

THE EVIDENCES OF SPIRITUALISM.

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE MASONIC HALL, MELBOURNE, SUNDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1876, BY W. H. TERRY.

The idea of Spirit intercourse is a strictly rational one to all those who believe in the immortality of the soul; it is supported by the Scriptures of all nations, and by the history of civilised races, and it is an anomaly which at first sight appears incomprehensible that Christians who found their belief on the records of the spiritual and supermundane occurrences of the Old and New Testaments should deny the possibility of the occurrence of similar manifestations at the present day. Is there less need now for such evidences? Are the meagre records of God's intercourse with an eastern nation thousands of years ago adequate to the requirements of Humanity in its present stage of progress and development? Have mankind at large so firm a faith in revealed religion that no further light is required, either to demonstrate the immortality of the soul, or give a knowledge of the nature of the life beyond? Look round and judge for yourselves, question your church-going neighbor on the tenets of his faith, and how unsubstantial is the foundation on which he stands, and how conscious he is of it. Talk to your materialistic friend, and whilst denying the adequacy of the orthodox system to prove man's immortality, and adapting himself to the alternative, he still hopes and wishes (with few exceptions) for evidence, positive, rational evidence, of such a condition. And in a rationalistic reasoning age, like this, such evidence is necessary to real conviction. Too long has blind unreasoning faith held sway; and now the time has come for it to be swept away, and its place filled by faith founded upon knowledge and evidence, and supported by reason, the requisites for which are to be found in modern Spiritualism.

Amongst the early investigators of Spiritualism in America was the Reverend S. B. Brittan, and Dr. Hallock, of New York. They carefully investigated the phenomena occurring through the "Fox" girls, and becoming convinced of its genuineness, wrote and spoke in their defence. Being men of acknowledged ability, and good social position, their example stimulated inquiry and drew the attention of many thinking people to the subject, among whom was Horace Greeley, the then Editor of the "Tribune." He personally tested the mediums, and in that paper expressed his unqualified satisfaction that the raps which occurred in their presence were not caused by them.

About this time (1851) the Hon. John Worth Edmonds, a Judge of the Supreme Court at New York, formed a circle in that City, where through the mediumship of Dr. Dexter a series of highly interesting and philosophical communications were received and subsequently published; they had a large circulation and ran through several editions. Many circles were formed in various parts of the States, and wonderful manifestations of power and intelligence were exhibited. In the presence of a number of well-known and intelligent witnesses one Edw. Fowler received a written communication, signed by upwards of fifty spirits of men well known in history, every signature of which was found to be a facsimile of their earthly autographs. The Hon. J. P. Talmadge, Governor of Wisconsin and a prominent senator (a man of powerful mind), was induced by his friend Judge Edmonds to investigate, and obtained such evidence in a comparatively short time as compelled him to give in his adhesion to the cause. The excitement in reference to the subject increased, the Clergy became seriously alarmed, and with a view of upsetting the phenomenal facts, an eminent professor of chemistry, Robert Hare (the Faraday of America), was appealed to. He did not immediately respond, but in 1858 he wrote as follows:—I feel called upon as an act of duty to my fellow creatures to bring whatever influence I possess to the attempt to stem the tide of "popular madness," which in defiance to reason and science is fast setting in in favor of the "gross delusion" called Spiritualism.

With this idea the professor went to work and constructed three ingenious instruments for the detection of the imposture, but the engineer was "hoist with his own petard," these very instruments being the means by which he was convinced beyond all doubt that those he had mourned as dead still lived, and exercised a lively interest in his welfare. One of the first communications spelt out through the test "indicator" was a Latin quotation his father (who had been "dead" many years) was in the habit of using. Professor Hare had

more courage than many of his class, and publicly avowed his conviction, giving the grounds for it. He stated to an audience of 3000 persons, who assembled to hear his vindication, that he was fully aware of the effect it would have upon his scientific reputation, but that Truth was dearer to him than worldly honor, and as he predicted so it was; the so-called scientific world turned their backs upon him, and came to the comfortable conclusion that his once great mind was failing.

In 1869 a committee of thirty-six persons was appointed by the Dialectical Society of London to investigate the Spiritual phenomena. The report published in 1873 affirms that raps, movements of tables and other objects occurred, and intelligence was displayed by some force apart from the individuals composing the circle. Sub-Committee No. 2 reported that the different intelligences communicating (purporting to be spirits) displayed separate and distinct individualities, they also demonstrated beyond doubt the objective nature of the phenomena. The Committee examined witnesses on the subject, with the following result:—

1.—Thirteen witnesses state that they have seen heavy bodies—in some instances men—rise slowly in the air and remain there for some time without visible or tangible support.

2.—Fourteen witnesses testify to having seen hands or figures, not appertaining to any human being, but life-like in appearance and mobility, which they have sometimes touched or even grasped, and which they are therefore convinced were not the result of imposture or illusion.

3.—Five witnesses state that they have been touched, by some invisible agency, on various parts of the body, and often where requested, when the hands of all present were visible.

4.—Thirteen witnesses declare that they have heard musical pieces well played upon instruments not manipulated by any ascertainable agency.

5.—Five witnesses state that they have seen red-hot coals applied to the hands or heads of several persons without producing pain or scorching; and three witnesses state that they have had the same experiment made upon themselves with the like immunity.

6.—Eight witnesses state that they have received precise information through rappings, writings and in other ways, the accuracy of which was unknown at the time to themselves or to any persons present, and which, on subsequent inquiry, was found to be correct.

7.—One witness declares that he has received a precise and detailed statement which, nevertheless, proved to be entirely erroneous.

8.—Three witnesses state that they have been present when drawings, both in pencil and colors, were produced in so short a time, and under such conditions as to render human agency impossible.

9.—Six witnesses declare that they have received information of future events, and in some cases the hour and minute of their occurrence have been accurately foretold, and even weeks before.

In addition to the above, evidence has been given of trance-speaking, of healing, of automatic writing, of the introduction of flowers and fruits into closed rooms, of voices in the air, of visions in crystals and glasses, and of the elongation of the human body.

In presenting their report, your Committee, taking into consideration the high character and great intelligence of many of the witnesses to the more extraordinary facts, the extent to which their testimony is supported by the reports of the sub-committees, and the absence of any proof of imposture or delusion as regards a large portion of the phenomena; and further, having regard to the exceptional character of the phenomena, the large number of persons in every grade of society and over the whole civilised world who are more or less influenced by a belief in their supernatural origin, and to the fact that no philosophical explanation of them has yet been arrived at, deem it incumbent upon them to state their conviction that the subject is worthy of more serious attention and careful investigation than it has hitherto received.

During the year 1870, Mr. W. Crookes, F.R.S., Editor of the British Journal of Science, who had formed one of this Committee, commenced a series of investigations with Mr. D. D. Home, and obtained some very startling results. An accordion was played in a cage, without visible hands. A board attached to a spring balance was made light or heavy at will, without any possible contact with Mr. Home's hands, and many other manifestations of an intelligent power outside the medium were obtained. These experiments were followed by a series through Miss Florence Cook. Up to this point Mr. Crookes had kept his belief as to the cause of the phenomena in abeyance.

but the evidences of their spiritual origin received through this source were too much for him, and he openly joined the Spiritualist ranks. And so it is with every truly scientific man who has correctly investigated—they have one and all come to the same conclusion. Sir William Thomson, in his opening address before the British Association (1871) said, "Science is bound by the everlasting law of honor to face fearlessly every problem which can fairly be presented to it." Spiritualism is a problem which demands and courts investigation, but unfortunately the majority of so-called scientific men do not recognise the law referred to by this eminent authority.

The following is a list of the phenomena scientifically demonstrated in his own house by Mr. Crookes:—
The movement of heavy bodies, with contact but without mechanical exertion.

The phenomena of percussive and other allied sounds.

The alteration of weights of bodies.

Movement of heavy bodies when at a distance from the medium.

The rising of tables and chairs off the ground without contact with any person.

The levitation of human beings.

Luminous appearances.

The appearance of Hands, either self-luminous or visible by ordinary light.

Direct writing.

Phantom forms and faces.

The agency of an Exterior intelligence and miscellaneous occurrences of a complex character.

This, remember, is the result of a careful scientific investigation, entered into without reference to the cause, the Spiritual demonstration being the outcome.

A book recently published by Mrs. Catherine Berry, a lady of independent means in England, contains a mass of evidence of startling phenomena, physical and mental, which no theory but the spiritual could possibly account for. At one seance, eleven persons being present, the manifestations were very powerful, three persons being levitated distances of 1 to 8 feet from the floor. There are, also, accounts of objects being carried about the room, and spirit voices heard in the light, Materialisations and many other wonderful phenomena well attested.

I may here remark that the phenomena of levitation is not uncommon in Victoria. A well authenticated case is published in the Harbinger for September, 1873, and another in the same paper of June, 1876. Whilst the bringing of solid substances into a closed room is a very common occurrence in the presence of a lady resident at Castlemaine, who some months since submitted to the most crucial tests that could be devised, and demonstrated the fact both at Melbourne and Sandhurst.

Some two years since the attention of the New York press was attracted by accounts of marvellous materialising phenomena occurring at a country homestead in Vermont, and on behalf of two leading papers, the "Sun" and "Graphic," Colonel Olcott, a gentleman of approved acumen and literary ability, was despatched to the scene to investigate and report. He spent upwards of two months in the investigation, assisted by an artist, who not only sketched every portion of the house, inside and out, but graphically reproduced the marvels which occurred therein. Colonel Olcott, though not professing to be a scientific man, carried through his investigations in a much more scientific manner than many so-called scientists. Submitting test upon test, but omitting the offensive expressions of scepticism which so many indulge in, I cannot present the results of his investigations more concisely than he does on pages 412 and 413 of his book "People from the Other World," and will therefore read them. He says—

"In the first place, it has been proved that, after making every allowance for fraud on the part of the mediums—for Horatio's removing his hand from his neighbor's bare arm in the light-circle, for his untying and rebinding himself in the dark-circle, and for William's personating every alleged materialised spirit that approximates to his own height and bulk—we have a large balance of marvels to account for.

"We have the writing of certain names that the medium had no means of knowing; the exhibition of detached hands of various sizes and colors, some deformed by accidental pre-mortem causes; we have the simultaneous playing of musical compositions by such a number of instruments that one or even two men could not have done; we have the playing of Georgian and Circassian and Italian music by invisible performers, in response to requests made in languages that neither the medium nor any other person in the room, except the asker, understood; we have the pulling of a spring-balance by detached hands unlike the medium's, one with a finger amputated, and the other with tattoo marks upon the wrist, which, in each case, would prove that the medium had nothing to do with

the pulling; we have had the playing upon an instrument and the display of hands, beyond the reach of the medium, and when his position and movements were all under easy scrutiny; we have had the passage of a solid iron ring upon the arm of the medium, and its transfer to my own, with both of the medium's hands held by mine, and also the dropping of the same solid ring from the medium's arm to the floor, in the light, with a lamp standing within 2 feet of the medium.

"We have had the execution of airs upon various musical instruments in concert, in a style so utterly unlike the best efforts of the medium as to preclude the idea that he could have been the performer upon either one of them; we have had, finally, the appearance of a multitude of figures emerging from a closet, where, in the nature of things, it was possible that any mortal person except one man could have been, dressed in a great variety of costumes, and differing in size, apparent weight, manner, sex, age and complexion from that person—to make no account of those whom he might have personated if he had been supplied with the appliances of the actor's art.

"We have, moreover, and especially, seen some of these figures dressed in Oriental costumes and speaking Oriental languages, besides others who conversed audibly in the modern tongues of Europe. Of the appearance of children and even little babes in arms; of the appearance of the two former at one and the same time; of the speaking words and sentences by children I have heretofore given such circumstantial accounts, and the substantiation of my statements is so easy, I cite the facts as among the most wonderful of the proofs accumulated during my protracted investigation."

There is one important fact not included in this part of the book, but referred to elsewhere, the recognition by persons present of the materialised spirits as their deceased friends. This occurred in at least three instances out of four, and is one of the strongest evidences of the Spiritual origin of the phenomena.

During Mr. Foster's visit to this city many strong evidences of spirit intelligence were given through him. I have been present with a total stranger to him, and heard him describe no less than eight spirits so minutely as to be readily recognised by my friend, and this was no isolated case. Of the many that came under my notice I shall select the following:—A gentleman connected with the Melbourne press, a thorough disbeliever in the Spiritual theory, paid Mr. Foster a visit to see if he could find out how it was done, telling him that he had no belief in it, but would venture a pound to satisfy himself. Almost immediately Mr. Foster said—"There is a friend of yours here, says his name is D—" "D—" said the visitor somewhat startled, "Well, if it is him, let him tell me something that will prove his identity." "He wishes you to ask questions," says the medium. "Does he?" replied the gentleman, "then ask him where the papers are which his wife has been unable to find." Mr. Foster stated that the spirit of D— would write a reply, and, taking a pencil, "Old portmanteau, New Caledonia," was written. The visitor waited for no more, but hurried off to the residence of D—'s widow and inquired where D—'s old portmanteau was. It was produced, opened, and in a book on "New Caledonia" the missing paper was found. It was a paper of importance and monetary value, and after being sought for unavailingly for months the search had been abandoned as hopeless. Will any theory but the Spiritual one explain this? The gentleman referred to, though previously a determined sceptic, was convinced that it was the spirit of his old friend D. who gave the information.

The evidences I have brought forward so far would be considered ample to ensure the general acceptance of any ordinary scientific discovery, yet they are not a tithe of what can be presented in support of the important fact of spirit intercourse with mortals, a fact upon which hinges the demonstration of man's immortality. Yet I do not ask or expect belief on this or any other oral or written evidence, but I do say that no unbiassed person can carefully review even the evidences presented in this paper, and conscientiously assert that there is not sufficient to justify a rational investigation of the subject. I would have you bear in mind that the subject I have presented to you involves that most momentous problem, "If a man die shall he live again." It is no unsubstantial theory, but a question of demon-trabé fact, and is *per se* the most important question relating to humanity. As such let it be considered calmly and dispassionately. Weigh, sift, and analyse the evidence, reject all that you find faulty and defective, but hold fast to that which your reason demonstrates to be substantial and good.