

Myriads of organised beings may exist imperceptible to our vision, even if we were among them; and we might be equally imperceptible to them.

W. R. GROVE, Q.C., M.A., F.R.S.

Correlation of Physical Forces, p. 161.

AN EVENING WITH MR. HOME FIFTEEN YEARS AGO,

And Reflections thereon.

A LECTURE AT THE CAVENDISH ROOMS, LONDON, ON SUNDAY EVENING,
17TH JULY, 1870.

BY

WILLIAM WHITE.

Nature, I am persuaded, did not without a cause frame our ears open, putting thereto no gate at all, nor shutting them up in any manner of inclosures, as she hath done upon the tongue, the eyes, and other such out-jetting parts of the body. The cause, as I imagine, is to the end that every day and every night, and that continually, that we may be ready to hear, and by a perpetual hearing apt to learn.

RABELAIS.—*Pantagruel*, Book III., chap. xvi.

Alas! Priests and Philosophers alike deny me the comforts of certainty unless I consent to pluck out mine eyes.

THYRA PUDEPHAT.

LONDON:

JAMES BURNS, 15, SOUTHAMPTON ROW.

1870.

DUE sense of the general ignorance of man would also beget in us a disposition to take up and rest satisfied with any evidence whatever which is real. I mention this as the contrary to a disposition, of which there are not wanting instances, to find fault with and reject evidence, because it is not such as was desired. If a man were to walk by twilight, must he not follow his eyes as much as if it were broad day and clear sunshine? Or if he were obliged to take a journey by night, would he not "give heed to any light shining in the darkness, till the day should break and the day star arise?" It would not be altogether unnatural for him to reflect how much better it were to have daylight; he might perhaps have great curiosity to see the country round about him; he might lament that the darkness concealed many extended prospects from his eyes, and wish for the sun to draw away the veil: but how ridiculous would it be to reject with scorn and disdain the guidance and direction which that lesser light might afford him, because it was not the sun itself!

BISHOP BUTLER.

PREFACE.

A FRIEND, whose worth commands affection, writes—

“I have read your Lecture, and can only express astonishment that with your common-sense so much nonsense can exist. To what hallucinations is not human nature liable! I wish you had better occupation for your Sabbath evenings in London.”

I am not insensible to criticism of this sort, being quite as prone as my censor to convert ordinary experience into a measure of all experience, and to fancy that there is nothing in heaven or earth that is not included in that experience. With Andrew Fenwick I believe, that “we should be paralysed if we had more than a glimpse of the spiritual forces that envelop and control us,” and that “we may be thankful that we live blind-fold.” Buckle has argued that the rational spirit of civilization is only possible where Nature is tame, and the mind delivered from the disquiet of famine, tempest, and earthquake. Obviously our smug scientific self-satisfaction requires a quite domestic environment wherein to maintain itself. One has to be Cockney, or something equivalent thereto, to speak thus—

“Nothing has ever been known of the spiritual world. That anybody knows, or ever has known, more about it than anybody else, is nonsense. I am myself the standard by which you may measure Abraham, the patriarch; and as to his visions, they were merely dreams, such as I have myself. I am the measure of the man Paul. And, you may believe me, as to voice or light from heaven ever having come to him at the time of his conversion, that it was not so. Simply, at that time, he had an attack of vertigo, such as we all know something about.

"O! this glorious clearing of the mind, by which now, in my view, there is nothing higher anywhere than the level of my own experience! O! what a comfort it is to have miracles shrink into common earthly things, and to know that nobody has ever seen them, any more than I have."

"An odd sort of comfort!" remarks the Rev. William Mountford. Odd, perhaps, but comfortable. It is so pleasant to feel that nothing can surprise us—that nothing can occur at variance with "the fixed laws and immutable order of Nature." Pleasant, I say, but illusory; and at the risk of crucifixion as a fool by the enlightened, who have taken stock of the universe and know what can and cannot be with infallible readiness and precision, I repeat—Pleasant, but illusory. We read of an ancient community who in their own sight were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing; but who, to shrewder eyes, were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and the question is suggested whether in these latter days the like may not be true of many whose foible is omniscience.

30, *Thurlow Road, Hampstead, N.W.*

28th August, 1870.

AN EVENING WITH MR. HOME FIFTEEN YEARS AGO,
AND REFLECTIONS THEREON.

LET me premise: I was not made a Spiritualist by spiritual manifestations. And let me be candid: my tendency from childhood was in favour of supernaturalism; and when in 1848 I found a volume of Swedenborg on a second-hand bookstall in Glasgow, as I read I believed, and by what I read was drawn to further reading and deeper credence.

In making this statement I may seem to discredit myself at the outset; but I cannot help it. As I wish to be taken for honest, I know no shorter way to that end than to be honest—to be frank even to the verge of egotism.

"You read Swedenborg," it may be said, "and you believed in him. Why did you believe in him? How did you know that his testimony was true?"

I reply, I believed Swedenborg's testimony in so far as it was in accord with my reason, affections, and experience. I discovered in myself a strong sympathy with his ideas and judgments. His opinions on innumerable matters became my opinions, sometimes at first sight, sometimes after consideration, sometimes after more or less resistance.

All belief, I take it, is of this character. We believe that to be true which we see to be true, or feel to be true; or, in other words, which is in harmony with our peculiar constitution.

One truth Swedenborg taught me, which I realised slowly, but which I hold firmly as a truth of the first magnitude, namely, the unity of humanity; not only of man with man, but of men with spirits; that we here on earth are organically related to our predecessors; that our independence is wholly illusory; and that we cannot think a thought, or move a finger without the co-operation of our unseen associates.

Furthermore, he established in me the conviction that death works no change on human nature, and that men and women divested of their earthly bodies, survive as men and women in spiritual bodies, with every sense and faculty sharpened for existence in a rarer air.

These spiritual bodies, included in the spiritual world and subject to its order, transfuse and vivify every fibre of our earthly

bodies. Death, indeed, is nothing but the withdrawal of the spiritual from the earthly body; the earthly having by disease, injury, or wear, become unfit for its residence and service.

Hence we are inhabitants of two worlds. By our spiritual organisation we are denizens of the spiritual world, and by our earthly of the physical world.

And this brings me to a point I desire to make especially clear. Suppose we could relieve the senses of our spiritual bodies of their carnal vesture, we should at once find ourselves, to the extent of their release, *en rapport* with the sights and sounds of the spiritual world.

This, says Swedenborg, was his experience. He was able, almost at discretion, to enter into the spiritual world, and converse with its inhabitants. Generalising this experience, he went on to assume that all spiritual intercourse is so effected; and that when we read in the Bible that any one saw or heard an angel, we are to conclude that the spiritual eyes and ears of the seer had been unsheathed, and thus that the transaction described was in the spiritual world.

The explanation is, I dare say, largely true, and was satisfactory when I first became acquainted with it, especially in connection with the facts of clairvoyance; but I hope to show that it is insufficient, and that whilst we may make acquaintance with spirits by opening our senses in their sphere, they in turn may become manifest to us by operating outwards in our physical sphere, clothing themselves for the purpose in matter appreciable by our senses as veiled in flesh. So much by way of preface.

In May, 1855, I chanced to meet Dr. Garth Wilkinson, and in the course of conversation he described a variety of extraordinary phenomena which he had witnessed in the presence of Mr. Home, a medium who had arrived from the United States. He advised me to see Home, but I lacked sufficient curiosity to do so.

Repeating Dr. Wilkinson's experience to a friend, coupled with his advice, he said, "I wish you would invite Home to my house, and come with him." Thus incited, I wrote to Home, made an engagement, and on the evening appointed conveyed him in a hansom from his lodging in Jermyn Street to my friend's residence in Islington.

In Home I found a pale, consumptive-looking young man. He told me that the spirits had informed him that he had not eighteen months to live. The spirits were at fault, as they usually are in prophecy; but at the time I thought them in a fair way to prove right.

At my friend's house we were ushered into the dining room,

where sat twelve gentlemen, the majority of whom were strangers to me, and all to Home. Home was taken aback, and remarked that spiritual manifestations took place with difficulty in large and promiscuous companies; "but," said he, "we cannot now do better than try."

We sat round a long dining table, Home on one side, nearly facing me. The window blinds were drawn down, as it was dusk, candles brought, and the room well lighted. We were requested to place our hands on the table, and to converse freely. We had scarcely been seated five minutes when raps began to be heard on the table, on the walls, and on the floor.

"Will the spirits kindly rap here?" asked Home; and immediately raps took place on the table in front of him. Others made similar requests, and were as quickly gratified. I did so myself, and had an instant response. And let me here observe, that I had fancied if ever I came into open communion with spirits, I should be intensely, if not painfully, excited. On the contrary, on this occasion I was perfectly calm—indeed, enjoyed unwonted composure, with all my wits alert for observation.

Various feats of telegraphy were attempted: one rap signifying No, two Doubtful, and three Yes; but there were so many with questions to ask, the process was confusing and tedious. As for the raps, they seemed as if caused by slight explosions within the wood, rather than by blows on its surface.

A small hand-bell was laid on the floor, and shortly commenced tinkling. Home put his hand under the table without stooping, and produced the bell. The spirits, he said, had brought it to him. It was again thrown under the table, and shortly ringing was heard behind our chairs as if the bell were moving around the sitters. Home begged that none of us would look; but one gentleman, hearing it at his back, could not repress his curiosity, wheeled round, and at the same moment the bell dropped on the floor near the wall beside his chair. I noted at the time that Home's hands were resting, like my own, on the table. Once the bell was silent for a while, and was inquired for. I turned my eyes towards the floor, under the table, and saw it fall between my feet. It was suggested that it had been in course of conveyance to me, as it had been to Home.

Home asked for an accordion; but there was not one in the house. A servant was despatched to a neighbour and borrowed a concertina. Home said it would do, and placed it on the floor under the table. In a few minutes it commenced playing. Home put his hand down, the concertina met his advance, and performed music whilst he held it, his left hand remaining on the table. Then he replaced it on the floor, where it resumed playing by itself.

Feeling something touch my leg, I looked, and there was the concertina. I did not attempt to take it, but it rose to my knees, clambering just like an animal. I took the strap, and the instrument was pulled out and pushed in, making sounds, but nothing that could be called music. I had some difficulty in adjusting my hand so as to resist the upward pressure, and distinctly felt an invisible hand co-operating with my own. Finding me, I suppose, an inefficient medium, the concertina was gently withdrawn.

All the time the rapping continued about the room and on the table, but not noisily. Several of the party likewise felt hands touching them. One gentleman who sat on the side of the table opposite to me had his face bathed in perspiration. Subsequently I inquired what had so moved him, and he informed me that he had had his hand grasped repeatedly and affectionately in a fashion that was peculiar to his father, who had left this for the spiritual world.

Raising my eyes, I saw a hand as of a boy over the breast of a friend opposite to me. I saw it as distinctly as if it had been a hand pushed through a door. Suddenly one of the company gave a shriek, sprang from his seat, and threw his arms in the air. What was the matter? we all in a breath inquired. A hand, he answered, had approached him; and when laid on his forehead he could not restrain himself. So the evening terminated. Two hours had passed away as ten minutes; and as I drove back to Jermyn Street with Home, I felt as if my faith in the other world had got a new rock for its foundation.

Naturally my mind continued much exercised concerning what I had heard, what I had felt, and what I had seen. As a Swedenborgian, I had no difficulty about the presence of spirits, but only about the mode of their manifestation. I had convinced myself (as stated at the outset) that we are intimately and organically related to spirits, and can do nothing without them—nothing whatever; for, as Swedenborg testifies—

“Man without communication with heaven and hell would not be able to live for a moment. If communication were broken, he would fall down dead as a stock. The spirits associated with me were a little removed, and instantly, according to their removal, I began, as it were, to expire; and I should have expired unless they had come back.”

But granted the presence of spirits; how did they manifest themselves in a fashion so abnormal? Holding that all activity in nature is a manifestation of spirit through nature, I was yet accustomed to regard each item of nature as the corresponding

mechanism of its appropriate spiritual force, and essential to the physical exhibition of that force. At the *séance* with Home, however, spirits effected a variety of actions in the (apparent) absence of corresponding physical media. Here, I repeat, was my difficulty.

Granting, again, the presence of spirits; I was ready, as said, to believe that if my senses were relieved from their carnal vesture, I should, like Swedenborg, enter into open acquaintance with the spiritual world; but that, I felt sure, had not been my case whilst with Home; and that the extraordinary phenomena I had witnessed (that I had heard, felt, and seen) had been manifest through the ordinary avenues of the bodily senses.

Possibly, had my experience remained solitary, I should, after the habit of my kind, have gradually argued myself into the conviction that I was somehow mistaken, or had been under some peculiar hallucination on the evening in question. Mercifully I was left with no opportunity to play such folly. Not only from time to time have I had the experiences of that evening repeated with variations and extensions, but I have had them independently confirmed by similar experiences of friends and acquaintance on whose acuteness and veracity I can depend. Indeed, the evidence whereon I rely as to the reality of physical manifestations by spirits, I can only describe in a word as irresistible. Of course, I cannot expect to communicate my conviction to others; but this I may say, that I imagine there is not a philosopher in existence, be he ever so hard-headed, who, with the experience I have enjoyed, supplemented by diverse and disinterested testimony, would fail to share that conviction.

Reverting to the difficulty I felt as to the manner in which these extraordinary manifestations were effected, I was gradually brought to the conclusion that under suitable conditions certain spirits obtain substances in the atmosphere of those who wait on them, whereby they are able to operate immediately on material objects, and even to make themselves visible to the physical eye.

I had this idea remarkably confirmed by a well-known physician. At a *séance* he amused himself by gently pressing the hands presented to him by the spirits, until they vanished under his grasp. The spirits complained of this treatment. Why? Because, they said, they formed these hands with great pains, and did not like to have their labour dissipated. They made for themselves gloves, tangible to flesh and blood, from the aura of the company.

Hence, I incline to believe that where spirits make themselves outwardly manifest, they do so by means of certain physical

emanations, and that those who, like Home, are specially styled mediums, more readily than others yield what the spirits require for the exhibition of their power, or for their partial incarnation.

And thus we meet a constant complaint that since spirits do so much, why do they not do more? The answer has been given. What they do, they do with difficulty. As is well known to all who have had any experience of their external manifestations, they are assisted and hindered in a remarkable manner by the temperament and disposition of those who assemble to meet them. The presence or absence of an individual may make or mar the success of a *séance*. The evening with Home I have described was eminently successful, but it owed its success to a fortuitous concurrence of favourable conditions. It might have been a complete failure, and Home powerless to avert the disappointment.

In physical manifestations, then, we hold that spirits are limited by the conditions wherein they operate; and a similar limitation extends to the higher order of manifestations in which spirits enter into and possess a medium, using the medium's faculties as their own in speaking, writing, singing, drawing, or other ways. They operate through the acquirements of the medium, conscious or latent, which they excite or vivify, but rarely transcend.

Thus too we see the explanation of the imperfect grammar and orthography in which spiritual communications are so frequently couched, and which afford occasion for so much waggery in the newspapers.

Even when there is no possession, when the spiritual senses are opened into the spiritual world, and spirits are met face to face, the seer is still limited in his acquaintance by his own character. Swedenborg is an eminent illustration of this fact. His angels all talk and think in what has been styled Swedenborgese. Every one of us, as I stated at the outset, is vitally related to spirits, and these spirits are our kindred in the most thorough sense, and in communion with our inmost feelings and thoughts. Hence, did any of us, after the manner of Swedenborg, enjoy open intercourse with our spiritual neighbours, it is not likely we should be altered thereby in any essential respect, but keep on talking and acting as we talk and act now—possibly with greater intensity under the stimulus of their recognized sympathy.

Fifteen years have passed away since that evening with Home. He was then comparatively unknown; he is now famous, and his mediumship familiar to emperors political and

emperors intellectual. During these fifteen years the merits of Spiritualism have been under incessant discussion, in which I can scarcely claim any part, save that of an interested bystander. To the variety of supernatural manifestations which I have from time to time witnessed, I have usually been led by others rather than sought after of myself. As a diligent reader of Swedenborg, much of the novelty that Spiritualism offers had been anticipated; and secure in my own mind, I have been too idle or too diffident to try to make proselytes.

Instructive has been the controversy kindled by Spiritualism. Over and over again has it been pronounced an exploded imposture—exploded at one time by the Wizard of the North, at another time by Polytechnic Pepper, at another by Professor Faraday. Annas, on the day of the crucifixion, I dare say, pointed with his thumb over his shoulder to Calvary, and exclaimed, to Caiaphas, "Thank God! there's an end of that imposture!" Such is always the world's treatment of new truths, and it is for Spiritualists to submit with equanimity to the inevitable. They may well do so. They are impostors, and if not impostors, fools—they who know whereof they testify, who have heard and seen and handled! And they who thus judge them off-hand are the true men! It seems to me that if we are to talk of imposture or folly, the epithet rightly applies to those who slander at hazard, and pronounce unqualified opinions on matters whereof their ignorance is total.

There are some who, staggered with the weight of sober testimony in favour of Spiritualism, begin to ask—What has Science to say? I should like to ask these good people—What do you mean by Science? Sometimes social reformers are confronted with an entity called Political Economy, whose mandates they are adjured to violate at their peril, but when pressed to an issue, Political Economy generally proves to be no more than what Mrs. Harris was to Sairey Gamp—an alias for the objector's own prejudices. There is no Minerva called Science who can be appealed to concerning Spiritualism. There are astronomers and entomologists, civil engineers and anatomists, geologists and meteorologists, and if we wished to ascertain the truth in their special lines of excellence, we could not do more wisely than resort to them; but to require from any of them a verdict on Spiritualism in the name of Science is an absurdity that has only to be stated to be seen. Who can doubt that if the physical manifestations of spirits were under discussion by the Royal Society, as much nonsense would be talked (though of another sort) as in the Convocation of Canterbury itself? The patient students of the phenomena of Spiritualism (and there are several such) are men of science, precisely on the same ground that

Lyell and Liebig are men of science. They are alike observers of Nature—of Nature in different aspects. I applaud the courage of Mr. Crookes in turning his attention to an unpopular branch of science; but when he styles his essay, *Spiritualism viewed by the Light of Modern Science*,* it is difficult to repress a smile, the light of modern science being no more than the light of Mr. Crookes,—an excellent light, but liable to depreciation under so very grand a designation. Amusing, too, is the *naïveté* wherewith he draws up a programme for the spirits; as if it was the office of the philosopher to prescribe what he would like to see, rather than to ascertain what is to be seen. I trust the spirits may prove propitious, only I remark that they appear to test the *savans* much more effectually than the *savans* manage to test them.

It is with reluctance that I utter a word in apparent disparagement of the efforts of Mr. Crookes and other sincere inquirers, for we cannot too cordially support and assist them. We know some of the conditions of spiritual manifestations, but our knowledge is very imperfect. We have free and abundant manifestations when we assemble the proper conditions, but their assemblage is to a great extent a matter of accident. It seems to me that if we knew the requisite conditions we might ensure manifestations at will—provided we could command the conditions. To this consummation I look forward, but its realisation can only be achieved by patient and protracted experiment. Thereby the other world, and our association with its inhabitants, may become as demonstrable to common experience as the existence of our antipodes. Columbus gave the Western to the Eastern hemisphere, and practically doubled the world; but if Spiritualists introduce mankind to their ancestry from creation, how much greater the service!

The idle question is often put—What is the good of spiritual manifestations? The summary answer is, that truth is its own good—that to know is a divine satisfaction, and that facts of any sort can never be indifferent to a philosophic mind. “But then the manifestations are so undignified, so very undignified, so unworthy of immortal beings!” And pray, where was it learnt that immortal beings had any regard for the fancy article we call dignity? It is plain the Creator has none, and why should His creatures? Physical manifestations have little charm for advanced Spiritualists, they preferring acquaintance with their other-world friends on easier terms; but this at least may be said in their defence—they are eminently useful in compelling

* In *Quarterly Journal of Science*, July, 1870.

the attention of a generation which, like Thomas, will not believe unless they can see and handle. Although we live in a Christian land where it might be supposed that a life beyond this life was of all ideas the most familiar, one has only to penetrate beneath the surface to find what brutish and heathenish ideas of death are entertained. Said seriously a most respectable church-going Cræsus, who, in his last illness, had bought himself a vault in Kensal Green Cemetery, "Now I shall die happy, for I know where I am going to!" It once fell to my lot to tell an elderly lady, who belonged to a church where she had undergone what is technically known as "conversion," that she was labouring under a disease from which recovery was hopeless. Sitting sadly by the fireside, she broke the silence of our meditation with, "Oh, Mr. White! I wish I *really* knew whether there is another world; for if there is, I'd get ready, and if there is not, I'd enjoy myself." It would be easy to multiply anecdotes of similar tenor, but these sufficiently indicate the state of mind which physical manifestations are designed to arouse. More than a century ago Swedenborg published his angelic experiences with the purpose, as he said, that mankind should remain no longer ignorant of the condition of souls after death; but the world has been strangely indifferent to his revelations, and his followers have been equally unfortunate. But since the Rochester rappings startled Sadduceism in 1848, what progress has been made in the knowledge and confession of the world to come! American literature is seasoned with Spiritualism. Nothing, from sermons to novels and newspapers, but shows traces of its influence. Not even its outward antagonists escape its outward touch. And during the great and terrible conflict of North and South, when scarcely a household but knew the terror and misery of death, sweet and subtle were the consolations which the diffused atmosphere of supernatural experience conveyed to myriads of devastated hearts.

For myself, let me confess—for confession is sometimes wholesome—that I have too long been indifferent to Spiritualism in its humbler forms. Early in life I received Swedenborg, and he satisfied me profoundly; and I went on to reckon that what had satisfied me ought to satisfy everybody, and that if others could not eat what I had eaten, and flourish thereon, why then they might go without! I forgot the mercy of Heaven, which has many and varied ministries, and in my conceit failed to recognize, in any adequate manner, the nature and magnificence of the revolution in transaction before my eyes.

It is alleged by Secularists that Spiritualism is mischievous, inasmuch as it tends to withdraw the mind from the business of the present life. I remember Mrs. Ernestine L. Rose, an

eloquent preacher of Atheism, relating that Professor Bush once made her a present of Swedenborg's treatise on Heaven and Hell. "Thank you, Professor," said she, putting the book under the cushion of the sofa; "my daily duties are enough for me; I shall attend to Heaven or Hell when I find myself in either."

Well spoken, Mrs. Rose! You were right and you were wrong. If Spiritualism led us to imagine that Heaven and Hell had for us any existence outside our own hearts, or tempted us to indulge in whimsies and forget our fellow-creatures, it would be mischievous indeed, and I should be sorry to say a word in its favour. But whilst Spiritualists differ on many matters, on this I think they are all agreed, that the conditions of well-being hereafter are the conditions of well-being here, and that to eternity joy and peace are inseparable and inconceivable apart from active brotherly service. We can only be happy as we resist evil and produce happiness; there are no other means to a blessed existence. Thank God, none!

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