week,—is that the phenomena are produced by tricks. I am inclined to think that no one ever sees the slate quite continuously from the moment they see it blank on both sides to the moment they see writing on it. I think it probably always disappears for one or more intervals (however short) under the table, and that during those intervals Dr. Slade sometimes changes it (having another concealed about his person, about the table, or about his chair), and sometimes rests it on his knee, or against the table, supporting the other end with his sleeve or his little finger, and writes on it. It is easy to write noiselessly on a slate with his fragments of pencil—quite as easy or easier than to make the loud sound usually heard.

I doubt the continuous seeing of the slate, because at the last four séances when we were carefully watching for that, we never once saw it continuously. At the previous séance—at which I was in the best place for observation—my attention was concentrated on observing whether he turned

the slate in bringing it from under the table, which he certainly did not do. On thinking over the séance afterwards I could not remember that I had seen it continuously, though I had a very strong impression that I had done so. I now think that impression was probably false.

We took our own marked slate to these five last séances, and told Dr. Slade we were very anxious to get it written on while we held it in our own hands, or while it lay on the top of the table. We did once get writing apparently done while the slate lay on the table, but had no opportunity of seeing the under surface immediately before.

Dr. Slade had arranged that the last séance on Friday should take place in the evening after dinner. On Thursday he made me (I sat opposite him) hold our slate between me and Mr. Sidgwick in hopes of getting it written on. No writing came. On Friday when we arrived he told us that he felt extremely ill owing to a trying séance with a man who had a bad influence on him, and who had besides searched him more or less and generally made himself very disagreeable. He had been suffering from palpitations ever since. The spirits also informed us through him in a trance that they meant to do great things; would write on the slate held by me if they could, and that if Dr. Slade suffered from the effort they must be responsible. Dr. Slade made us hold our slate between us, and himself held one of his own. Mr. Sidgwick was next him, I opposite. After a few scrawls, &c., Dr. Slade held his slate tight against the table, and a long message (apparently) began to be written. At the same time Dr. Slade began to look very uncomfortable and to complain of feeling so. In a faltering voice he told Mr. Sidgwick to take hold of one corner of the slate. Mr. Sidgwick made attempts to see more under the table, but every time he moved Dr. Slade begged him to sit still, as every movement he made affected him (Dr. Slade). Presently he became entranced, and the spirits told us through him that the moment the writing ceased (the sound was going on all this time) we must go into the next room and send in the secretary with a glass of wine, or Dr. Slade would go into a rigid trance. After 10 minutes we were to return and continue the séance. He came out of the trance a little before the writing ceased, then brought the slate up on to the table and gave it to us. We took it into the next room and sent in the wine as directed. The slate was written on all over one side with sentences (of no interest) in each of the following languages—French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, English. The Greek was a quotation from the New Testament, the others complimentary phrases. The remainder of the séance was short, and nothing of interest occurred. The writing described above was rather neatly done, and the dots and accents put with so much precision where they were meant to be that it is impossible to suppose the writing was done by any man who could not see what he was doing.

The more we think over this séance the more suspicious it appears to us. The arrangements seemed so well contrived for deception. Being in the evening the light was necessarily less good, and though there was bright gas-light it was above the table, which threw a shadow. It was ingeniously contrived that Dr. Slade should use his own slate (thus getting an opportunity of changing) though we brought one ourselves. The illness gave him an opportunity of getting us hastily out of the room so that he could safely dispose of the second slate. I also thought the time occupied in

apparently writing seemed unnecessarily long, but as I did not time it this impression goes for very little.

At the first séance we were at in July, I saw part of his hand moving as though writing and fancied the slate was resting on his knee. This occurred for two successive messages, a longish one and a short one. Each time the hand moved backwards and forwards about as much as would have been required to write the message, and each time I had no opportunity of seeing the portion of the slate on which the message was written, between this movement of his hand, and the time when the sound of writing came and the slate was produced written on. At the time I thought we were on the way to discover the trick, but at the next séance I observed the same movement and afterwards saw the slate with nothing on it. I now think he probably makes the same movements without producing results that he does in order to produce them, with a view of disarming suspicion. Thus on one occasion he laid the slate on the table to get it written on and made a difficulty about showing us the under side. We insisted, and there was nothing there. He then said we had broken the power for that time by insisting on seeing the under side.

I have never thought any of the phenomena other than writing which I have seen with Dr. Slade worth considering as evidence. My chair was raised with me on it, Dr. Slade's knee being against the side of the chair, and his hand on its back. The chair in the well-known place on the fourth side of the table, quite within Dr. Slade's reach I think, was several times raised and upset. A table ran forward from the corner behind Dr. Slade, but he was leaning very much forward at the time (because the slate insisted on being allowed to go far under the table) and I think his leg probably stuck out behind him, and his foot hooked to the leg of the moving table. Touches and grasps under the table can, I think, be done with the foot. A particular soft touch on the right side of the right leg of the person next Dr. Slade was often repeated, and though it must be rather difficult to get his foot there without ever letting his leg touch other people's, I think it would be possible, and it is suspicious that the touch so often comes in the same spot. We saw a hand one day in rapid movement between Mr. Sidgwick's body and the table, but it was when Dr. Slade's hand was under the table by way of holding the slate.

So much for our own experience. With regard to other people's, it is noticeable that there is no record, as far as I have seen in the *Spiritualist*, of a long message being written on a marked slate—thus excluding the possibility of the slate being changed. In Miss Jeffrey's case (as in ours) an excuse seems to have been made to use Dr. Slade's slate, instead of the one she brought, for the long message. As to the really important point of whether the slate was seen quite continuously—I do not think it is stated in any communication to the *Spiritualist*, except one from W. Whitear in the *Spiritualist* for August 25th. I cannot recall whether private friends have stated that they saw the slate continuously from the moment they saw it blank to the moment they saw it written on.¹

My theory of the way the writing may be done does not account for the

¹ As will be seen later in this paper, further experience has led me to the conclusion that observers may be easily deceived as to the fact of their own continuous observation.

person holding the slate feeling a pressure which seemed to follow the course of, and to be due to, the writing. This happened to Mr. Sidgwick when the writing in many languages was by way of being done, and also to a friend of ours.¹ Nor does it account, I think, in all cases for the sound, which cannot be produced by Dr. Slade scratching the slate when his hand is not on it.

There remains, too, Serjeant Cox's positive statements that various movements of objects occurred when Dr. Slade's hands were on the table upon his hands, and his whole body to his feet fully before his eyes, and when he was certain that not a muscle moved. (See *Spiritualist* for August 11th and 25th, 1876.) We were seldom able to see the whole of Dr. Slade's body, nor "by moving our heads slightly to see the whole space below the table," owing to the position in which Dr. Slade kept our hands. I think Serjeant Cox's statement that the chair which was lifted was far beyond any possible stretch of Dr. Slade's legs, and that the knee grasped was beyond his reach, must from his own account be (to say the least) exaggerated.

I have not stated five general grounds of suspicion which probably occur to everyone—namely, his conjurer-like way of trying to distract one's attention, his always sitting so as to have his right hand to manipulate the slate, the vague and general character of the communications, his compelling one to sit with one's hands in a position that makes it difficult to look under the table, and his only allowing two sitters at a time.

A few days after I wrote this report, Professor Lankester had his celebrated séance with Dr. Slade, and his exposure, so far as it went, supported the view to which our experience had led; but some of the evidence elicited at the trial which followed, shook for a time our confidence in our conclusions. Further experience, however, of the possibilities of conjuring, and of the extent to which even intelligent people may be deceived, combined with Dr. Slade's persistent objection to using securely locked and sealed slates brought by the sitters, have brought us back to the conviction that his performance is conjuring, and nothing but conjuring; the more so that other persons besides Professor Lankester affirm that they have caught him tricking. But his tricks certainly are and were clever, and as I know of two conjurers who visited him with friends of ours and failed to discover his *modus operandi*, I do not think it argues stupidity in a witness unacquainted with conjuring, if he fails to find it out either.

¹ From experiments I have since tried I think this experience must be due to imagination. By resting a slate on two tables, placing the hand on it, and getting some one to write on the under side, it can, I think, be ascertained that the vibrations cannot be followed in this way. I have also learnt experimentally that the sound of slate-writing cannot easily be localised with certainty, and that there are several ways of imitating it. It is worth remarking that one of the worst positions for localising the sound, if it be not on the slate, is with the ear on it. The illusion that the writing is being done on the slate is then easily produced in a person who does not know that the sound of real writing on it would generally under the circumstances be quite startlingly loud.—May, 1886.

I have never seen slate-writing with Mr. Eglinton. Three sittings I have had with him have been perfect blanks, and he is almost the only medium out of 18 or 20 I have sat with, with whom I have witnessed no phenomena at all.

As an appendix to my narrative of personal experiences, I will add an account of some séances at which I was not present but which were conducted by the group of investigators to which I belonged, and have in various ways strongly influenced my view of the subject. They were a series with Mr. Haxby at the house of some friends of ours, Mr. and Mrs. H., in 1878. A sister of mine was present, and I have her written account, which is almost the same to me as my own, because she and I have investigated so much together that I know the exact value of her statements. At the séance I shall first speak of there were present the host and hostess, Serjeant Cox, Mr. and Mrs. Volckmann, my sister, two other ladies and a gentleman, and the medium. The cabinet consisted of an oblong space curtained off in one corner of the room. Mrs. Guppy-Volckmann sat at one end of the circle, or rather horseshoe, next the cabinet, and not more than two or three feet from it; Mrs. H. next to her, and my sister at the other end of the circle, so that she and Mrs. Volckmann were the two sitters nearest to the cabinet. "The light was that of a small oil lamp, with a coloured opaque shade, turned low, and with two books in front of it." It stood behind the sitters near the corner of the room (a small one) furthest from the cabinet. "There was also a little light from the fire." During the séance Abdullah and Toby—two supposed materialised spirits—successively appeared. My sister's account goes on as follows:—

The difference between Toby and Abdullah is simply that the former always appears considerably more bent than the latter, without beard or head ornaments, and with sleeves (I think). All that would be necessary to turn Abdullah into Toby would be to pull the large handkerchief which hangs [from Abdullah's head down his back] over the forehead, so as to conceal the ornaments, and to pull down the sleeves. Abdullah [dematerialised and materialised in the circle, that is, he] appeared to most of the circle to diminish in size, and finally vanish in front of the opening of the curtains of the cabinet, and also to appear in the same place and gradually grow up to his full size. This happened more than once. From my position being nearer than anyone else's, and from my seeing Abdullah more in profile while growing and diminishing, I was able to see the whole process distinctly. He went down on his knees—rather hastily—(others observing this too)—and then gradually bent down and forwards, moving his body back into the cabinet as he did so, and keeping the curtains closed above him. Finally he went flat on the ground, leaving only his head exposed, and then drew it in. I was able to see that he was lying down inside the cabinet, as the curtains do not quite reach the floor, and I saw the long line of white

drapery all the way from the opening of the curtains towards the wall. The growing was done in exactly the same manner, a small bit of white being shoved out first, and then the head, &c. The ornaments on Abdullah's forehead do not appear till he is nearly grown up, and I am almost certain that I saw him throw back the flap of his head-handkerchief just as he became full-grown. Three times while Abdullah was in the circle we distinctly heard noises in the cabinet. First rattlings as of something knocking about the chair, next as of a stick striking the floor. This was done both in and out of time with the musical-box, and at the same time Abdullah moved about and carried the musical-box, waving it in his arms. . . . The third noise was the banjo knocking about. Abdullah went into the cabinet between the times when the different sounds were heard. All these noises (as we found by trying ourselves afterwards) could be made by tying a weight or a banjo to a string attached at the other end to Abdullah's foot, and passing it over the bar of the chair in the cabinet. Little jogs of Abdullah's foot could thus make all the sounds.

* * * * *

The last time that Abdullah vanished in this way he did it close to the wall, between Mrs. Volckmann and the cabinet. We saw him go down on his knees, and then all of a sudden he was gone. Mrs. Guppy-Volckmann declared that he was not close to the wall, and that he disappeared through the curtain and not at the opening, and that the curtain had never moved. Most of the circle saw the curtain move, and I saw him make a rush into the cabinet close to the wall, and saw his white drapery trailing behind.

After this an indistinct, black object came out from the cabinet, close to the wall near Mrs. Guppy-Volckmann, where there was a deep shadow, and disappeared under the train of her voluminous black velvet gown. Others in the circle thought the black object disappeared, but did not see how or where to. Soon after Abdullah materialised from under the gown. As the white object first appeared it was obvious to me that it was the head and shoulders of a man lying on his right side. I was sure that his legs were concealed behind Mrs. Guppy-Volckmann's chair, and this Mrs. H. made sure of, as she stretched out her hand and felt the cloth of his coat there.

Serjeant Cox maintained that the noises made in the cabinet while Abdullah was out would require half a day's preparation beforehand.

The last thing that occurred at the séance was the appearance of Haxby (still entranced) at the opening of the curtain, and with him some white drapery purporting to be Abdullah. At the same time Joey spoke, having previously informed us that it was impossible to do this while a spirit was materialised. This appearance of Abdullah and medium together was quite similar to what we had seen on a former occasion.

At the next séance my sister sat in the place previously occupied by Mrs. Volckmann, who was not this time present. She says :—

Abdullah professed to dematerialise before us once as at the previous séance. My head was only about 1½ft. from him, and I saw him go through the same process as he did then. I saw his arms plainly till he was right

down on the floor. Then he put up his hands to the cloth on his head bringing the part hanging behind over the top and front, to hide the tiara, and then pulled the whole off his head, the white cloth remaining as the last bit of Abdullah for a few moments. I saw his hair plainly as the cloth came off, and also his back inside the curtains.

Before this séance all the members of the circle, including an enthusiastic Spiritualist, whom I will call Mr. X., had been told what to expect. Mr. Sidgwick was present, and he appends this note to my sister's account.

I was seated at the furthest point in the circle: at the same time in witnessing Abdullah's disappearance I was unable even to imagine it anything else than the medium withdrawing gradually into the cabinet, having first fallen on his knees, and then gradually lowered his head. But Mr. X., who sat nearly as far off as, but certainly not farther than I did, remarked when the performance was over that "all our doubts must now be removed," and afterwards to Mr. H., on going away, that our materialisations were better than theirs in Paris.

Experiences like this make one feel how misleading the accounts of some completely honest witnesses may be. For the materialisations in Paris were those which the Comte de Bullet had with Firman, where near relatives of the Count were believed constantly to appear, and which are among the most wonderful recorded in Spiritualistic literature. And after all it appears that these marvellous séances were no better than this miserable personation by Haxby.

II.

Those who have followed me in this I fear lengthy, though yet incomplete, account of my own experiences, will agree with me that they certainly point to trickery as a more probable explanation than hallucination of most of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism. The hypothesis of hallucination has often been suggested, and has recently been again advanced by E. von Hartmann. So far as we yet know, however, sensory hallucination of several persons together, who are not in a hypnotic state, is a rare phenomenon, and not therefore a probable explanation. Moreover, I think that all who have had a large experience of Spiritualistic séances will agree in thinking that it is not at all generally applicable, partly because material traces of what occur so often remain, and partly because of the general agreement, not only of all the witnesses but of all the senses, as to what is perceived, as distinguished from what is inferred. There is, however, some reason to think that collective hallucination does sometimes occur at séances, and if so, the fact is very interesting, and it is important that careful independent records should be kept by

sitters with a view to throwing light on the subject; but I feel sure that nothing of the kind has occurred within my own experience.

I must, however, carefully distinguish sensory hallucinations,—that is, perceptions which have no objective counterpart—from erroneous interpretations of what is perceived. Erroneous interpretations which arise from confusing what is observed with what is inferred—from a failure to “distinguish between facts and inferences from facts,” as G. H. Lewes put it—are, I think, very common at séances. Our conclusions as to what we see or hear are always founded on a combination of observation and inference; but in daily life it is seldom necessary to distinguish between the two elements, since, when the object and its mode of presentation are familiar, our inferences are generally correct. But it is different when, owing to circumstances, such as a bad light, we have to infer more in proportion to what we perceive than usual; or when some one, *e.g.*, a conjurer or a ventriloquist, is trying to deceive us by presenting one object under the familiar aspect of another and suggesting false inferences. It is not uncommon to find people at séances encouraging each other in the belief that they see, say, a living human figure, when all that they actually *see* is something moving which is about the size of a human being; the rest is inference.

This is a simple form of the kind of error in question, but I believe it extends to cases much less easy to understand—namely, recognitions of departed friends. I have never myself been at a séance when any relatives of the sitters have been supposed to appear; but I know at first-hand of a case where a gentleman recognised his aunt, and then turned to the other sitters for information as to the presence of her most characteristic feature. The following is quoted by Mr. D. D. Home, *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, p. 342, as the confession of an exposed medium:—“The first séance I held after it became known to the Rochester people that I was a medium, a gentleman from Chicago recognised his daughter Lizzie in me after I had covered my small moustache with a piece of flesh-coloured cloth, and reduced the size of my face with a shawl I had purposely hung up in the back of the cabinet. From this sitting my fame commenced to spread.” The following, again, I quote from an account of a séance in a recently published Spiritualistic work:—“In this figure we both *instantly recognised* a sister of my wife, called Emily, who had been dead about six years. As Emily had been of a sallow complexion with black hair and eyes, recognition was easy. We both expressed our belief in the appearance of our relative, but the other members of the circle thought it was some one else.” One party or the other (if not both) must have been mistaken here.

The same thing has happened as regards so-called spirit photographs. These have, in common with figures seen at materialisation

séances in a bad light, the characteristics of being in general not very well defined, and of being draped in a way not common in ordinary life. At the trial of Buguet, the spirit-photographer, in Paris, in 1875, it came out that different people claimed the same photograph as a likeness of their respective friends, and some photographs I have seen by Hudson, a spirit-photographer in London, which have been differently recognised by different sitters, seem to me to have been taken from the same model. I observe that "M. A. (Oxon)," speaking of spirit-photographs, says: "Some people would recognise anything. A broom and a sheet are quite enough for some wild enthusiasts who go with the figure in their eye, and see what they wish to see. . . . I have had pictures that might be anything in this or any other world sent to me and gravely claimed as recognised portraits." (*Human Nature*, May, 1875, p. 202.)

There is a negative inference often even more hastily made as regards recognition—namely, that the figure seen cannot be the medium. I do not think that nearly enough margin is usually allowed for the effect of disguise and acting. A friend of mine once dressed up as a stranger and paid an afternoon call, with a letter of introduction, on her own mother, with whom she was living at the time, and was not detected. Her mother had some time previously dared her to succeed in disguising herself from her, which made it more remarkable. Why should a disguised medium be more certainly recognised?

For reasons of this kind much of the evidence from recognition obviously fails to come up to the required standard, and it is impossible to lay stress on any of it unless we have reason to know that the witnesses are on their guard against the possibilities of error, and have practised themselves in avoiding it. These remarks about recognition apply not only to materialisation but also to professed reproduction of the handwritings of dead friends. I am sure, from what I have seen, that these are liable to be hastily identified from a very superficial resemblance.

If then we must distrust the evidence from recognition, and can regard the explanation by hallucination as at most of extremely limited application, the only important question that remains to be asked—and this applies not only to materialisations but to all the physical phenomena of Spiritualism—is whether the precautions taken to exclude what may broadly be called conjuring have been sufficient. In the vast majority of recorded cases we have no evidence that they have been sufficient. In many it is indeed obvious they have not, and only those who have a very inadequate idea of the possibilities of conjuring can doubt it; but one cannot investigate Spiritualism for long without learning that some people quite sincerely think

things inexplicable which they could do themselves if they tried. In other cases the absence of any mention of certain precautions leads one to doubt whether they were taken.¹ Other cases again are, no doubt, inexplicable as described, but this is not enough unless a very wide margin has been allowed for conjuring, for descriptions of conjuring tricks are also often inexplicable owing doubtless to the omission of some important detail which has escaped observation, or the insertion of some item which is a mere inference. No one—not even a conjurer—can expect to know all the possibilities of conjuring and to observe all the accidental circumstances which may on any particular occasion

¹ It seems to me undesirable that even men of established scientific reputation like Mr. Crookes and Professor Zöllner should hold themselves exempt from mentioning even the simplest precautions. (Crookes' *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p. 43; Zöllner's *Transcendental Physics*, translated by C. C. Massey, 2nd ed., p. 79.) It is a matter of common experience among scientific experimenters that they sometimes omit precautions which, when once thought of, seem obvious, even in their own line of work, and such omissions are especially likely to occur in the present investigation, owing to its highly novel character and the complicated sources of error to be guarded against. That Professor Zöllner did not always perceive and avoid important sources of possible error may, I think, be inferred from his writings. For instance, in describing the séance on December 17th, 1877, when he obtained four knots in a string of which the ends were tied and sealed together, he omits to mention that the experiment had been tried and failed before. We learn that this was so, accidentally as it were, from his mentioning it in another place and in another connection (*Abhandlungen*, Vol. ii., p. 1191), where he tells us that it was a long time before the "spirits" understood what kind of knot was required of them, and that before they did so he obtained knots, but not such as he wanted—knots, I infer, which could be made by ordinary beings without undoing the string. Now this fact obviously greatly affects the value of the experiment, for it makes it possible that Dr. Slade may have prepared a string similar to Professor Zöllner's at home, and brought it with him, and, notwithstanding Professor Zöllner's watchfulness, have changed it. (Professor Zöllner put the string round his neck during a portion of the time before they sat down to the table, in order not to lose sight of it. Afterwards it was placed with the sealed end on the table, Professor Zöllner holding it in position and the greater part of it hanging down below the table; and it was while so placed that, as was supposed, four knots were made in it. It is generally hazardous to infer from a description when a conjurer's opportunity occurred, but if pressed I should say that the most likely time seems to me to have been after the string was taken off the neck again,—perhaps while it was being arranged on the table.) Whereas if Dr. Slade had been totally unprepared for the experiment, we should have had, on the view that it was conjuring, to make the much more difficult supposition that he had prepared a similar string, or undone and re-done one of Professor Zöllner's, after the latter went to the house for the séance. The omission to mention this fact in describing the incident seems to me so unaccountable except on the supposition that the possible importance of it had not occurred to Professor Zöllner, that we must I think assume in other cases that he may not only have omitted to mention, but failed to see the importance of even obvious precautions.

favour deception and perhaps never exactly recur. It may, I think, be fairly inferred that some leading Spiritualists do not allow a sufficient range for the possibilities of conjuring from the fact that they have on several occasions avowed their belief that certain public conjuring performances showed the conjurers to be mediums.¹

Other believers in the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, or the same at other times, lay stress on the advantage that, as they urge, conjurers have over mediums. Conjurers, it is said, require their own stage and apparatus, whereas mediums will come to the investigator's own room, bringing nothing but what they wear, and often allow themselves to be searched: moreover, prizes have been offered to conjurers who will produce the same phenomena as the medium under the same conditions, and none have come forward to claim them, though, it is argued, "imposture can be reproduced at will." This last, however, seems to me a most unjustifiable assumption, since, as I have above observed, the success of imposture may frequently depend on accidental and unobserved opportunities; and it appears to me that mediums possess an advantage far greater than stage and machinery in being allowed to fail whenever they please. The conjurer would only compete with them on equal terms if he could secure witnesses doubtful whether what they saw was conjuring or not, and if he enjoyed the same immunity from any necessity to succeed, or to adhere to any programme. The following statement by "M.A. (Oxon.," bears on this point. He says (*Human Nature*, for 1876, p. 267):—"The balance is largely against 'prepossession' influencing spiritual manifestations in any appreciable degree, so far as my experience goes. In 99 out of every 100 cases people do *not* get what they want or expect. Test after test, cunningly devised, on which the investigator has set his mind, is put aside and another substituted." In other words the evidence is rarely, properly speaking, experimental, which makes it necessary to allow a much larger margin than would be required in experimental evidence not only for trickery, but also for accidental mistakes and mal-observation, even if trickery, conscious or unconscious, were out of the question. And it must be borne in mind that the most excellent moral character in the medium is no guarantee against trickery unless it can be proved that he was in no abnormal mental condition when the phenomena occurred; and that extraordinary deceptions have been

¹ Thus Mr. A. R. Wallace considered Dr. Lynn's entertainment to be clearly mediumistic, and, as he describes it, it is certainly difficult to explain. Mr. B. Coleman and "M.A. (Oxon.," asserted the same of Maskelyne and Cooke's. Others have also declared themselves in the same way about these and other conjurers. See the *Spiritualist*, May 15th, 1873, p. 205; Dec. 18th, 1874, p. 297; Oct. 15th, 1875, p. 189; August 17th, 1877, p. 78. *Medium and Daybreak*, August 24th, 1877, p. 538; April 2nd, 1886, p. 212, &c.

carried on by hysterical patients and others with no conceivable motive but a desire to secure attention.

There is another reason why conjurers would often compete on unequal terms with mediums, and that is that it would not pay professional conjurers to practise the particular tricks required. Slate-writing, for instance, is not adapted to public performances, and the number of people who would pay guineas for the chance of perhaps seeing writing produced on a slate by conjuring is small. I have, however, been fortunate myself in meeting with an amateur conjurer whom I will call Mr. A., who had given some attention to the subject of slate-writing and could produce some of the phenomena. He very kindly gave me three or four sésances, none of them in his own house nor with his own table, but otherwise under conditions externally similar to Dr. Slade's and Mr. Eglinton's, and I consider the experience gained most valuable. Dr. Slade had already taught me how very little I could observe at a time. Nevertheless it was a shock to me to find how easily Mr. A. could deceive me. At one of these sésances a lady friend of mine was present who had not been told beforehand that I knew this was conjuring. She was interested in slate-writing, had seen some very good slate-writing phenomena with a medium, and observed Mr. A. in the same state of mind. She sat next him. The next day she wrote an account of what took place, still without knowing that it was conjuring. This is her account of the first occurrence.

I took slates with me, two ordinary ones and a folding slate. We first used the ordinary slates; they were cleaned, dried, and placed one on the other upon the table, a nib of pencil between them, and Mrs. Sidgwick's medium's and my hands resting on them. No writing being heard, Mr. A. and I held them underneath the table. Eventually, however, writing was produced whilst the slates were on the table in position I have before described. The message was a long one, covering completely one side of slate. We examined them when they were placed the second time on the table, and satisfied ourselves that they were clean. I am sure that the slates were not changed.

Those who have studied the records of slate-writing sésances will have noticed that it is rare for sitters to have long communications, such as this was, written *on their own slates*. Short remarks of a few words or even lines on the sitters' slates are common, and long messages covering one side of the slate are common too, but on the medium's slates. At the time I had this sitting with Mr. A., I was under the impression that long messages on slates brought by the sitters never occurred, and consequently I was even more surprised than my friend at the result. To cover one side of a slate with writing obviously requires considerable time, and it seemed to me so inconceivable that Mr. A. could have had the opportunity to do it unobserved, that notwithstanding my

friend's certainty that it was her own slate, and my own impression to the same effect, I came to the conclusion that it must have been changed. But I was wrong. It *was* my friend's slate, and Mr. A. *had* found an opportunity of writing on it. I was told afterwards how, and saw the possibility, but I do not believe I should ever have discovered it if I had not been told. I need hardly say that it was not done while we heard the sound as of writing going on. This is my friend's account of the next incident :—

The medium next asked me to fetch a book from the other room. I took one at random from the shelves of the library. [The shelves contained several hundred volumes.] Mr. A. saw me take it out, but did not touch it. I brought it into the room, and put it on a chair between Mrs. Sidgwick and myself, whilst we prepared another slate and bit of pencil. Being again satisfied that the slates were clean, the book, into which I had not looked and the name of which I did not know, was placed on the slate, all our hands resting on it as before. I mentally thought of a page and line, from which a quotation was to be made—both numbers, at medium's request, being under 10. After a short time writing was heard. On the slate was written "Cantor lecture will be given on Monday, at the Kensington Museum. This is all we have power to do." We looked at p. 2, line 7, the numbers I had thought of, but did not find the words quoted. The medium, however, was very sure that they would be found somewhere near, and he soon discovered on last line of p. 7, "Cantor lecture," and on second line of p. 8, "will be given on Mondays," and a few lines further down, "at the Kensington Museum."

The test having been only a partial success the medium proposed that we should try it again. He asked me to fetch a second book from the other room. I took up a "Journal" lying on the table. I did not look to see which number I had chosen. Medium asked me to think again of two numbers under 10, to determine page and line from which quotation should be made. I did so, and very shortly after was written in red chalk, "no such page." This was true, for on opening volume, we found it commenced at a hundred and something.

Assuming, as we must do, that the slates could be changed under our very eyes, without our perceiving it, these two incidents are not very mysterious, but the next is, perhaps, more surprising.

Mr. A. wished to try this test again, so I fetched a third book. This happened to be *Time*—both he and I saw the title. This time I told him the numbers I was thinking of, p. 8, line 5. We held one slate under the table and another, with the book on it, remained on the table; both these slates were Mr. A.'s. After a time writing was heard, and it was on the upper slate that we found the quotation, correctly given this time, "The Imperial Parliament" [p. 8,] line 1, and then a few words taken from line 5. (The slate used was a large folding one with a lock belonging to the medium. Into this he slipped a sheet of paper and a bit of pencil. It was on the paper that the

quotation was written. Mrs. Sidgwick had the key,¹ and it was she who opened the slate.) The séance was held by full gaslight.

The following incidents of the same séance are also instructive:—

Mr. A. asked him [the supposed spirit] to tell us any secrets about either of us, and we heard the sound of writing on the slate lying on the upper surface of the table. The sound continued when Mr. A. withdrew his hands a short distance from the slate, but ceased when he withdrew them to a greater distance. A long message was written again, covering the whole side of the slate, and commencing at a spot where the medium had previously requested it to commence by putting a small cross.

* * * * * *

One of our messages at request was written in different coloured chalks, the bits of which had been placed on the table underneath the slate.

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Before he left, Mr. A. held a slate with me under the table, and asked that the name of the animal written on the slip of paper I had chosen should be written on the slate. Writing was heard, the slate brought up, and I found *rhinoceros* in red chalk. This was correct, though how Mr. A. knew, or by what means the word was written, I have no idea, for the slate appeared to me to be clean when we put it under the table.

Without for an instant maintaining that Mr. A.'s performance was as good as, from the description of others, I suppose that Dr. Slade's and Mr. Eglinton's sometimes is, I am disposed to think that he too could have supplied Professor Zöllner with experimental proof of the existence of four dimensional beings, if Professor Zöllner could have seen him without knowing he was a conjurer.

Another conjuring performance, with which I had nothing to do myself, but of which a written account was sent to me by the gentleman concerned, may be worth mentioning in this connection, because it has the special interest of having been performed in the presence of a witness who was, as it were, behind the scenes. I should add that I have discussed the incident with this witness. A gentleman, whom I will call for convenience Mr. X., sat with a conjurer for slate-writing. Mr. X. held one slate in his left hand, and another lay on the table before him in such a position that he "could easily watch both." The latter was a double slate, hinged and locked, belonging to the conjurer. This Mr. X. unlocked, placed in it three pieces of coloured chalk, and re-locked it, putting the key in his pocket. His account pro-

¹ The precaution of keeping possession of the key of the medium's locked slate is one often adopted with Mr. Eglinton, but it is of course perfectly useless, as there may be any number of keys.

ceeds thus (I have italicised the part to which I wish most to call attention):—“*After some few minutes, during which, to the best of my belief, I was attentively regarding both slates, Mr. — whisked the first away and showed me on the reverse a message written to myself. Almost immediately afterwards he asked me to unlock the second slate, and on doing so I found, to my intense astonishment, another message written on both the insides of the slate—the lines in alternate colours, and the chalks apparently much worn by usage. My brother [who was looking on] tells me that there was an interval of some two or three minutes, during which my attention was called away, but I can only believe it on his word.*”

The fact is that slate-writing as generally exhibited by Dr. Slade and Mr. Eglinton is not at all the simple phenomenon it is sometimes supposed to be. The table may be mentioned, for instance, as one of the complications apparently superfluous if the phenomena be genuine, but most useful as a screen and in other ways if they be due to conjuring. I cannot but think that this absence of simplicity in the conditions under which not only slate-writing, but the other physical phenomena are generally produced affords an important presumption against their genuineness.

And there are two further arguments against their genuineness which are gaining in force every year. The first of these is that almost every medium who has been prominently before the public has at some time or other been detected in trickery, or what cannot be distinguished from trickery except by hypotheses which appear to me violent and baseless. And the second is the absence of evidence which does not depend on the investigator's power of continuous observation. By continuous observation, I mean observation which is uninterrupted during a certain interval of time, varying in length according to circumstances,—this observation extending of course to all circumstances which can have affected the evidence. This kind of observation is seldom or never required, either in ordinary life or in scientific investigations, so that we have but little practice in it, or opportunities of estimating our power of exercising it. It is often on our want of power of exercising it that the success of conjuring depends, and it should be, and in many cases is, the aim of investigators into Spiritualism to make the evidence independent of it. It is easy to devise experiments of various kinds which apparently introduce no new difficulties if the phenomena are genuine, which resemble in kind those we see, and omit none of the conditions said by (or through) mediums to be necessary, and which, if successful, would place some of the physical phenomena beyond all question of conjuring by eliminating the necessity for continuous observation or accurate recollection on the part of the investigator. But as far as I can ascertain no really good

evidence exists that such experiments have ever succeeded.¹ Professor Zöllner devised some good ones, but they failed. He wanted, for instance, to have a knot tied in a continuous band cut out of bladder. The "spirits" explained that they had failed in this because "the band was in danger of 'melting' during the operation under the great increase of temperature," affirmed to occur during the passage of solid through solid. One would not have supposed that cat-gut (made up into a string) melted less easily, but knots were found in a piece of cat-gut with the ends sealed together. This, however, is not necessarily an occult phenomenon and the evidence that it was done at the séance after the ends were sealed, and not done by Slade at home and his piece thus prepared exchanged for Professor Zöllner's, depends on the latter's power of continuous observation.

The necessity of continuous observation at a slate-writing séance can hardly, I think, be eliminated except by obtaining writing on a slate securely covered. Many people have tried to obtain this with Mr. Eglinton, but I have never heard of any successful attempt except one of Mr. Wedgwood's. He took a pair of slates, tied and sealed together, to Mr. Eglinton, but obtained no writing and put the slates aside. Some months later he again took the slates to Mr. Eglinton's as they were, adding only gummed paper round the edges. This time he obtained a long message, but the experiment, as one eliminating the necessity for continuous observation, is vitiated, because we have no complete guarantee that (1) the slates were not tampered with in the interval, and (2) that a pair prepared in imitation was not substituted at the second séance. For Mr. Wedgwood had no reliable means of identifying his slates or his gummed paper so far as I have been able to learn. He has never, I believe, obtained writing on a securely closed slate except

¹ There is an alleged case of pieces of platinum being introduced into hermetically sealed glass tubes in Professor Hare's laboratory through the mediumship of a Mr. Ruggles, but in the only description I have seen there is no evidence of the identity of the tubes seen empty and those seen with the platinum in them 55 minutes later, except what depends on the watchfulness of the observers. Dr. S. A. Peter's description of this phenomenon is quoted in Zöllner's *Transcendental Physics*, Mr. Massey's translation (2nd Ed. 1882, p. 152). An experiment which may have been important is given in Dansken's *How and why I became a Spiritualist* (Baltimore, 1869). He tells us of an anonymous medium who had an iron ring put on and off his neck, which he says was seven inches less in circumference than the medium's head. But the evidence in several essential points is very incomplete. It is also asserted that private mediums have obtained phenomena independent of continuous observation. Baron du Prel, in *Sphinx* for June, 1886, says "Ich kenne persönlich drei Privatmedien bei welchen direkte Schriften nicht nur in Doppeltafeln sondern überhaupt in unzugänglichen Orten vorkommen." It is to be hoped that these persons will place their evidence before the world with the detail required to make it scientifically valuable.

on this occasion, though he has frequently tried. Another gentleman, Mr. F. W. Bentall, who gives us an account of his experiences with Mr. Eglinton (see *Journal* of the Society for June, 1886), and who was successful in obtaining writing on slates not securely closed, tried a large number of times and quite in vain with securely closed ones. At some of these trials he used a slate covered with a sheet of glass. The "spirits" explained that "the vital fluid—call it what you may—cannot be retained sufficiently long in the enclosed space to enable us to move the pencil with force enough," &c. Afterwards Mr. Bentall substituted wire gauze for the glass, so that there was no longer an enclosed space in the same sense, but the result was no better.¹

I mention these experiences with Dr. Slade and Mr. Eglinton merely as illustrations of the kind of evidence I mean. Various other experiments, designed with the view of obtaining evidence of this kind, might be mentioned. For instance, some friends of mine have made many attempts to obtain writing in a hermetically sealed glass retort, containing paper and pencil, at dark sésances with Mrs. Jencken, but they never succeeded. The tests described in connection with our investigation into materialisation phenomena were also intended to be of this kind. It is difficult to suppose that all conditions which eliminate the need of continuous observation are also such as exclude the operation of occult forces—if such exist. And if, as time goes on and experiments are varied, it is found that crucial tests invariably fail—that the phenomena continually stop short exactly at the point to which conjuring could conceivably go—the improbability that this is due to chance becomes greater and greater, and ultimately greater than the difficulty of supposing any amount of defective observation.

At present, however, notwithstanding this absence of what may be called crucial evidence for the existence of these physical phenomena beyond the recognised laws of nature, there is still some evidence which ought not to be set aside, and which, though, in my judgment, not enough to establish so vast a conclusion, still affords a *prima facie* case, and makes it our duty to seek opportunities for further investigation. Without attempting here to go into the details of this evidence, I may refer the reader to that of Comte Agénor de Gasparin as to the movement of tables without contact in what seem to have been careful experiments carried on with his own family and friends (see De Gasparin, *Des Tables Tournantes et du Surnatural en Général*, Paris, 1854); also to the experimental evidence for similar phenomena obtained by the sub-Committee, No. 1, of the Dialectical Society (see *Report on Spiritualism*

¹ Of course, had these experiments of Mr. Bentall's succeeded they would only have been crucial, if he had some satisfactory way of identifying his slate, and of proving that it had not been tampered with.

of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society, 1871). Also to some of Mr. Crookes' experiments with Mr. Home on the alterations of weight of a partially suspended board (see *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, by W. Crookes, reprinted from the *Quarterly Journal of Science*, London, 1874). And, finally, I would refer him to "M. A. (Oxon's)" account of phenomena occurring through his own mediumship (see *Human Nature* for 1874).

Evidence of this kind makes me think that the investigation should go on, and may yet be fruitful; but I think we have enough experience to show that it is not worth while continuing it with established mediums under the conditions at present imposed.

This brings me to what, if these be genuine phenomena, is a point of great importance, namely, that there has been a large amount of hasty assumption as to the conditions under which the phenomena can and cannot occur. This can easily be proved by quotations from works on the subject. In some investigations this would be of comparatively little consequence—if a hypothesis has been mistaken by one investigator for a fact, the next investigator will probably find out the mistake and correct it; a little time would be wasted and that is all. But in our investigation it is very different. If there are genuine physical phenomena it is almost certain from the analogy of the automatic phenomena that they depend largely on the nervous and mental condition of the medium, and therefore on his beliefs. If, therefore, he believes, *e.g.*, that the phenomena can only occur in the dark, the consequence may be that with him they will only occur in the dark, and thus a mere conjecture may become a real, though quite artificial, condition. For instance, De Gasparin believed it essential that the circle should hold hands and form a chain, but—as I understand their description—the Committee of the Dialectical Society did not hold hands, and certainly there was no chain in Mr. Crookes' experiments with Mr. Home. The failure, therefore, of De Gasparin's circle to obtain phenomena when the chain was broken may be with some probability referred to their belief in the necessity of the unbroken chain. De Gasparin himself has some good remarks on the influence of such belief, though he does not apply them in the instance I have mentioned. Now I believe not only that many of the conditions supposed to be necessary, and which greatly complicate and hinder the investigation, have been assumed on very insufficient evidence, but that some of them at least have been deliberately invented to facilitate fraud.

And there is even another danger peculiar to this investigation, namely, that conditions may be invented unconsciously, so far as the medium is concerned, for it is known that the invention of false excuses for failure is one of the curious things that occur in automatic writing. It is very important, therefore, that those who find in themselves or

their friends what seems to be mediumistic power—whatever that may be—should approach the subject in as unprejudiced a way as possible, and, in order to establish the genuineness of the physical phenomena, that they should aim at obtaining them under the simplest possible conditions.

In conclusion, I would repeat that it is not because I disbelieve in the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, but because I at present think it more probable than not that such things occasionally occur, that I am interested in estimating the evidence for them. I feel bound, however, to admit that by far the larger part of the testimony put forward as affording solid ground for a belief in them, which I have been able to examine, is of such a nature as to justify the contempt with which scientific men generally regard it; and though it is to be regretted, it is hardly under the circumstances to be wondered at, that this contempt is hastily extended to the *whole* of the testimony. If what I have written should contribute, in however small a degree, to the improvement of the evidence on this subject in the future, I shall feel that it has not been written in vain.