

no 9

# TABLE-TURNING

NOT

# DIABOLICAL.

A TRACT FOR THE TIMES.

BY REV. F. CLOSE, A.M.

INCUMBENT OF CHELTENHAM.

THIRD EDITION.—THIRD THOUSAND.

“A WORD SPOKEN IN DUE SEASON, HOW GOOD IS IT.”

*Prov. xv. 23.*

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## TABLE-TURNING NOT DIABOLICAL.



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THERE are some subjects, intimately connected with revealed truth, which are in their nature so obscure, and upon which Holy Scripture either keeps silence, or utters so indistinct a sound, that under ordinary circumstances it is better not to investigate them, or at all events not to suggest them as topics of public discussion. But when, from accidental circumstances, or from any cause, such topics are already thrust forward into public notice, are canvassed in common conversation, give rise to hazardous speculations, and threaten to endanger the truth of Scripture, it then seems criminal for those to remain silent whose office it is, in some measure at least, to guide public opinion. Without any conceit of settling difficult and perplexing points of dispute, each may contribute what he can towards the discovery of the path of wisdom and religious discrimination; he may help to calm the minds of some, to correct the judgment of others, and to promote in all a sound, comprehensive, and scriptural view of passing events which agitate the public mind.

At the present moment, surprizing and conflicting notions are rife upon the subject of supernatural interferences whether of good or evil spirits; and certain strange exhibitions of a perplexing character threaten to drive some persons into scepticism, and others into superstition. There must be a *via media* somewhere, and a good common-sense as well as scriptural way of regarding these things to be discovered, if men, especially Christian men, would examine them soberly and rationally.

This cannot however be done without reference to the only admitted divine authority which we possess; holy scripture is as yet the only written communication from the Eternal world, unquestionably

authenticated by miracles, and thither we must betake ourselves if we would hope to settle our minds on the subject of supernatural interferences. All supposed miracles must be brought to this test, and here alone can we hope to obtain satisfactory information on the subject. Neither shall we find it here by the process of picking out short texts here and there, however forcible in their appropriate connexion, but inapplicable it may be altogether to our own times and circumstances; there must be a comprehensive view of the dealings of God with men under separate dispensations; and having carefully collated our facts, then we may be in a situation to draw general principles from them and rules of action which may guide us in our examination of modern problems.

**NOW LET US TAKE A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE NARRATIVE OF MIRACULOUS INTERFERENCES AS RECORDED IN HOLY SCRIPTURE;** bearing always in mind what we mean by a miracle—not merely something wonderful, and beyond our comprehension or experience—but something which implies the interruption of the known laws of the material world, their suspension, or disturbance; some experiment in matter which, having been submitted to the severe test of our natural senses, is clearly supernatural.

Now no instance of this kind is recorded in the page of Scripture during the first 1600 years of the world's existence. From Adam to Noah we read of no miracle—not even of the interference of an angel—that was a purely spiritual dispensation. “The God of the spirits of all flesh” communicated with the spirits of the faithful without any extraordinary action of matter, or witness of miracle—“Man walked with God,” and he needed no wonders to prove his existence.

Noah introduced a series of miracles of a peculiar character, which were occasional during a period of about 900 years to the time of Moses. Noah's flood was a miracle—and so was the circumstance of the entrance of all living things into the Ark—the confusion of tongues at Babel was a miracle, and so was the destruction of the cities of the plain and transfixion of Lot's wife—yet all the miracles of this period were peculiar in this respect, that they were wrought by God himself, and not by the agency of man.

It was MOSES who was destined to display the power of God in the working of miracles by his people. The burning bush was a miracle—because the bush burned with a glowing fire and would have been con-

sumed, had not the laws of nature been suspended ; so was the leprous hand in his bosom, and the rod or staff which became a serpent, and then a rod again. From the moment when Moses performed these wonders before Pharaoh and his Court, an era peculiarly miraculous commenced ; for many years miracles were public, national, continuous, performed by some secret power at the command of a man, in the face of friends and foes, during a period of fifty or sixty years. They ceased not with Moses, but continued with his successor ; and though they afterwards became more rare, and long periods intervened without their occurrence, yet we read of them from time to time for another space of 900 years. The last miracles wrought under that dispensation were displayed in Babylon, among the children of the Captivity.

After the Captivity the Second Temple was built, but without miraculous interference—the latter Prophets did not accompany their message with miracles, and Ezra who undoubtedly finally settled the Jewish polity and religion, wrought no miracles. Then for a space of 350 or 400 years, the miraculous power was dormant—unless you choose to receive the Apocryphal stories of Bel and the Dragon and such like fables as probable, or true.

After this total suspension of the miraculous power for so long a period, a new and surprizing era broke upon the world ; and during the space of about one hundred years, from the first angelic visit to Zechariah in the Temple to the death of the last of the Apostles, innumerable, surprizing, and incontestible miracles were wrought by Christ and his Apostles, in the face of day, in the teeth of opposition and prejudice, before Jews and Gentiles, who never attempted to deny the reality of the miracles, although they were ready to attribute them to Satanic agency.

And now a dispensation is established during which, as in the case of the Patriarchal, no miracles have been wrought—unless as in a former case you are content to receive the Apocryphal miracles of Father Newman, which we class with Tobit, and Bel and the Dragon. There is no rational evidence whatever of the continuance of the miraculous power in the Church for any assignable period after the death of the apostles ; and credulity, forgery, or hypocrisy are certainly written on all the miraculous stories of the middle ages.

Here then we have a brief and rapid sketch of the facts of Scripture touching miraculous interferences. From Adam to Noah, about

1600 years, NONE! Neither angel, nor wonder, nor sign: From Noah to Moses, about 900 years—the second Patriarchal period—Miracles, but not wrought by man, direct actions of the Almighty, or the ministration of angels. From Moses to the First Captivity—another period of about 900 years—a succession of splendid miracles, public, private, for a long time continuous, afterwards occasional. Then for nearly 400 years a total suspension of the miraculous power. A fifth period of mavelous signs and wonders introductory of the Christian Dispensation; with a final suspension of all miraculous powers for 1700 years—a period longer than the similar Patriarchal Dispensation before the Flood.

This review of the scriptural facts of the case may prepare us to draw some inferential deductions of great importance in solving the question before us.

Nothing appears more clear and certain than this: namely, that **MIRACLES WERE INVARIABLY WROUGHT EITHER TO AUTHENTICATE A NEW REVELATION, OR TO ATTEST A MESSAGE, OR A MESSENGER AS SENT FROM GOD.** This will be found to be true of every miracle recorded in Scripture, directly or indirectly:—that it was so in the case of the series or cluster of miracles with which both the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations were introduced is undeniable. When Jehovah first imparted to Moses the power of working miracles, it is expressly declared that he was to perform them before his own people to prove that he was sent from the Lord God of their fathers—“that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.” (Exodus iv. 5.) And for no other purpose were all the stupendous signs and wonders wrought by Moses, whether of judgment to the Egyptians, or of mercy or of chastisement to his own people: they were to authenticate the mission of Moses, to confirm all his revelations from Heaven. And with equal accuracy and certainty may it be asserted by the miracles, one and all of Christ and of his disciples and followers, they were to authenticate his mission, to prove by supernatural testimony not only that he had come forth from God, but that he was the person whom he represented himself to be, even the true Messiah of prophecy and promise. Again and again he appealed to his miracles as his witnesses. “I have greater witness than John:” (who wrought no miracles) “for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the

Father hath sent me." (John v. 36.) And the same is asserted of the subsequent miracles of the Apostles—"The Lord giving testimony unto the words of his grace, and granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." (Acts xiv. 3.) That this therefore was the great leading design of the miracles of Moses and of Christ cannot be denied.

But the attentive student of Scripture will discover the same purpose in all the occasional and incidental miracles recorded in sacred story: he will find in illustration of this point that wonders were more frequently wrought when the revelation of God was called in question, and the worship and truth of God had been suffered to decay. Thus in the palmy days of David and Solomon, when none questioned the truth of God, when the Temple services were religiously observed, and when the constant flow of inspiration from the pen of David and Solomon met with no obstacle from infidelity, nor neglect from a pious generation, miracles were rare; but in the days of the Judges, and under the reigns of wicked kings, when the written word was neglected, and the Temple services were disregarded, God kept alive his truth by miracle-working Prophets.

Nor must the testimony of miracles to the written word of God be overlooked; in proof of which, in both instances, the completion of the canon of both Testaments was coincident with the cessation of miracles. While the stream of written revelation flowed on, it was needful that its writers should from time to time be corroborated by miracle; but when the entire books of the Old Testament were completed by Ezra, and God's will was fully promulgated in his word, wonders ceased! Nor were they needed to confirm the written word, because that was reverently and devoutly received by the Jewish nation, and constantly read by them in their synagogues, during that period of 400 years, from Ezra to Christ—a period during which they were alike free from idolatry and infidelity, in the absence of all miraculous interference, being led and taught by God's written word only. So in like manner; as long as the Holy Apostles and inspired men were composing the volume of the New Testament, miracles abounded; their divine mission and inspiration as authors were established and confirmed by miraculous gifts and powers:—but with the last of the inspired Apostles, miracles ceased—the written word of God was again complete—there was no further revelation, therefore there were no longer miracles.

The coincidence of these events is all important touching the Supremacy of the written word; and therefore it is that Romanists, and their friends in our own church labour to make a show of evidence in favour of miracles after the completion of scripture—they would shake the sole infallibility of a written Revelation, and thrust in a Miracle-working Church, beside it, or above it, or along with it as may suit their purpose.

But our Scripture canon may safely be followed—miracles are the invariable testimony of Heaven's messages and messengers—apart from this their proper work, hypothetical miracles may always be suspected, or denied.

But there is yet another great fact discoverable in a scriptural search for supernatural operations, and one that touches more nearly on the subject we are still approaching; it is this, namely—that, while there are indications of supernatural interferences of Satan, and Diabolical agency, such powers were never exercised except coincidentally with, and antagonistic to the miracles of God and of his Church:—**IN A WORD THAT SATAN WAS NEVER PERMITTED TO WORK PHYSICAL MIRACLES EXCEPT WHEN GOD ALSO WROUGHT THEM; AND THEN ONLY TO MAKE IT APPARENT THAT HE WAS IN ALL CASES TO BE DEFEATED.** How remarkable is it that the very first display of divine miracles was met by a corresponding display of Diabolical agency! There can be no reasonable doubt that the miracles of the Magicians of Egypt were real miracles, effected by the agency of the evil spirit. When it is said after each miracle of Moses, that “the Magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments”—(Exodus vii. 11.)—and when we read upon the transformation of all their rods into serpents, “that Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods”—we have not only a clear ratification of preternatural agency, but we have an instance and an emblem of the universal defeat which that Diabolical agency was always to sustain by the presence of a superior power.

The instances and discoveries of this evil agency are rare in the subsequent pages of Scripture history; and the records of them are dim and mysterious. But one thing is certain—they are to be found only during those periods when the Dispensation was miraculous and divine miracles were current. When His interpositions ceased, so did those of the wicked one. During the long interval when true miracles



were suspended, nearly 400 years, we search in vain in Scripture story for any trace of Satan's miraculous powers. And most certainly along with that most glorious display of miraculous powers which introduced the Gospel Dispensation the miraculous powers of Satan were revived. Few question or deny this fact: new and stranger developments of diabolical agency were clearly tolerated during our Lord's personal ministry—bodily possessions of the Devil, distinct from cases of lunacy, were allowed—and even a limited power of working miracles was given to the Jews, some of whom our Lord implied had power to cast out Devils. “If I by Beelzebub cast out Devils, by whom do your sons cast them out!” He admits the fact, and insinuates the agency—unbelieving Jews cast out Devils, and Satan consented to let it appear that his kingdom was divided, if only he could cast suspicion on the miracles of our Lord. But with the cessation of the miracles of our Lord and of his Apostles, the miraculous powers of Satan ceased also. For the legends of the age immediately succeeding, touching the miraculous interferences of the evil one, are even more childish, monstrous, and destitute of all rational evidence than those attributed to divine agency during the same period of the Church.

But this branch of our investigation cannot be complete without reminding the student of Scripture that one of the express objects of the Divine Will in the introduction of the Christian Dispensation was **THE FINAL OVERTHROW OF THE POWER OF THE WICKED ONE**; and this especial power in particular, his diabolical influence over the bodies of men, or the faculty of working physical miracles. That mysterious conflict between the Son of Man and Satan, during his temptation in the wilderness, indicates more than simply spiritual contention: and victorious here, the Saviour's whole course even in the flesh was one continual triumph over the miraculous powers of the Devil and his inferior agents. They knew him and quailed before him—“Art thou come to torment us before the time?” They ever obeyed his voice and yielded to his power. Nor only so, the Lord Jesus, even in his life time, conferred like powers on his followers. Thus, when he sent out the twelve, “he gave them power against, or over, unclean spirits to cast them out.” (Matthew x. 1.) And, when the seventy disciples returned from the mission on which he had sent them, they came to him with joy, saying, “Lord, even the Devils are subject unto us, through thy name!” And Jesus, participating in

their triumph, exclaimed, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven!" And then he ratified and increased their powers, saying, "Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and OVER ALL THE POWER OF THE ENEMY; and nothing shall by any means hurt you." But it was upon the cross that the Saviour consummated his triumph over the Devil and all his hosts; when he bowed his head and died, "he through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil." (Hebrews ii. 14.) There he "spoiled principalities and power; he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." (Colossians ii. 15.) He bequeathed to his church the fruits of that victory; the Holy Apostles trampled in like manner upon the power of the wicked one; and, while it appears that his bodily possessions rapidly declined after the death of Christ, yet enough is recorded alike to vindicate the divine power which rested on the Apostles, and to display the jealousy of the great Head of the Church against any attempt to imitate it. "There came a multitude out of the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed every one." (Acts v. 16.) And by the ministry of a solitary Evangelist "unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed of them." (Acts viii. 7.) In the case of St. Paul, even if a handkerchief or apron which had been laid upon his body were placed on the bodies of sick people, and persons possessed with Devils, "the evil spirits went out of them:" which when some bad men attempted to imitate, the evil spirits had power over them. "Then certain vagabond Jews, exorcists"—miracle-workers by profession—"took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth; the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leapt on them and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." (Acts xix. 12—16.) But the disciples of the Lord Jesus sustained no such defeats—by his name and upon his authority, the Devils were uniformly subject to them; until, as may be gathered from the general tenour of their subsequent writings, the power of Satan was again restrained within those spiritual operations by which he has at all times since the fall of man been enabled to tempt, and harass, and deceive the people of God.

The Church's warfare with him then became simply spiritual ; against such inroads of Satan alone are we warned in the Epistles of the Holy Apostles ; no methods are prescribed for casting out devils, nor any provision made for persons possessed with devils ; the armour with which the Apostle furnishes us for the conflict is altogether spiritual, and that conflict itself is maintained not against flesh and blood, or devils in flesh and blood, but against wicked spirits in high places. (Ephesians vi. 10—18.) All the miraculous powers of the Devil were destroyed by Christ and His Apostles—he is chained—hitherto shalt thou come and no further—“his head is bruised,” is crushed ; he is impotent to assay a miracle—we may defy his power—“resist the Devil, and he will flee from you :”—and the demolition of this his power is one of the glories of the Gospel dispensation : let us not tarnish that glory, nor dishonour that triumph, by admitting for one moment that the Devil, Satan, Beelzebub, the Great Dragon, under whatever form, and by whatever name he may be distinguished, has now any power at all over the material world, over the bodies of men—or that he is permitted to work any sort of physical miracle. We utterly deny it and repudiate it. Some may tell us that such powers are to be revived again towards the close of this dispensation—yet neither is this interpretation of prophecy certain, and still more is it to be doubted—nay, no living man has authority to tell us—that the end is come ; or even coming upon us. Each successive generation has thought so, and said so, and believed so, and the end is not yet—and if they bid us look at the signs of the times, we might read them perhaps in the words of Christ—“Then if any shall say unto you, lo ! here is Christ, or there ; believe them not !”—“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth unto the west : so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be !”—(Matthew xxiv. 23, 27.)

Let us then entrench ourselves behind these great facts, and veritable conclusions of Holy Writ, when we turn to examine the claims of modern wonders to a supernatural character : so shall we not be soon moved in mind, nor be driven about by every wind of doctrine.

Truth, candour, and honesty oblige us to admit that for some time past there have been certain well established developements of powers whether natural or supernatural, which to us are inexplicable, for which we are utterly unable to account by any known or ascertained laws

either of matter or of spirit. Beyond a doubt large deductions must be made for imperfect experiments, for credulity in some witnesses, and hypocrisy in others. But after all reasonable deductions are made, enough of surprising fact remains to perplex the wisest heads, and to puzzle the most scientific. There are well substantiated facts connected with Mesmerism, Animal Magnetism, and Table-turning, which yet remain to be explained and accounted for. It is true that some philosophical and scientific persons have attempted to sneer at the whole matter, and with a scepticism to which they are specially prone who are deeply read in the well ascertained facts of experimental and practical philosophy, affect to treat all such exhibitions as delusive. This is an easy way of getting rid of a difficulty ; but while it adds to the feeling of self-complacency and contempt with which they are disposed to look down upon believers in such facts, it unhappily proves nothing ; and is far from satisfying those who either are eye and ear witnesses of such things, or have received them on testimony of such a character that to doubt it, would tend to destroy the grounds of all credible testimony. Another division of this party appear disposed to attach a certain degree of credit to the facts, but attempt to account for them in a manner still more unsatisfactory. It is unquestionable that many instances may be adduced where tables have been turned by designed or undesigned muscular movements of the thumb and fingers, and not by any new or subtle power unknown before ; but at the same time cases can be cited where such collusion, or such unconscious muscular motion could not by possibility have produced the result. Thus when a large heavy table is moved about, at will, by two or three feeble and delicate women, who could scarcely move it at all by the exercise of their natural powers, it is simply feeble and weak to talk about unconscious manipulation. Manipulation whether conscious or unconscious, could not do this at all. Surely it would comport more with the wisdom of science if a fact is admitted which cannot be explained upon any of the known and ascertained laws of matter, to wait further results of experiment and of time to ratify, or to refute the facts, or to discover the hidden power by which they are performed. It is really surprizing that in the present day, when discoveries are continually made in the world of matter, and new and strange combinations traced, that honest, honorable and scientific minds should yield

to such vulgar scepticism. Credulity is pitiable—but scepticism is mischievous : and there is no occasion for the exercise of either the one or the other in the case under consideration.

But how are these circumstances viewed by the religious mind of the country ? for in this question we are more deeply interested—mistakes in physical science correct themselves, but speculative opinions upon religious and moral subjects involve spiritual and moral consequences of good or evil. Superstition is the pious feeling misdirected, or in excess ; and to superstition therefore religious people are more especially at all times prone. This will be more or less the case in proportion as the feeling of religion, is or is not under the sober guidance of the written word. Now those who have watched the bias and tendency of the minds of spiritual people during the last twenty years, will be prepared to expect that anything of the wonderful, or mysterious will be readily received as supernatural and miraculous. The character of a large portion of our popular religious literature during the period referred to, whether issuing from the High or Low Church press, has had a tendency to create a morbid expectation of wonders ; undefined and ardent speculation has been created ; a disposition to catch at every trifling event as the fulfilment of some prophecy, according to the private interpretation of some popular SEER ! Hence Table-Turning or anything else the natural cause of which remains unexplained is immediately imputed to supernatural causes ; miracles just now would be gladly welcomed and greedily swallowed because they would fall in with the bold prophetic speculations which are so popular. There is therefore not only the old natural tendency of the human mind to superstition, to contend with, but that principle cherished and fostered by popular theories, and the unprofitable, because speculative studies of many religious people.

But worse than this ; not only are such discoveries of new and hidden principles of nature heedlessly and with little consideration pronounced to be miraculous, but the religious logic of too many carries them further ; and because according to their opinion no good object can be obtained by these experiments, and because some bad persons may have made an evil use of them, therefore they jump to the next conclusion that they are of the Devil—that they are miracles wrought by the power of the wicked one, to beguile, and deceive, and betray the unhappy children of men. And pamphlets and tracts appear warning

us against witchcraft, and necromancy, and unclean spirits, until we seem at once transported into the midst of the dismal temptations of St. Anthony—and we expect the civil power to be called upon to interfere, and the Mosaic penalty to be enforced “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!”

One sighs over the departure of common sense, sound scriptural intelligence, and healthy, manly, courageous piety! Bits of scripture culled here and there at random, totally irrespective of their context, regardless of the contrarieties of dispensations, and circumstances, are thrown about at random, and we are assured that the Devil has come down among us with great power! How strange it is that such persons do not see that by such reckless reasoning and dangerous assumptions they are giving the Great Enemy the 'vantage ground which they suppose him to seek! By attributing to him powers which all scriptural and analogical reasoning assure us that he does not possess, and by assuming that he has ability to work miracles, and to answer questions from the invisible world, they are breaking down the bulwarks of truth, shaking men's minds in respect to the veritable miracles of scripture, and launching us on a boundless sea of dark and misty waters, where gloomy superstition and miserable infidelity strive for the mastery. The power of the devil to turn hats and tables may be safely defied; such a process is in itself as innocent as spinning a top; and doubtless the day will come when we shall smile, or our descendants will smile at our solemn difficulties, when the principle by which heavy tables are moved by feeble and delicate fingers, will be as popularly known as the reason why a top spins, and hums, if it is hollow and has a hole in it!

These religious errors and speculations are eminently dangerous, and it becomes all well-instructed Christians to refute and expose them. Reverence in things really sacred and spiritual is one thing, superstition applied to merely physical and natural experiments is another. We cannot be too much exercised by the solemn thought of Satan's spiritual power over our hearts, to tempt, to deceive, to terrify; he is really terrible when he thus assails us—we have need vigilantly to watch and pray against his attacks, and to clothe ourselves in the good armour which God has provided us, and in which we may contend with him and prevail—“And the God of peace shall bruise, or tread, Satan under our feet shortly.” (Romans xvi. 20.) But let us not fear where no

fear is ! nor believe for a moment that ho has yet powers of which the Lord Jesus—" the stronger than he"—has stripped him.

Let us briefly recapitulate our argument. God has never put forth miraculous powers, nor enabled his people to exercise them, except to authenticate a message or a messenger from himself : such powers were more or less displayed from the calling of Moses to the Captivity in Babylon. They ceased with the closing of the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures for about 400 years, and were renewed at the commencement of the Gospel dispensation : they were continued during a space of one hundred years, and again ceased about the time when the canon of the New Testament was completed, and they have not been renewed since.

Diabolical interference in the shape of material miracles, commenced with the first miracle of Moses, and were permitted at intervals, until the first cessation of the Old Covenant miracles. When the latter were suspended, Satan's miracles ceased :—when the New Testament miracles commenced, Satan's revived ; and as in the case of those of Moses, were swallowed up by the greater triumphs of Christ. When Christian miracles ceased, Satan's ceased also—and have never been revived. At no period of the world has Satan been permitted to work wonders, but when the power of God wrought them too.

No miracles being allowed in this Dispensation since the Apostolic times, natural wonders should not be attributed to miraculous interference ; and since the power of the Devil was overthrown by Christ and his Apostles, it is on many accounts as dangerous, as it is unwarrantable, to attribute the power of working miracles to him. The present extraordinary exhibitions should not therefore, on any account, be admitted to be properly miraculous :—they may be wonderful, and governed by unknown and undiscovered physical laws, but there is no reason why they should not one day be satisfactorily accounted for upon principles of natural philosophy yet to be displayed. Least of all should they be attributed to diabolical agencies, for which there is no solid ground in reason, and the whole analogy of our Scripture guide is against it. For these sufficient considerations, we confidently assert—

**“ THAT TABLE-TURNING IS NOT DIABOLICAL.”**

By the same Author.

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