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WHAT ARE  
SPIRIT RAPPINGS?

BY

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SOLE PRACTITIONER TO THE LIVERPOOL MEDICAL  
MESMERIC SOCIETY, FROM 1844 TO 1848.

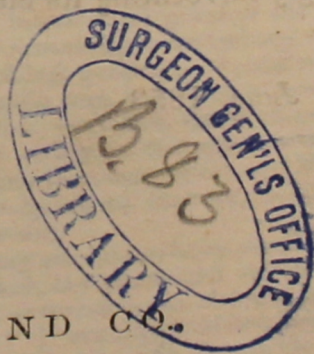
Drinking with seraphs from the well of life,  
And then carousing in the cup of death.—POLLOCK.

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

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IN venturing to publish this brief pamphlet, it may be well to state, that I am perfectly aware some of the views advocated are very unpopular; that my own advocacy of medical Mesmerism as a curative agent has left me, after ten years' active agitation, with few friends and many enemies. It is quite likely this expression of my honest convictions may alienate some of my few remaining friends; therefore, if it should be read by any who deeply sympathise with the views taken, there is pressing need that their co-operation take a tangible form of expression.

I am satisfied that Mesmerism scientifically applied is the primary curative agent, and will be recognised as such in a few years; therefore I have sacrificed my professional prospects, family connections, and social ties, as a point of duty, in unflinchingly advocating its claims.

WILLIAM BETHUNDSOR.

*June, 1853.*



## WHAT ARE SPIRIT RAPPINGS?

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To live in the present age, and stand utterly aloof from every advance in human progress, is a somewhat difficult task. Although occasionally we may hear of a wealthy man who prefers his carriage and post-horses to steam and railway, few will now send a message of vital importance some hundred miles by running token-bearers, since the electric telegraph speeds more swiftly than the swiftest runners of two centuries ago. There was a time when men might not freely express the burning thoughts which forced themselves upon awakened intelligence, on peril of life and limb—the rack and the stake. Then, every aspiration after intercourse with the unseen world was considered unhallowed, and strictly forbidden by the secular and priestly powers; and although “the gift of healing” has never been entirely lost, governments put forth every effort to restrain this knowledge from the common people, and to punish with “death” those who, acting in the spirit of Christ’s second commandment, gave the healing efflux of their own vitality to ease the sufferings of their fellow-men. But for persecution of the truth, surely this testimony of Van Helmont’s had borne more fruit ere this:—

“The God-elected physician,” he says, “will be accompanied with many signs and wonders for the schools; and while he uses his gifts for the alleviation of his neighbours’ sufferings, he will refer the glory of his cures to God. *Peace* is his guide. His heart will be truth, and his knowledge understanding. Love will be his sister, and the truth of the Lord will enlighten his path. He will call upon the grace of God, and the desire of gain shall not possess him. For the Lord is rich and a free giver; and pays back an hundred-fold with a heaped-up measure. He will make fruitful his work, and his hand shall be clothed in blessings. From his mouth shall flow comfort; and his voice shall be as a trumpet, at the sound of which disease shall vanish. His feet shall bring gladness, and sickness shall dissolve before him like the snow in summer. Health shall follow his footsteps. These are the promises of the Lord to the holy one whom He has chosen; these are the blessings reserved for him whose path is the path of mercy. Moreover, the Holy Ghost shall enlighten him.”

Three centuries have rolled on since the foremost intellectual giant of his age peered these lines, and how few yet comprehend their meaning, or are imbued with the spirit of his teachings; and men are eating and drinking, getting gold, and measuring their fellows by the size of the wedge which each man has hidden among the stuff, and hancies he may call his own; while a few, very few, think there is a small cloud, scarce yet so “big as a man’s hand,” rising in the western sky. A few slight “raps” are said to be heard, afar off, in the western world; and Mrs. Boyden, whose husband was the editor of the *Star-Spaniel Banner*, Boston, United States, brings them to the metropolis of the world.

The wisest and most intelligent celebrities of our day are said to have witnessed the result; and while some go away utterly dissatisfied, the continued stream of investigation evinces a deep and widely-extending interest upon the subject. What are the Spirit Rappings? They are not a trick! If accumulated testimony of credible witnesses shall longer be received as evidence upon any subject, we must in candour admit that many highly respectable, utterly unimpeachable witnesses have borne strong testimony, which would be universally accepted without challenge upon any ordinary matter of fact. They have heard “raps.”



actually methodised so as to spell out replies to questions, involving in some instances, it is said, replies to the thought of an inquirer! "Thought-reading is a power possessed by man, and may be brought out by magnetic action in very broad relief, as the experience of medical mesmerists frequently demonstrates. If we reject testimony from those who conscientiously investigate any science or art, we shall not be able to advance far in the pursuit of that subject. The astronomer gives us an almanack, the result of laborious application; we accept his conclusions as correct in the main, without expecting that every man should work out each calculation; and in the most abstruse science which the mind of mankind to-day grapples, correct conclusions will seldom be jumped at by investigators who imagine their own common sense, their fixed opinion, is the standard of immutable truth. If the present dispensation is in advance of the ancient Jewish economy, is it unreasonable or unscriptural to "ask" and expect to receive so much of spiritual power as was accorded to the ancient Seer of Israel?"

To one who had some years since manifested a disposition to bestow the curative influences of magnetism,\* we wrote.

His strong desire was then to bless,  
To check the mass of wretchedness—  
Results he hoped to see.

Those two when join'd in heart and hand,  
As portion of th' heroic band  
Daring to pioneer,  
Had surely laboured not in vain,  
Had gain'd such vict'ry over pain,  
As Israel's ancient seer.

The genuine leaders of these days  
Are greater than Archimedes—  
Their fulcrum finds a place.  
When mighty truths are freely giv'n,  
The mightiest rocks are quickly riv'n,  
And scarcely leave a trace.

Truth is necessarily indestructible, since it corresponds with everything in the universe, which is true; with the experience of all climes, and every age. The savage paddles in his canoe; the civilized man of to-day swiftly crosses the Atlantic in a noble steam-frigate; the same law of gravitation operates on behalf of each. When Saul sought his asses, he went to the seer Samuel. When Pharaoh was commissioned to mitigate the horrors of a seven years' famine, he was instructed through the instrumentality of Joseph. When Belshazzar was troubled by the hand-writing on the wall, he was prepared by the testimony of Daniel to expect the fearful trial foreshadowed.

In every age, and every varying clime, men seem to look for, to expect to realize, the possibility of some gleams of intelligence beaming upon the material from the spiritual world; but now it may be said—

The days of ignorance are past;  
Light, living light has come at last,  
On wings of cherubim:  
Who fly so near the mountain's brow,  
That man may almost touch them now,—  
Man handles Deity.

The spiritual world seems to be brought in closer contact with our material condition; and, startled from their owl-like slumbers by the signs of the times, the veriest sceptics begin slightly to bestir themselves, and seem disposed to listen for "the still small voice," which whispers at the very bottom of each man's consciousness—whispers of life and immortality.

There is a spiritual world, and men KNOW it. They daily "ask" from the Father of spirits for blessings both spiritual and temporal, and hourly receive those things which are sought.

\* Dr. Marsden, of Malvern, author of "Notes on Homoeopathy."



All nature is vocal with prayer and praise; the recognition of HIM in whom "we live and move and have our being;" as even the Athenian poets said. Man is a nobler creature than he knows, has powers far beyond what he realizes.

"I hold a middle rank 'twixt earth and heaven,  
On the last verge of mortal being stand;  
Just on the point where angels have their birth—  
Just on the confines of the spirit-land.  
The chain of being is complete in me—  
In me is matter's last gradation lost,  
And the next step is spirit—Deity."

"Yes, in my spirit does Thy spirit shine,  
As shines the sunbeam in a drop of dew."

Yes, man claims kindred in his present state, morally and intellectually, with the highest intelligences of the heavenly host; and therefore, when somewhat cleansed from the thick clay of mammon-worship, which so universally degrades and defiles him, it may be possible to hold close communion for a short time with higher intelligences. "Angels are ministering spirits, sent to minister." Most spiritually-minded men realize the presence of good and evil angels, as accompanying man while he sojourns upon earth, and suggesting thoughts, aspirations, hopes, and fears, in a manner too subtle for the cognizance of his external senses. Shall we then be justified in rejecting all human testimony, pointing to the possibility of disembodied spirits making their presence manifest to the material senses of a living man? Even by an audible "rap," which appears to be the lowest, the slowest means of communication they employ.

Mr. Beecher, brother of Mrs. H. B. Stowe, the celebrated authoress of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," says, in the preface to a recent publication entitled "Review of the Spiritual Manifestations,"—"The public mind in America is fast settling down in the belief that the facts are facts, and that the only question is how are they to be accounted for?"

"(1.) *Statement of Geo. Willets, Rochester, N. Y. Condensed.* Capron and Barron's History, etc., pp. 51—53. Took place in the summer of 1848.

"All which I shall relate as obtained from those sounds was in the presence only of my friends Mr. and Mrs. Post, myself, and the little girl spoken of. As what follows all purported to be from my father, I will say that his name was William Willets, a member of the Society of Friends, widely known at Westbury, L. I., where he lived until near sixty years of age, and subsequently at Skeneateles, Onondaga county, where he died in 1841. The communication by sounds then went on to say, that it was my father that was present and talking with me, and three hours were consumed at the first interview. In saying to me what his counsel was, it always assumed to advise, but never to dictate. He said that it was not best for us to go to Michigan, and gave various reasons.

"I then asked what was best to do. The answer then was, 'Come to Rochester.' I replied that I knew of no business that I could do in Rochester. The sounds said, 'I will tell thee when thee comes.' I asked if I might know now. The answer was—No, that I did not need any business until I came, and then he would tell me. The sounds then said, that after a time it would be best for me to buy some land. I asked where. The sounds then spelled out the name of a man whom no one present knew, and said that he owned fifty acres of land on such a street adjoining the city, and such a distance from the centre of the city; that he would sell any part. I asked the price that would be asked. The sounds were heard and counted by three of us—one hundred and fifty times in succession—to tell us the number of dollars per acre that would be asked. The sounds said that we had better go the next day and see if this was so, and said that we should not see the man until ten o'clock, though we might look for him as early as we pleased.

"In the morning I looked in the Directory, and there found the name which had been spelled out to us, and went to his residence at seven o'clock, and was informed that he had gone to a distant part of the city, and would not be home until twelve o'clock. We then went to find him, and had some difficulty to do so;



ut after talking with him five or six minutes, looked at the time, and *it was seven minutes past ten!* This person said that he owned fifty acres of land on the street told us by the sounds, and that he would sell any part. When I asked him the price, he showed me a map, with the price of each lot marked, and taking the number of acres, said by the sounds to be best to buy, and averaging the price, it was the price told us within six cents per acre.

"The 1st of December, 1848, I moved from Waterloo to Rochester. A few days after getting here, the little girl spoken of came round to our house and said that the 'Spirit' had directed her to come, for what purpose she did not know; we inquired what it was, and this was the communication: 'I told thee if thee would come to Rochester, I would tell thee where thee could find employment; in four days from this time I will tell thee.'

"The four days went by, and again, without solicitation, and without thinking the time was up, the little girl came. The communication was, 'Apply to William Wiley, Superintendent of the Auburn and Rochester Railroad, to-morrow at two o'clock, at his office, for a situation, and thee will have one before this week is out. (This was Thursday.) I was a stranger to Mr. Wiley, and I called on Mr. Post, and told him the direction, and asked him if the next day he would go with me. That evening, he happening to be at the depôt, inquired if Mr. Wiley was at home, and was told that he was in Boston, and by a letter just received, would not be at home till Friday night. I was told by the sounds on Wednesday to apply on Thursday, at two o'clock. Thursday, at half-past one, instead of going to the railroad office, I went round where these sounds were heard, and said, 'How is this? I am told to apply to William Wiley, and he is in Boston.' The sounds said, 'Go to his office, now he is there.' I called for Mr. Post, and walked immediately there and *found Mr. Wiley in his office.* He said that he had returned sooner than he expected to when he wrote the letter. Mr. Post said that I was a relative of his and wished employment, and Mr. Wiley replied that they were all full, with abundant applications, and could give no encouragement whatever. We walked back, thinking deeply, and I again went where the sounds were heard. I inquired, 'How is this? Mr. Wiley has no place for me.' The answer was, 'Thee will have a place on the cars, and will know it before the week is out.'

"On Saturday night, at dark, I met Mr. Post, and he asked if I had heard anything from Mr. Wiley. I replied, 'Not a word.' At eight o'clock on that same evening Mr. Post called at my house, and said that Mr. Wiley had just been to his store, and said that he had a place for me, and wished me to call at his office on Monday morning. As Mr. Wiley did not tell me what place I was to fill, I again asked the sounds what it was; and they said it was to go as baggage-master between this place and Auburn. On Sunday morning I wrote to my friend James Truman of Waterloo, stating that I should pass through that place on Monday following, in the capacity above stated—before I knew *from Mr. Wiley* what place he wanted me to fill, and he can probably testify to that fact. One month after I had been running on the cars, I learned that the person whose place I took had done things worthy of a dismissal *previous* to my being directed to make application, and which did not come to Mr. Wiley's notice till *the day on which I received the appointment.* These things have only been known to a few friends; you and the world now have them. I have many communications penned down at the time they were received, purporting to be from my father, all of the most elevating character, inciting me to goodness, purity, and honesty of heart, and ever pointing to the endless progression of man. In conclusion, I may say that I have examined the matter attentively for one year and a half, and have abundant opportunities to do so, and am prepared to say, although the sounds may cease to-day, and never be heard again, *they have displayed a remarkable degree of intelligence, and were not made by any person visible to us.*

"GEORGE WILLETS.

"Some may ask how these communications are obtained. I answer in various ways, but usually by knocks or raps on the table, walls, or floor.



"Three raps thus—rap, rap, rap, signify an affirmative. A single rap negative.

"The alphabet is repeated slowly, and the raps are given when the right letter is reached. Thus, by calling the alphabet several times, a *word* is obtained, and thus by degrees sentences are spelled out. By practice this is done much more rapidly than one would at first be led to suppose. At other times the tippings of the table are substituted for raps—the process being otherwise the same. Besides this, there are writing mediums, whose hands are made use of without their will, to write out communications, purporting to be from departed spirits.

"Also, there are speaking mediums, whose vocal organs are used without their will, to utter communications from deceased spirits."

If the evidence were deemed conclusive, that these communications come from the spiritual world—were this hypothesis established to demonstration, the only great gain we at present can see flowing from its general recognition, appears in the conversion from scepticism to knowledge of a future state of being, of many who are now disposed to say, "Shall the dead live again?"

As to any information which may be derived from such channels, let it ever be received with extreme caution. Those who would reject the teachings of the Divine word, and cease sedulously to regard the leadings of Divine Providence for such miserable guides as these, will surely in the end "lie down in sorrow."

All these communications, whether by "rapping," through writing mediums, or the dictum of clairvoyance, are surrounded with so many elements of mistake, the laws which govern are so little understood by us, that they are not always correct. If truthfully given, not ever truthfully interpreted. Could a few men obtain correct information with regard to mercantile or funded transactions, these would obviously be able to control the resources of the state: we believe there is but one instance of this kind recorded in the history of the world. The relative position between monarch and people of a most powerful kingdom was once changed in this manner by Joseph on behalf of Pharaoh.

Some years since various and conflicting statements were published as to the whereabouts and return of Sir John Franklin, said to be the dictum of clairvoyance, and some statements, not published, with regard to him emanated from a spirit-rapping communication some months ago. Some of these the event proved most notoriously untrue. The writer never knew a case of clairvoyant-examination yet, which, honestly sifted and fairly related, did not contain some grains of error—something not true—although always mixed with extraordinary statements, which could be verified by the experience of the listeners. Much of this is thought-reading, and there is a mass of evidence perfectly conclusive, that thought may be read, without being vocally expressed, even by persons in the perfectly waking state, who never heard of mesmerism or kindred subjects.

In these investigations, the replies given are deeply tinged with the cast of thought, temper, and spirit of the inquirers; with the opinions, views, and feelings of each medium. To render such researches of much practical value, for ordinary guidance in the affairs of every-day life, the information obtained should be reduced to a mathematical accuracy, that we might depend upon its correctness. We have traced the gravest errors, the most egregious misdirection, on the part of three—the three most vaunted clairvoyants in England—involving serious detriment to the health, and tending to shorten the lives of the ladies and gentleman who gave up for a short time their waking judgment, and the teachings of intelligent experience, to be led for a season by such blind guides. What is already known to one party engaged in the investigation will be correctly stated by the clairvoyant; what is strongly desired by an inquirer will often be broadly stated by the clairvoyant; and thus confidence is for the moment established, and parties are induced to follow on, like men on the moors, who chase an ignis fatuus, or "Will-of-the-wisp," until they find themselves sinking deep into the thick mire of a dark bog.

There generally appear some gleams of truth, some wonderful flashes of extraordinary intelligence, with liability to error and misdirection, that render the practical utility as means of present guidance very doubtful. Man, in his



present condition, cannot bear very close or long continued intercourse with the "spirit-world," without becoming disqualified for the ordinary duties of life; and it is dangerous to seek occult knowledges where the mind has not been prepared, in a child-like and docile spirit, to receive them, lest it should be, as it has been with others, that

He contemplated the unseen,  
Until the visible, I ween,  
Was veiled from normal sight.

The thoughts may dwell upon what to man in his present condition are but shadows, until the visible objects which surround him lose their power of producing, *through the ordinary medium of his senses*, the consciousness of their presence, and of their normal relations upon his mind. And the danger of this undesirable phenomenon is greatly increased, where social ties do not bind the man to earth, and social joys bring back his desires and affections to every-day life.

Magnetic pursuits peculiarly lead men to intense and unrelieved thought, upon the abstruse analogies of the spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical laws which have relation to our "fearful" and "wonderful" constitution. All these laws are the laws of Infinite Wisdom; are sustained and momentarily enforced by Omniscient power. In deep humility and trembling awe, surely it is safe to seek to be led by the leadings of Providence, line upon line, and precept upon precept, into closer, deeper, and more intimate knowledge—as each mind is able to bear an afflux of light, and remembering that all agencies are under the supreme control of "our Father, we will not fear the power of any adversary," while every research is made in simple faith, and with a single eye to the glory of God. Thus, while we feel and know, by the experience of years, that man can heal the sick to-day by the manifested action of faith and love in the form of "a pass," and read of Christ telling his disciples to "Go, heal the sick," we regard as a trick of priestcraft—a desperate effort to sustain by fraud time-honoured abuses on the part of men, who "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,"—much that has been said and written to prevent men from availing themselves of that "good gift"—"the gift of healing."