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THE

EIGHTH WONDER:

OR, A WORD FOR THE

SPIRITS,

AND A FEW WORDS WITH THEM.

A NARRATIVE OF FACTS,

WITNESSED IN A PRIVATE CIRCLE.

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πολλὰ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων

πολλὰ δ'ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί

Eurip.

Utrumque vitium est, nulli credere, et omnibus.

Sen.

Sit thou a patient looker on,

Judge not the play, before the play is done.

Quarles.

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THE EIGHTH WONDER.

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THERE is no subject involving doubt which is unworthy of attention ; for “ the enquiry of truth, which is the love making, or wooing of it ; the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it ; and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it ; is the sovereign good of human nature ;” * and as there is no truth that may not be mixed up with falsehood, and upon which, it may not, as it were, be engrafted, it becomes every man to try and distinguish the pure metal from the alloy ; the original stem from the after-growth. We have been induced to make these remarks from the consideration of the topic which has recently engrossed so large an amount of attention in America, Germany, and France, and which seems likely to demand the same in our own country.

An ordinary table is taken, and a number of people, varying in proportion to its size, place their hands upon it, so as to produce a circle ; the fingers of each person’s right hand touching those of the left hand of the person next in order. Care should be taken to prevent anything else coming in contact with the table. After the lapse of a shorter or

* Bacon.

longer interval, a vibratory motion is perceptible, together with a tingling sensation in the hands and arms of the performers ; and the table begins to move slowly,—it may now be considered to be in a proper state for experiments ; some of which, successful and unsuccessful, we shall mention. Let us caution our readers once more against being too determined to disbelieve, or too hasty to come to conclusions ; the number of those who are convinced of the fact, is daily increasing, and men who have laughed loudly at the idea, and ridiculed those who entertained it, if they have not the candour to own their mistake in words, still do so in effect, by their silence upon the subject. Too much credulity, or too little, are both proofs of a weak mind ; but too much credulity may be the fault of a trusting and full heart, while too little is almost invariably the failing of a narrow and empty one.

Every fresh discovery, or theory, has had to encounter the most determined opposition ; sometimes, indeed, coming from great men, who, vain and puffed up with their own knowledge, have presumptuously fancied that they alone knew anything upon the subject ; but usually coming from those, who, in the intensity of their ignorance, have felt that any discovery for which they could not account, was either sinful, or absurd.

“ Chacun tourne en réalités
 Autant qu'il peut, ses propres songes ;
 L'homme est de glace aux vérités
 Il est de feu pour les mensonges.”*

The want of success in “turning the tables” is generally caused either by the carelessness of the experimentalists, their want of power, of patience, or of inclination : to which may be added, the impediments thrown in their way by deriding friends, and self-opinionated critics. As more persons than one are usually required to produce the effect, care should be taken that the operators have all the same object in view—the simple elucidation of the truth, without any desire to produce a false effect. We have seen persons so anxious to arrive at the result to which many of their friends have attained, that they have deluded

* La Fontaine.

others, and almost themselves, into the idea, that the table was moving by the newly-discovered power, when, in fact, they were impelling it by mere physical force. Nothing can be more unfortunate than this, as the impression immediately received is, that the whole thing is an absurdity, and a delusion, and that the experimentalists are invariably the dupes of others, if not of themselves. How ridiculous the wonderful discoveries with regard to mesmerism were made to appear by the fancies, delusions, and deceits, practised by many at the time. It may here be mentioned, that the motion of the table cannot be produced in the same degree, if at all, by every one; and that thus, thousands have hastily concluded there is no truth in the result stated. We have seen many people of cold temperaments vainly endeavouring to produce the slightest effect. Children also, appear to have little power. Of course, it does not follow, because some are incapable of exerting the influence, that it must necessarily be so with all. How striking is the contrast between the mental and bodily activity of some, and the slothfulness and impotency of others; and we find in this case, that some persons are capable of producing far greater results than others. Young girls of a nervous temperament, appear to possess the greatest amount of power.

We will now call attention to a few facts which have come within the range of our own observation, expressing a belief, that with moderate attention, almost any one may produce similar results. In the first instance, two ladies succeeded in moving a small work-table; after placing their hands upon it, in the manner previously described, to the utter astonishment of all in the room, and no less of themselves, who little anticipated such an issue from a trial, which had commenced almost in joke. In obedience to their will, the table moved to any part of the room; sometimes with considerable violence, and without the slightest exertion of physical force. By thinking of a word, the table would spell it, by tilting at the letters which composed it, when the alphabet was repeated aloud.

These experiments have been repeated several times since, by different people and before many friends, and uniformly with success. It seems then from this that the movements of the table are completely

under the control of the operators' minds, and that (as proved in many cases) even one person is able to cause the table to tilt at the letters of names, the other persons at the table not willing it to move in any particular direction.

We have now to give an account of some trials of another kind, which though commenced in joke, have produced a solemn effect upon the minds of many who were present. The questions were put in this way by some one in the room. "Is there any spirit wishing to communicate with Mr. —; if so, will the table move in his direction, if not, in the opposite one?" It moved in his direction. "Will the spirit communicate its name?" The letters of the alphabet were then slowly repeated,—at a particular letter the table tilted,—as soon as it had returned to its proper position the alphabet was again slowly repeated, the tilting took place at another letter, and so on. The letters at which the table moved were written down upon paper, by some one at another part of the room, and were found, to the surprise of all present, to spell the christian and surname of Mr. —'s late father. At another time a lady was present in the room, the names of any of whose deceased relations no one knew. The same questions were asked as in the former instance, and the initials of her brother's name, who had been drowned thirty years ago, were given. No questions were put to the spirit at that time, but on another occasion they were, and the following extraordinary message was spelled out in the same way. "Pursue, dear sister, the path of kindred souls, lament my trials, touch not my doom, prepare." The question was put, "What?" "A tomb in the waters, unconsecrated ground. Visit my remains." Question, "Where?" "Round the wave, but my spirit is with you here:—see me with the eye, for you could."

A young lady was seated in the room, away from the table, and two other ladies had their hands upon it. Her father's name was spelled. The following questions were then put, and the answers returned verbatim as they are given:—

"What has the spirit to communicate?" "Remember your precious charge." "What charge?" "Your sisters." "What has the spirit to communicate to my sister —?" "Pray." "What to —?"

“Watch.” “What to me?” “Join them.” “Has the spirit anything to communicate about my mother?” “Rich in joy,” was spelled out. The whole of this message was more than usually curious, as the three ladies spoken of assure us that the short remarks are precisely of the character which their late father was accustomed to make while living; and that the special advice was particularly applicable to each of them. On another occasion the same lady (not being at the table) asked the question, “Whether any spirit wished to communicate with her?” The table was to tilt in her direction as usual to indicate assent. It did so, and then a different name, or rather the initials were spelt out A. B. C. The message was, “Remember the love I bore you; my spirit hovers near you.” In another instance, a lady wishing to communicate with a certain spirit, whose name had been indicated by the table, but fearing lest she should be affected by the message, asked a friend to take down the letters while the alphabet was being repeated in so low a tone that she herself could not hear them. In a few minutes her friend asked for the communications to be stopped, as the results appeared absurd, but upon reading what she had written down, the lady told her that the name was one with which she was acquainted, and that the message (which related to a poor boy who had turned out badly) was peculiarly intelligible to her.

A gentleman asked, in the usual way, “Whether there was any spirit present wishing to communicate with him?” The table spelled out the three names, at full length, of a sister who had died. Wishing to ask her some question which should be convincing, he enquired, “where he had seen her last, before her fatal illness?” “In the park.” “On what day?” “Wednesday.” “In what month?” “July.” “What day of the month?” While some one in the room was counting the numbers, a young lady, who was a sister to the gentleman putting the questions, struck with the singular truth of the answers, and powerfully moved by the conviction, that the spirit of her sister was communicating them, fainted away, and the experiments were thus suddenly brought to a close.

We could go on multiplying instances to a very large extent, but think sufficient have been given to prove that there is some power

at work—something more than electricity, or than mere coincidence,—which is well worthy of investigation. At times the letters spelled were a confused jumble of consonants, quite unintelligible, and at other times the messages appeared equally so, as in the case of the lady's brother who had been drowned ; but in the other instances which we have given, the messages were particularly applicable. We have simply stated facts as they occurred, without the slightest wish to add anything to make them appear more mysterious, or to withhold any thing that may seem contradictory. As to account for them satisfactorily, that is quite another thing. In the first instance, when we had overcome our doubts as to the movement of the table, and had proved to ourselves in the most convincing manner, that it moved in accordance with the will, not alone of *all*, but even of *one*, happening to possess a larger amount than the rest of the peculiar force, (whatever it may be,) we concluded that the answers elicited from the table were in reality nothing more than the thoughts of the persons round it, most affected by that power. This was at first satisfactory, but when the names of people unknown entirely to those at the table were spelled out, which was the case in most of the instances mentioned above, it was no longer any explanation. Then came the question, how far the power might be communicated from one to another, through the air, and, like electricity, affect the condition of those at the table ; so that what was passing in the mind of one in the room, might produce, as it were, its counterpart in that of another, and so the table, by its movements, express it in words.

This certainly is rather a far-fetched theory, but we were willing to try and explain such extraordinary facts, in any way that could offer a chance of clearing up the mystery. A circumstance, however, has just come to our knowledge, which casts an additional doubt on this view of the question, if it does not entirely overthrow it. A lady, on whose word we place the fullest confidence, went to a friend's house, and finding the family all from home, walked into the drawing room to await their arrival. She tried a few experiments with a hat, in the same way as with the table. After a short time the name of "Eliza Townsend," was spelled out, as that of a spirit wishing to communicate with her ;

and the message was, that she was to tell "Katherine Townsend to go to her mother, and think about Australia." This appeared very extraordinary, as she knew no one of that name. A servant, coming into the room, she asked her name, but it was not in the least like Townsend; the other servant's name, she knew, was Ann, and although she thought it scarcely worth a question, she asked her surname, which turned out, to her surprise, to be Townsend. The lady said to her, "They call you Ann, do they not?" "Yes, Miss," was the reply, "but it is only for shortness, my real name is Katherine." And when asked to spell it, she did so precisely in the same letters the hat had indicated. What makes the whole circumstance the more curious is, that the servant had lost a sister, named Eliza, and intends emigrating to Australia.

In this instance, at least, there could have been no influence exercised by any one else in the room, seeing that at the time of the communication, the lady herself was the only person present.

Can it be possible then, we are led to consider, that any direct intercourse between ourselves, and the world of spirits is permitted? That there have been times, and of no unfrequent occurrence; at which special warnings have been given, and at which even the forms of the departed have been permitted to be once again seen on earth, we think there are few who doubt:—and it is our conviction that there is scarcely a single family in which some legend of the kind does not exist. That such belief should be so universal, is in itself strong proof that it is true, otherwise it could not have stood the test of so many ages. Again, do not all true Christians believe in "the communion of saints?" And is it not a happy and encouraging thought, that the spirits of dear departed ones are hovering around us; rejoicing when we love one another, and pursue the path of virtue? Why, then, should we be so startled, and perplexed by carrying the thought a little further? and why should we not strive to ascertain whether, for some wise purpose, which we cannot at present understand, an intercourse may be permitted? Does it not show, how great is the difference between *realizing* a thing, and believing it? Or, in other words, between the belief of the *head*, and that of the *heart*?

Doubts then arise in the mind, whether the agency may not be that of evil spirits, as well as of good; and if good, whether we may not be rashly presuming upon mysteries which are intended to be hidden from us. We must leave these considerations for the settlement of divines, hoping soon to see the matter taken up in the calm spirit of investigation, by those whose position and abilities will entitle them to credit, and demand attention. If we have said anything in these few pages, that will lead to a more extensive inquiry into the subject, by learned and upright men, we shall consider we have fully gained the object which we have in view. Who knows that there may not be some new and wonderful influence at work, to control and guide which, in the right direction, may require the mighty efforts, and indomitable perseverance of a giant mind?

In conclusion, we would say, in the words of Lord Bacon, with regard to the effect likely to be produced, if these discoveries become generally known, and believed.—“It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion: for while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no farther; but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity.” While we believe that some sceptical minds, may find in this new wonder, fresh food for unbelief, we cannot but think the serious and reflecting may discover much to increase their devotion, and confirm their faith.