

"DOES SPIRITUALISM TRANSCEND NATURAL LAW?"

A PAPER READ BY

William George

W. G. STEVENSON, M. D.

BEFORE THE

POUGHKEEPSIE LITERARY CLUB.

FEBRUARY 3, 1880.

C'
Poughkeepsie, N. Y.
1880.



Phil 7054.13

~~THE~~

Col. J. H. Higginson.

THE FOLLOWING PAPER WAS READ BEFORE THE

Poughkeepsie Literary Club, February 3, 1880.

In reply to the Rev. J. L. Scott, in a Discussion of the Question

“DOES SPIRITUALISM TRANSCEND NATURAL LAW?”

—BY—

W. G. STEVENSON, M. D.

To solve the riddle of man's destiny has ever baffled the human mind. That immortality awaits him, after bodily death, is a belief as old as the human race; the ideal nature of this eternal existence has varied according to the intellectual status of the age or people.

Man's desire is to prolong his being, and when his head is silvered with the frosts of many winters, or his body bows beneath the stroke of some disease, nay; when in the vigor of manhood he stops to think, he instinctively shudders at the thought of dissolution and his fancy and reason unite in constructing some theory which will satisfy the mind, secure a belief and give assurance of a life to come.

The attempt to transform a belief into knowledge, to establish a theory on a basis of known facts, so that “I believe” gives place to “I know” has been, if not successful at least productive of philosophic thought and inquiry.

The voice of tradition echoing through the ages speaks of the universal, intuitive belief in a future world; that the Supreme Giver of life has revealed to some the truths pertaining to eternity is accepted by many, and, hence, on the basis of authority, faith has been anchored in many trusting hearts.

The authority of a revelation of some kind has been a significant factor in all beliefs of a Hereafter. It gives to the Hindoo a belief that Brahm is the eternal spirit from which, and into which all existence flows: it intensifies the value of the moral laws of Zoroaster and Confucius, makes sacred the “Osirian shrines of Egypt, the funeral fires of Gaul, the Druidic conclave in the oak groves of Mona, the reeking altars of Mexico,” the Delphic tripod of Mount Parnassus, the sepulchral mists of Mecca and the glorious vision of Olivet, all of which seek to impress their respective votaries with a belief that the

reality of a future life has been revealed to man. And yet generation after generation comes upon the stage of being, mingles for a brief moment in the joys and sorrows of life and passes on with fated steps to the "narrow house" appointed for all, and, as its portals close, a voice, ringing through all time, gathering the reverberating echoes from each individual tomb, breaks forth upon the ear of humanity, asking in a solemn tone—"If a man die shall he live again?"

For a moment the heart-throb stops; the senses are alert, but no response is heard,—the intellect is paralyzed; reason reels on its triumphant throne—faith only is supreme; man reverently bows his head in the presence of such a mystery.

The solution of this mystery Spiritism assumes to give. Its assumption is based, not alone on any principle of authority, intuitive knowledge, or philosophic thought, which may be sufficient to establish a belief, but on knowledge of a positive character; this it boldly affirms, and says it knows the truth, and by experimental tests not only proves the existence of an Intelligence external to and independent of man, but demonstrates the reality of individual spirit life and communion.

Spiritism is an attempt to apply the inductive methods of reasoning to spirit life and phenomena; it seeks to satisfy the religious part of man's nature by making faith subservient to fact, and, by proving the fact to be an objective reality within the domain of physical law, it brings the spiritual into the realm of the material and invites science to examine and pass judgment on all that pertains to it. It claims to know the truth of spirit life, action and desire; it tells of spirit conditions and progress; it spans the dark river of death with silver threads over which pass the thoughts of the departed to their friends on earth.

It asserts that certain human organisms are sensitive to spirit influence, and become "mediums" to receive and communicate spirit impressions—whether in the form of mental or physical phenomena.

This spirit influence gives to the medium exalted powers and enables him by the laying on of hands to heal the sick, give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf; it enables the medium to work marvels in the physical world so that material things like men, rocks, chairs or tables, will rise into the air independent of any physical cause; the medium has power to dematerialize substances, to see through things opaque, to hear spirit-voices, see spirit forms and speak with the tongue of prophecy; indeed the modern medium claims all the powers and prerogatives which have been imputed to the prophets and seers of pagan, and apostolic days, and thus makes "modern spiritualism" related to demonology, magic, witch-

craft and what is called "ancient spiritualism." It is affirmed by the spiritualistic philosopher of to-day that the phenomena are similar in all instances and are presented through kindred mediumistic channels.

Such is the status of what is now known as "spiritualism," and the object of this discussion is to elicit truth relative thereto. What is known in the schools as "spiritualistic," as opposed to "materialistic philosophy"—is not involved in this debate, nor do I wish to be understood as in any way attempting to impeach its general and accepted statements; neither is it pertinent to the present subject to discuss what is known in ecclesiastical history as "miracles," except so far as they may influence a belief in the spiritualism of to-day. To prove the truth or falsity of spiritualism it is only required to prove that its reputed phenomena are true or false.

There is no spirit entity which as an object can be weighed, measured, or otherwise tested; it is, as human knowledge goes, intangible and immaterial, (in the sense of not possessing any of the known properties of matter) the senses do not respond to its presence, intellect does not define it, and even the imagination fails to compass its being. The infinities—eternity and space—what are they? There is no oracle to answer; their related phenomena alone come within the range of the human mind; neither can the mind deal with spirit, in itself, as an entity or objective reality, because it has no known properties which affect the senses; it can come within the sphere of man's intellect only through such manifestations as are related to man.

Gravity is not known except through its material expressions, but its phenomena are examined and the truth of its existence is established. Light, electricity, life are not grasped as real objects but are defined and established by virtue of such manifestations as are related to man's senses and intellect.

So, too, of Spiritualism, it claims real being for spirit, but does not show spirit; it shows to the senses and mind only phenomena, and these as its credentials must certify to its reality.

The gentleman has very properly asked—"Is there any well credited phenomenon beyond the pale of Natural Law?"

What is "Natural Law?" Let this be first answered.

When I affirm that throughout the entire domain of Nature, I have knowledge only of an unbroken and orderly sequence of events arising from causes which are within Nature, through laws which are persistent and continuous, I do not affirm that the God of Nature may not break the continuity of events as known to us, and manifest power and purpose beyond the

limits of human understanding ; this involves not possibility but probability.

Law is but a name for the "ascertained sequence of events," and Nature is only a name for "the aggregate action and product of many Natural Laws." By "Natural" I understand every agency that enters into the causation and modification of matter and life in all their varied forms and expressions always working in an orderly sequence of cause and effect. It is therefore evident that we can not with any certainty testify to the supernatural unless limits are first placed to the natural, whose domain has ever extended as knowledge has increased till now its reign is traced from the "atom which vibrates in points of distances infinitely small" to worlds which rush onward in immensities of space.

The superhuman is known, but the supernatural is unknown, and transcends the limits of human thought. Man cannot make or suspend natural laws, but may, to a degree, limit and modify their action and interaction.

"Laws may be designated either as the known sequence of events or as another form of expression for what is called the properties of matter; thus gravity as a law, and weight as a property are one and the same; chemical affinity and the property of atomic combination are the same; the laws of light, heat, sound and electricity express only the properties of vibrations of certain subtle forms of matter."

These laws or properties are absolute, nothing can be added to or taken from them.

To destroy involves the same power as to create; to transform involves only the combining of different laws, by which different properties are presented, or as we commonly say, different forms of matter.

"Iron by virtue of its special properties, has a specific gravity or weight greater than water, and hence sinks to the bottom when thrown into it; if now iron is caused to float on water independent of the application of any modifying law, it can only be when its weight is lessened or the specific gravity of the water increased, or in other words by creating something new, by destroying that which was. This new something, having special properties, would permanently retain them. If in the case of iron which floated on the water it must permanently remain lighter than water, which is affirming that it is not iron, for iron has the property of weight greater than water, but this being lighter than water, whatever may be its other properties, it is not iron."

This is an example illustrative of a violation of natural law; let it be demonstrated as a reality and science will offer no explanation for it.

To overcome one law by another is constantly being done; a magnet may make iron float in water, even when there is no visible connection between them, but there is no violation of law, because no property of matter is destroyed.

How mind acts on matter, or matter on mind I cannot tell; the essential nature of matter, life and mind whether in their simple or complex expression is a mystery which defies human analysis or interpretation, but this at least is known, mind has never been made manifest to us except through matter, and is beyond doubt correlated with the nervous mechanism as a material basis for every expression of intellect, emotion and will. From this I conclude, as a deduction from universal experience and knowledge, that since the mechanism through which mind is made manifest is within the domain of law, so, too, must be all that in any way affects it. I cannot conceive of a power forced by the necessities of an absolute condition to utilize a definite property or law in order to manifest itself, and at the same time able to manifest itself independent of this necessary condition. Such would be a violation of all systems of thought or reason, and can not be true.

Whatever, therefore, may be the nature or source of the influence that affects mind, it must be in some way related to mind, either directly or indirectly, through the mechanism through which mind is expressed, and hence within the reign of law; to say that it is in violation of law, or beyond law, which is another expression for the same thing, is clearly a confession of a very limited perspective of the facts in nature.

To illustrate again, let us assume that I have a vision of some spirit form, or hear a spirit voice, or experience a manifestation of spirit power, shall I say that these are contrary to or in violation of law? No; the very facts themselves demonstrate that they are within law, for they are made manifest by virtue of physical conditions, and are in harmony with the laws of light, sound and force. You suffer pain and I place my hand upon you and bid it depart, and it is gone. I may not explain the fact, but cannot deny its relationship with some law of the mind or body; and so with the reputed phenomena of whatever character, of either ancient or modern spiritualism, they are made known to us through the application of laws which relate to our senses or intellect, and the fact that such laws are utilized for the expression of occult forces, proves that these forces or spirits are within law and subject to it, at least so far as they reveal themselves to us.

To explain a phenomenon so as to bring it within the realm of law, it is not necessary to demonstrate every cause, condition or effect belonging thereto or arising therefrom; this may be desirable, but it is impossible, for it necessitates

knowledge of ultimate facts which transcend the narrow limits of man's philosophy.

The silent but ceaseless workings of the varied forms of life, show us the transformation of the not-living substance into living tissues, which breathe forth action under many forms, determine their character, and crown the mystery with consciousness and will. The dead in very truth have been made alive, and an act declared as profound and incomprehensible as though the grave were opened and its mouldering tenant bidden to arise and walk. I can not tell the nature of the ultimate causes, nor explain their method of action, but because similar causes, under similar conditions, have through all time produced similar results, demonstrating thereby an orderly sequence of events, I know that natural law abounds.

Phenomena are explained when they are susceptible of correct classification; that is when they are properly placed within the operation of some established principle. A stone falls towards the earth, and its falling is explained by the "action of gravity," which in fact is no explanation, for the question arises—what is gravity? and wise men reflect but do not reply. The fact that the stone falls is established, and is placed within the rule of what is called the principle of gravity, and the explanation is complete, within the limits of the known.

So, too, with all phenomena arising from or made manifest through the human organism, they are referred back to certain general principles which are designated physiological laws, because through the many ages of human existence they have acted with uniformity, producing at all times an orderly sequence of events.

To know physiology, or the ordinary functions of organic life, is absolutely necessary before it is possible to interpret morbid or abnormal actions, and hence in this, as in other departments of learning, expert or special knowledge alone is capable of correctly interpreting much that appears mysterious to ordinary observers.

Spiritualistic phenomena may be designated either subjective—such as are recognized by the medium's consciousness only—or objective, which may be observed by the senses of others. Illustrative of subjective phenomena, claimed to be spiritualistic in nature, I will cite a few cases known to myself or well attested by others.

Mrs. E., Mrs. G. and Mr. F., trance and test mediums, assert that it is almost a daily experience for them to see spirit forms flitting around them, coming and going as airy visitors, whose reality is assured because consciousness, which cannot be doubted, testifies of them. I was told a spirit form stood closely by my side, and that others were near me and talking

with each other. Questions were asked, and responses there-to, heard only by the medium, were related to me. Alas! to me all was vacancy; my outstretched hand did not feel their presence, my eyes did not behold them, nor my ear catch their voices. Recognition was impossible to me, for their description was too meagre.

It is a phantasm of your brains I said, a hallucination exists which makes the senses testify to what is not real. I was told that all were objective realities though perceived only by those who possessed the development of spiritual senses which enabled them to appreciate realities beyond the range of ordinary minds. As we see and hear things which can not be known to the blind and deaf, so I was told that mediums, by virtue of their sensitive organisms, cognized that which transcends our power of recognition.

I am therefore requested to believe as a reality, that of which I get no proof, except the self attesting evidence of the medium's own consciousness.

In its defence appeal is ever made to the evidence of the senses, or rather, to the consciousness which ascribes to some external real cause the power of impressing the senses; it is declared that the subjective evidence, comes from an objective cause, thereby making every mental vision or sound proceed from some real spirit form which flits before the eyes and whispers in the ears of a favored few.

It is important to have a clear appreciation of consciousness if we would be able to interpret its testimony and be prepared to distinguish realities from fancies of the mind.

While I recognize consciousness as the one stern reality of our being, yet I also recognize it as in some mysterious way so related to our nervous mechanism that it reflects in its own expressions the morbid or modifying influences which affect the nervous structure; hence he who suffers from certain diseases or is under the influence of opium, hashish, alcohol, a dominant idea or the spell of a delusion of whatever character, appeals to the evidence of his own consciousness for the truth of what he sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels.

I have known a man whose arm was amputated complain of pain in the fingers of the lost member, and with energy appeal to his own consciousness for the truth of what he felt. Shall we accept his consciousness as satisfactory evidence of a fact, or find an explanation in the theory which—making knowledge come from experience—gives to the brain records or pictures, so to speak, of every portion of the body—each portion having its own experience to record—which adds to the passive knowledge of the brain, and comes into consciousness whenever the related impression exists.

Experience had taught that certain impressions to certain nerves caused pain in certain localities, and now these same nerves were affected and it was natural for consciousness to ascribe the pain to the same place, for it had not yet had time to learn from new experiences its error. This is in nervous physiology known as the law of "Eccentric Sensation," and applies to the sight as well as to the touch.

A gentleman, under my care, suffered from disease of both optic nerves, with entire loss of sight. For a time he saw men and animals, of natural and grotesque forms, disporting themselves in the air or on the walls or furniture of his room; there was no delusion, because he was conscious that the forms were unreal; a hallucination only existed, as a result of a diseased sensorium, which passed away as his health and sight were restored.

A lady known to me had for five years, at stated times, a hallucination of sight and hearing—and would see and hear her daughter who was dead, also a friend who was living, as well as a beautiful river; so distinct were the visions and so audible the sounds to her consciousness, that at times she almost yielded her reason to accept them as realities; these hallucinations were increased by any cause which would disturb digestion, or excite or weary the mind, but faded gradually away as health improved.

Talma, when he trod the stage, could by the force of his will make his audience appear for a time, to his consciousness, as skeletons.

A painter was able, after attentively looking at a person for a short time, to bring him before his mind, so that after a single sitting he was able at any time afterwards to reproduce the exact image and paint from it with as great accuracy as if the original was before him.

A gentleman was a victim of a hallucination which first caused him to see a great cat at various intervals; this at length disappeared only to give place to a more imposing phantom of a gentleman-usher "in court-dress, with bag wig, sword by his side, a vest worked in tambour and a chapeau-bras," who attended him both in private and public places and paid him personal honors. This, after a time, disappeared only to be replaced by the apparition of a skeleton which never left him, but haunted him with its horrid presence until at length he died a victim to the power of a distorted imagination.

Ben. Johnson had visions of Tartars, Turks and Roman Catholics, fighting with each other. Napoleon on great occasions saw his "star" which as an omen of success urged him onward. Malebranche heard the voice of God within him.

Dr. Johnson clearly heard his mother, who was far away, call "Samuel." Pope saw an arm protrude from the lower portion of his own body. Goethe saw his own counterpart approach himself. Cromwell saw a woman of gigantic size who told him he would be the greatest man in England.

Miss D., long an invalid from nervous disease, but of high mental qualities, had been afflicted from childhood with visions, of men, women and animals. Wearied by close attention to a sick sister, she one night retired, to be awakened by, as she thought, her mother entering the room and standing at the foot of the bed. Thinking she had come, as was expected, to report the condition of the sister, Miss D. spoke, but received no answer. The figure walked to the side of the bed and stopped, when she again spoke, but was again greeted with silence. Again the figure moved, and with fright she asked: "Why don't you speak to me?" At this the figure turned and showed the face of a stranger, young, though pale and sad, with dark hair, and a white shawl over her shoulders. For a moment it remained, then fell to the floor and disappeared. Here the visions began in infancy, but during adult life appeared only at time, of bodily or brain exhaustion or mental anxiety.

Mr. A., aged eighty, had suffered some years with a brain trouble, without, however, having his intellect impaired. Being fond of music, he improved every opportunity to become familiar with its masters. He was awakened one night about two o'clock by strains of music, which seemed to come from the street. He rose to see, and the music ceased, to begin again the moment he reclined, and what was his surprise to observe three persons standing at the foot of his bed. He turned the gas on and inspected the intruders who were humming and singing, as if preparing for a performance. He rang the bell and directed his servant to put them out. "There is nobody here, sir," said John. "What!" he exclaimed, "do you see no one there!" and the servant again answered, "No." He was directed to go to the chairs, which were now occupied by the strangers, and move them, which was done, the strangers stepping aside. Mr. A. now thought himself a victim of a hallucination, and determined to observe its phenomena, and the servant departed. But so life-like and real were the forms, that he thought they must be realities in the room, and again summoned John, together with the housekeeper, but their examination only brought forth the answer, "There is no one here." Convinced that the visitors were but phantasms of his mind, he arranged to enjoy the music, and noting the hour gave it his attention. The musicians resumed their place, and sang at first a few simple airs like "Sweet

Home," and then selections from Beethoven and Mozart; between pieces they chatted in a foreign tongue. He noted the size, form, dress and faces of the performers, and thought one resembled Brignoli. At four o'clock the concert in his brain was ended, and the musicians had departed.

Such examples represent to the spiritualist well defined materializing exhibitions of spirit power; but to the physician and physiologist they represent only the downward action of an unconscious idea on the sense centers, making all mere subjective phenomena, without external reality.

I frankly ask my spiritualistic friend and medium, if the so-called "spirit forms" which you assert so often flit before your eyes and whisper in your ears, give any better evidence of realities than did the musicians to A.?

If you answer frankly, as I doubt not you will, you will say "No; the evidence is alike in all cases to those reported, and in all cases the evidence speaks of spirit manifestation." I reply, true, I cannot demonstrate by induction the error of your opinion, for science knows no test for spirit aside from organicism, but if we reason deductively from the known to the unknown with accurate definition, it seems an easy task to negate the "spirit" theory.

In the psychological phenomena the evidence is confined to individual sense perception and consciousness, the same as in the case of him who sees phantasms while under the influence of opium, hashish, alcohol and disease, or, when in health, under the influence of a dominant idea with expectant attention.

You may call other persons as witnesses, as A. did his servants, but their eyes and ears cannot testify for your consciousness of sights and sounds, any more than their feeling can testify to your bodily pain from a pin thrust in your flesh.

Now, since we know as an inductive fact that certain conditions of the brain substance or blood circulation do cause illusions and hallucinations of the senses, which cannot be distinguished from those psychological phenomena ascribed to external "spirit" power, the question seems limited to one of differentiation. How can it be determined, of two similar phenomena, which results from direct "spirit" power, and which from brain action under special conditions? In reply we may say that the conclusion seems justified, that when the cause or condition of one phenomenon is known, it is more rational and logical to explain a similar phenomenon by a similar cause or condition, than to introduce new agencies which are not susceptible of positive proof.

If appeal is made from this conclusion because logic is made the final arbiter of truth, as against the scientific method which brings logic to the test of experimental demonstration,

I again reply, there can be no experimental demonstration of purely subjective phenomena, since consciousness is at the same time both witness and judge. It alone furnishes the evidence and alone renders the verdict.

In proportion as the mind is concentrated on any special thing, the force of its impression is intensified in consciousness. If this concentrated attention be fixed on some special thought we may be ignorant of passing events, although in their immediate presence, or if fixed on some external object, we may have knowledge of it alone, to the exclusion of other things.

Under the conditions of concentrated attention, ideas, feelings, and sense perceptions, are marshalled into consciousness with as great distinctness as if they were the products of external objects, instead of being results of subjective conditions alone. This comes from the fact that the sensorium is influenced by impressions received, independent of their source. Its function is to transform impressions into conscious sensations, and hence an idea or emotion when directed in a special way with persistent and concentrated force, may so impress the sensorium as to cause it to project into consciousness sensations which seem to come from real objects external to ourselves. I cannot tell how this is done, neither can I tell how it is done when impressions come from without. The fact is known, but to explain how a simple impression is transformed into a conscious sensation is a mystery beyond human analysis or conception.

Consciousness, therefore, testifies as to effects, but not as to causes. That which has caused feeling, sight, hearing, taste or smell, may be external to the body, or within it, consciousness knows not, and cannot of itself determine. Why, then, from the evidence of consciousness alone, shall we declare that certain of its phenomena are purely subjective expressions of brain action independent of any external cause or reality, while other of its phenomena, similar in character, and attested by no other witness, are the effects of realities external to ourselves. Evidently, unless there are other methods to corroborate the evidence of consciousness, the query is not easily solved.

An idea, when it has taken such entire possession of the mind as to make it a controlling factor of belief, is a subjective force of great power, and, when in connection with expectancy, it dominates over every mental and physical expression of man's energy. I have known the strong man to tremble with fear, to suffer physical pain and mental anguish, to smile with gladness, to see visions, hear voices, smell odors and taste substances, when no reality was present. An idea alone made him submissive to its power, and directed with absolute au-

thority his senses, intellect, emotion and will. I have known him so under the influence of the mystic spell that a paper band held him securely against every struggle made for freedom, and a knife pierced his flesh without causing the least conscious pain or feeling.

I have thus at length presented some physiological and psychological facts, strange as they may seem, which come within the known laws of nervous action, and therefore belong to all time. Ignorance relative to these laws has, in the past, caused the facts to be exaggerated and misinterpreted, and hence under such names as animal magnetism, mesmerism, odylism, hypnotism, electro-biology, and spiritism, the public mind has been filled with the wonderful, and occult phenomena have been explained by the mythical and unreal, whereas they should be classified under the laws of nervous action and brought within the domain of the natural. When, therefore, the gentleman gives examples of things wonderful to him, he is not justified in ascribing to them undue prominence, or in placing them outside the limits of natural law till he has demonstrated that they are not susceptible of explanation.

The gentleman has said that "any faith that enrolls such names as Sir Matthew Hale, John Wesley, Anthony Trollope and Judge Edmonds has arisen to the dignity of scholarly recognition." I regret to say that if the beliefs of distinguished men are made the standard of scientific truth, then alas! the hallucinations and illusions of human history will alike claim the "dignity of scholarly recognition," and the logic of the argument will compel their acceptance as facts.

Witchcraft is now believed to be a terrible example of human error and superstition and yet its truth was affirmed by the best and wisest men of its age. That witches were real and their miracles genuine facts was attested by the entire ancient world, from Moses, to Paul, and in later days by such men as Sir Thomas Brown, Dr. Johnson, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Sir Matthew Hale, Lord Bacon, Bishop Jewel, Sir Edward Coke, and Blackstone: and John Wesley said if witchcraft was not true, the Bible could not be believed.

Did those great names save this mental epidemic of evil? No: it perished from the civilized world, but not till it had filled the earth with shame and sorrow, and secured a certificate of character from the great and good.

The faith in the King's touch to heal diseases was made perfect by the results obtained, which equaled the miraculous cures of apostolic days; the act was done in public, while the multitude thronged around imploring the regal benediction, and the reality of the work was affirmed "by the Privy Council

of England, by the Bishops of the two Churches, by the general voice of the clergy, by the University of Oxford, and by the general consent of the people."

"Charles II healed one hundred thousand, of which eight thousand five hundred were in the year 1682." These are historic facts, shall they be regarded as scientific facts as well? If so, how are they to be explained? Evidently the same as similar examples in our own day are explained—all of which are within the jurisdiction of natural law.

The gentleman has said that we "should ignore all cabinet, magic circles because such manifestations are beneath the dignity of this discussion." I concede them to be delusions where they are not impositions, but I am now interested in the question of "scholarly recognition" and ask why "cabinet and magic circles" are to be ignored, seeing that John Wesley believed in "spirit raps" and Judge Edmonds in cabinet materializing, and dark circle seances.

My simple query is if they are accepted by the gentleman as "competent" and "scholarly authority" in one phase of spiritism why should their testimony be rejected concerning the very things that influenced and confirmed their faith.

The gentleman has referred to the late Robert Dale Owen as a believer in spirit manifestations and one "competent" to judge of their reality. Why "competent?" Because "he had been to Congress, had introduced the Smithsonian bill, and become one of the Regents of the Institution and had been our resident minister at Naples." These and similar honors are offered as certificates to prove intellectual competency to form a correct judgment relative to the phenomena of spiritualism. Why then does not the gentleman accept his conclusions and believe in spirit communion, raps, materializing from dark cabinets, spirit voices, spirit power, lifting chairs, tables and men into the air, reading through opaque substances and the gift of prophecy? The fact that Mr. Owen was deceived by Katy King's crude trickery proves that he was not competent. His "confession" afterwards only confirmed the general belief of his honesty but in no way "testified to his competency." That he was a gentleman of culture and scholarly attainments in literature and history is not questioned, but these do not qualify for investigation and interpretations in physiological science. As well might my accomplished friend assume critical competency in the realm of organic chemistry or comparative anatomy—because he is, as I admit, learned in calvinistic theology. It is one thing to observe facts and another thing to interpret them; it is of first importance to know how to observe,—for this is essential if we would correctly interpret.

My personal experience justifies my belief that the majority

of men, even those who are, in a general way, intelligent, are actually incompetent to observe accurately anything which excites their emotions or expectations; they are so easily influenced by dominating ideas, that an expectant attention soon awakens in consciousness, as a reality, that which is but a "shadow of a shade."

Edward Irving, called by the gentleman "the greatest preacher since Paul stood on Mars Hill," is cited as an example of a spiritualist, whose powers exceed the limits of natural law." "He heard the voice of God saying 'arise and get up hence,' and he obeyed, and spoke with the voice of supernatural power." I think the enthusiastic gentleman will find it difficult to designate the words or ideas that were "supernatural," or show wherein there is the least evidence to authorize the conclusion that Irving transcended the human. "He believed himself guided by the personality of the Deity," and I am asked if he was a "blind, fanatical monomaniac?"

I do not think the evidence sufficient to enable me to declare him a "monomaniac," but when he says he "heard the voice of God," I doubt not as to his hallucination. His assertion is an expression of a subjective condition, and since it cannot be proved by other evidence than his own consciousness, which is not, as I have already shown, a reliable interpreter of causes, I cannot accept his statement as evidence of a reality, any more than I can accept the statement that Descartes heard the voice of an invisible person directing him to pursue his researches after truth, or that the child Bernadotte Soubirois actually heard and saw the Blessed Mary.

Charles F. Freeman, the Pocasset fanatic, appeals to his own consciousness, and says he knows he heard the voice of God commanding him to kill his child, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, and that, having obeyed, he now represents the Spirit of Truth, and stands on Mount Zion holding the keys of Heaven. A jury will evidently declare him, if not insane, at least the subject of hallucinations, the result of a disordered brain.

Irving may have possessed genius as did Patrick Henry, with whom he is classed, but genius is not unnatural, nor does it transcend the human. If spirit communion ceased, as the gentleman affirms, with the Apocalypse, how does it come that Irving was made an exception to the rule?

The gentleman says "Ancient Spiritualism must stand or fall with revelation. It is true else we are deceived." Doubtless one or the other of these statements is correct, but it seems to me that "Ancient Spiritualism," like witchcraft and other superstitions, which go hand in hand through human history, must stand or fall as it is false or true as determined

by our knowledge to explain phenomena.

The gentleman places the vision of Belshazzar, and the dark circle seance of Saul with the Witch of Endor among the "relics of witchcraft." He does "not believe Saul saw Samuel," but, "admits the phenomena." I ask him why call one part trickery and another part a reality, since both are attested by the same witnesses. If he accepts the truth of the phenomena, then he admits that some one was called from the dead, and it is as easy to think it was Samuel as another.

The gentleman says "spiritualism relies on history," but he appeals to science when he dismembers historic evidence. History proves either too little or too much as viewed from the standpoint of science. It testifies to phenomena, but does not furnish exact evidence which justifies us in the belief that the properties of matter were so changed that iron would float on water in the past and not do so to-day. On the other hand, if it is accepted on the merits of its simple statements alone, history binds the false and true together so that they cannot be distinguished from each other. It either pulls the miraculous of apostolic days down to the level of the tricks of Apollonius Tyaneus, and modern spiritualism, or it draws these up to it. History testifies to certain phenomena, but it does not furnish data by which I am able to determine that, of two events alike in character and equally well attested, one is true and the other false. When the order of nature is said to be broken the burden of proof rests with him who so affirms.

Evidence that may be accepted in a court of justice may not be evidence which will determine a law or fact of nature. The evidence which might establish in a court of justice things pertaining to Swedenborg and the saints, would also establish equally marvelous things of the Eddy brothers, Davis, Foster, Slade, Andrews, Mansfield, Mollie Fancher, Eva Fay, *et id omne genus*, but it would not determine the nature of the reputed phenomena, explain the method of their causation, or prove their "spiritual" character, however marvelous they might be. A court of justice may accept the reported testimony of the Rev. Dr. Duryea, Rev. Dr. VanDyck, Rev. Dr. Prime, Prof. West, and Mr. Parkhurst, and declare it sufficient to establish a judicial belief that the asserted phenomena pertaining to Mollie Fancher are indeed true, but this is not sufficient to convince a scientific mind that the blind can indeed see, or human life be prolonged for years without food, or in other words, that the reputed phenomena pertaining to Mollie Fancher are realities.

Swedenborg claims attention not because, as the gentleman has said, he "is fast becoming holy," but because his genius was such as to impress its influence on generations. It is

not my purpose or my expectation to interpret the many mysteries pertaining to the human mind, which I have already said transcend our comprehension. Nor do I wish to be understood as thinking that because a fact or mystery is classified under some general rule, there is nothing beyond. I fully recognize the imperfection of human judgment, and doubt not that there are many things in heaven and earth that man's philosophy does not reach, and so when I speak of men, great and good, I feel for them a deep reverence, and am ever ready to extend to them the salutations of an earnest but humble heart.

In my remarks on Swedenborg I have freely borrowed from a very able essay published some years since by Dr. Maudsley.

Swedenborg, by inheritance, lawfully possessed the peculiarities of organism which largely determined the nature of his eventful career. His early life was given to reflections on spiritual things, and even before he was ten years old he asserted that angels spoke through his mouth, thereby giving evidence that even when very young he had attacks of ecstatic trance. During these conditions his words had special significance to his father, who, himself accustomed to perform miraculous cures of diseases, and to "cast out devils" from those "possessed," very easily recognized them as coming from spirits.

Swedenborg was a marvel of industry, energy, and self-assurance. He delighted in novelty regardless of its worth, and exhausted every scheme to gratify his vain desire. He traveled and observed, but did not deliberate and verify. His prolific mind teemed with fancies and speculations, which his self-assurance urged him to publish and scatter before a credulous world. Postulates took the place of facts, and conclusions followed regardless of the reliability of premises. Inductive reasoning he ignored, and facts were made to substantiate his theories. He was serene in his boundless self-assurance, and he resolved to penetrate the great chambers of bodily life, and rest only when he had gained its loftiest shrine and stood in the presence of the soul itself.

To this end he studied anatomy and physiology, and while he proclaimed that "we are not to deduce experience from assumed principles, but deduce principles themselves from experience," he speculated largely and vaguely about magnetism, chemistry, astronomy and anatomy, and his speculations were not up to the standard of the exact knowledge of his own time. Newton, Halley, Berkeley, Hume and Kant were his contemporaries, and were the abler leaders of thought. Riotous fancy was the offspring of his originality, and inconsistencies and contradictions marred his philosophy, which, nevertheless,

contains much that is beautiful and true.

After a hearty meal he had a hallucination and saw reptiles on the floor, a mist spread before his eyes and a vision of a man was seen who, speaking said—"Eat not so much, I am God the Lord, the Creator and Redeemer of the world, I have chosen thee to unfold to men the spiritual sense of the Holy Scriptures, I will myself dictate what thou shalt write." Here is positive evidence of mental aberration the same in character as can be seen in our asylums to-day. His journal informs us that he would lie for hours "neither asleep nor awake" in a curious "trance," troubled or elated with visions and dreams which were all blended as one and the same expression of spiritual revelation, even though productive of disconcertant and obscene mental pictures.

For three weeks there is an interruption in his writing which corresponds to an attack of acute mania, as is demonstrated by the story of Brockmer with whom he lodged during this time. He refused to see people in his room and with stammering words, foaming mouth and dishevelled hair, he, with great excitement, declared himself to be the Messiah, come to be crucified for the Jews, and insisted on preaching in the synagogue. Two spirits were with him, each giving different counsel. With confused speech, he sought the Swedish Envoy and on his return threw off his clothes, rolled in the mud in a gutter and then distributed money to the assembled crowd.

There can be no doubt that he was now insane from causes intrinsic, and involving his personality. This always forbodes ill, but coming on at the age of fifty-six makes full recovery doubtful. His after life gives proof that, while the acute disease had passed away, there was a trace left which ever shadowed his mental life.

He writes "I have been permitted to hear and see things in another life which have never come to the knowledge of any man, and have been instructed concerning hell and heaven." An ecstatic trance existed and he saw and heard not realities external to him, but the sense centers were affected by impressions from the centers of thought and responded the same as though the impressions came from external objects. His consciousness recognized the effect but was unable to determine the cause. The objects in heaven appeared to him exactly like those in the world, illustrating the fact that imagination never creates objects of which the mind has no knowledge, it only transforms and combines things which are known. His self-assurance did not desert him in heaven for he tells us that he was above others and became the teacher of angels.

His spiritual discoveries are replete with contradictions, obscurities and absurdities which can hardly be explained on

the theory of seership, but fall into natural relations on the theory of a mind diseased.

His "spiritual diary" abounds with evidence to show this fact. "Hosts of spirits have conspired to suffocate me and soon as they had made the attempt a heavenly respiration was opened in me and they were defeated." "Certain spirits who on earth had been tradespeople and had defrauded their customers," desired him to steal things of little value. This showed a tendency to kleptomania.

Substances taken in the mouth were changed in taste, sugar would taste like salt, thereby showing an illusion of the sense of taste; suicidal tendency existed at times as is shown by the fact that when he was in the celestial streets evil spirits wished to cast him under the wheels of carriages. Sara Hesselia, of spirit land and fame, absurdly thought that Swedenborg wished to marry her in spirit life, but when she learned the contrary she excited in him a suicidal impulse the execution of which was only prevented by hiding the knife which was to be used for the purpose. Again he says—"When I awoke in the night I felt in the hair of my head a multitude of very small snakes," the result of plotting Quaker spirits whose "worship is so wicked and abominable that were it known to Christians (on earth) they would expel Quakers from society and permit them to live only among beasts. They have a vile community of wives who are possessed with devils,"—the obscenity which follows forbids its utterance, but it shows the fact of a diseased fancy dwelling with morbid sympathy upon sexual obscenities.

Paul sought the companionship of a certain devil, who fancied himself the deceiver of Adam and Eve, proposing that they make themselves gods. "During my sleep I have been infested by adulterers, and this devil and Paul have lent aid to my infesters, hence Paul's nefarious character was made known. Paul is among the worst of the apostles. That has been made known to me by a large experience. It would be tedious for me to write all I know about Paul."

Calvin is rebuked as follows: "You talk impious, begone you wicked spirit. You are in the spiritual world and do not know that predestination implies that some are appointed for heaven and some for hell. Have you any other idea of God than of a tyrant who admits his favorites into his city, but condemns the rest to a slaughterhouse? Be ashamed then and blush for your doctrine."

Swedenborg would ascribe every bodily pain to the presence of evil spirits, he would talk aloud in the night and affirm that he was speaking against evil spirits who were blaspheming in his presence.

The subjective evidence convicts Swedenborg of insanity, and appeal must be taken to objective facts if the gentleman will prove him possessed of superhuman faculties or powers. But here the reputed facts are too few and the evidence too imperfect to justify us in accepting as true, statements of the marvelous in opposition to universal experience and knowledge, and the fact that in many cases he refused to give tests under conditions which would enable proof to be obtained, is evidence against his pretensions.

Swedenborg's disordered imagination constantly gave a distorted form to all impressions received, whether coming from the intellect or senses, and his morbid creations were projected outward and interpreted by him as spiritual realities.

Extreme views I do not hold relative to this man, for while I think him insane, and his examples of seership the products of a brain diseased or imperfectly developed, I do not condemn him as a conscious imposter, nor seek to detract from his true greatness of mind, many expressions of which are worthy of praise and meditation, and mark him, as Emerson says, "a mastodon in literature," although to me they are beneath the productions of Dante, Shakespeare or Spinoza, who with many others, have transcended the achievements of Swedenborg, without pretending to possess other than natural, human powers.

"Because a man's mind is unsound all which he says is not therefore folly." Every one who speaks rationally and behaves properly is not necessarily sane, neither are all madmen incapable of high intellectual exertion. With as much truth as beauty it has been said that "athwart the murky atmosphere of madness lightning flashes of the deepest insight occasionally shoot, and the light of genius is sometimes only the light of a falling star."

Swedenborg's mental alienations did not, except for a short time, entirely control his intellectual life. They may have shadowed it, but did not completely obscure it. Because he had a high order of intellect, the eccentricities of his character should not be ranked as spiritual gifts. Benvenuto Cellini gave the world master pieces of art not because he was insane, but in spite of his insanity. The Positive Philosophy, of Comte, has its inherent worth independent of the fact that its author was a lunatic. Quakerism has its merits, though, its founder, George Fox, would to day be ranked as insane, as would the founders of Buddhism, Mohammedism and Shakerism. Prove to me that Swedenborg had "supernatural" gifts and powers, and I will prove to you, with evidence of the same character, that Buddha, Mohammed, George Fox, Ann Lee, and Andrew Jackson Davis were seers equal to him, and pos-

sessed of equally marvelous powers. I deny the facts, and yet may believe that their respective teachings and influence far surpass the comprehension of their founders.

Different historic epochs reflect through individuals their special characteristics. These individuals, be they few or many, become for a time the incarnation of an age, the lawful representatives of its social, intellectual and moral forces. Such a representative was Jeanne d' Arc. Credulity and superstition every where existed. That Providence directly interfered in the affairs of men was generally believed, and apparitions were accepted as realities in nature.

France, as the chosen nation for God's Kingdom on earth, was under special divine protection. A foreign foe polluted its soil, and desecrated its sacred shrines. Defeat had crushed the hopes of the people and there was no leader to inspire them to deeds of valor.

Under such conditions, and at such a time Jeanne d' Arc appears and takes a prominent place in her country's history. At the age of twelve she beheld an apparition of a young man who bade her—"run home, for your mother wants you." She obeyed, only to learn the error. Then a brilliant cloud appeared from which came a voice saying—"Thou art born * * to do marvelous things for it is thou whom the King of heaven has chosen to re-establish the kingdom of France and to be the aid and support of King Charles despoiled of his Empire. Clothed as a man thou wilt take arms, thou wilt be a chief in the army and all will obey thy commands." For five years similar apparitions appeared, until at length the command was imperative to go to Vancouleur whence she would be conducted wherever she should direct.

Her presence filled the soldiers with enthusiasm, and victory was the grand reward of their valor and her military genius. I do not seek to detract from her merits, but only protest against giving to her the element of the miraculous. That she really saw St. Catharine and heard St. Michael rests entirely on her own assertion, and can only be accepted as subjective evidence—the result of physical causes—and not proof of a reality. Those who afterwards witnessed the execution of the person supposed to be the Maid of Orleans (although there is abundant evidence to show that she herself was not burned), assert that the name of Jesus was plainly visible in the flames. The visions of the Maid and the people must be ranked among the phenomena of hallucinations and illusions. She doubtless was a noble and honest girl, but her enthusiasm—the offspring of an idea operating in a peculiar organism—alone fired the hearts of the soldiers, and enabled them, under the influence of its magic spell, to perform heroic deeds, the same in all re-

spects as history records of many others. An idea, be it true or false, may so possess the mind as to enable men to perform deeds that ordinarily seem impossible. The false idea that St. George, and Pope Adhemar, who had been killed, had come to aid the Christian arms, so inspired the army that Tancred and the two Roberts changed defeat into victory, and Jerusalem was rescued from the Saracen. The idea that St. George, St. Demetrius and St. Theodore, with an angelic host of warriors were seen descending from the clouds, filled the Christian soldier with such enthusiasm that the Cross triumphed over the Crescent at Antioch.

That the Maid of Orleans achieved a great work is admitted, but there is no evidence to authorize the conclusion that her work transcended the limits of human genius. Neither do her visions justify the belief that they were the result of "supernatural" agencies. Because "her enthusiasm was united with a definite purpose," it is not evidence against the human, any more than are the examples of Cæsar at Pharsalia, Cromwell at Edinburgh, or Napoleon at Marengo.

The gentleman has said that to call the reputed phenomena of spiritualism "impositions—is at least unscientific." Let me ask if it is unscientific to call things by their right names? If not, then the word is properly applied to the vast majority of the so-called "spiritualistic phenomena." My friend tells us "the subject is too sacred for jesting, too holy for experiment. The magnetic circle surrounds shallowness and fraud, but beneath it all there beats a heart with which the pulse of natural law has no harmony." This seems to be better rhetoric than logic. Does a heart beat that is not in harmony with the pulse it alone causes? Is not natural law in harmony with all truth? Does God direct the methods of events and yet make them discordant? Does He create a mystery, and endow man with an intelligence which urges him to investigate and know its truth, and at the same time tell him that it "is too holy for experiment?" No; the fruit of the "tree of knowledge" has been tasted, and it has proved such a blessing to man, so ennobling and purifying, that he will ever seek to partake of that which lifts nearer to Divinity, and refuse to be kept from it though pains and penalties threaten, and "flaming swords" guard the pathway.

Again he says "The sordid clairvoyant is an outrage on the credulous; if true it is sacrilege, if false, an imposition." But he has already told you "to call it 'imposition' is unscientific." Why does he, then, use the term? If clairvoyance is true, I see no more "sacrilege" in it than I do in ordinary eyesight. I think its claims are false, and therefore prefer to call it "imposition."

Objective phenomena are such as others may witness and verify. As examples of this class we are told that through the mediumship of Mr. Home, material things like chairs, tables, and musical instruments, rise into the air and move around independent of physical means, and even his own body rises and floats in the air; red hot coals placed on his head do not burn him, and his personal stature is increased and diminished by this spirit influence. Through the Eddys the spirits dematerialize the walls of a house, and hurl rocks into the rooms, or dematerialize the rocks first and then re-form them in the room. Spirits are "materialized," and, in real bodily forms, appear, act and speak as when living. Through Foster thoughts are divined, and names of departed friends appear in blood red letters on his arms. Mrs. Andrews makes visible spirit lights, and audible spirit voices. Through Alexis of France and Mansfield of New York, opaque substances offer no impediment to sight, and the contents of sealed envelopes and closed books are easily read. Through Mrs. Cushman of Boston, names of persons unknown to her are readily told. Through Eva Fay an electric current is broken without influencing the register of the galvanometer. Through Slade spirits write on the inside of folded and sealed double slates, while Fish is a medium through which spirit-power so operates that he can by the laying on of hands remove bodily pain and disease. Such are the wonders said to be presented through the "mediumship" of different persons, and we are asked to believe them as verities and know them as objective facts.

I have no objection to a belief in them if they are facts, but I protest against them till they are proved to be facts by evidence critical and positive. Such evidence has never been given relative to the so-called spiritualistic phenomena, and hence they are unworthy of our acceptance.

Prove the reputed facts by exact scientific methods and I will admit my inability to explain them, but until experts furnish such proof, I must class them in the long category of human errors and deceptions. Demonstrate them as real, objective truths, and while it may not relegate them beyond the limits of natural law, it may teach us anew the important lesson of humility.

I admit, however, that because such phenomena are without foundation in our personal experience, the limits of which closely determine the powers of our conceptions, it does not necessarily follow that they should be dismissed because their terms are unthinkable, since we cognize as real other things which are also unthinkable, as the existence of consciousness itself, and hence we are not justified in passing over occult phenomena simply because we cannot conceive of the methods of their causation.

Experience authorizes belief in the attributes of mind only when related to material brain substance, and yet, since we cannot have any definite conception of this relation, or of the nature of mind or consciousness, we are not transgressing legitimate thought if we accept as a fact of our belief that an unseen world, "consisting of psychical qualities or spiritual phenomena" might "be demarcated by an absolute gulf from what we call the material universe, but not necessarily be discontinuous with the psychical phenomena which we find manifested in connection with the world of matter." Our experience is finite, and "our capacity of conception is not co-extensive with the possibilities of existence," and hence it is not only possible but probable that beyond the range of the knowable as recognized by our present grasp of mind, there are regions of realities which may be related to us, and forms and conditions of existence which transcend the limits of our philosophy.

Human science may not be able to demonstrate the reality of these conceptions, but this is not evidence against it. Because the terms of the known fail to explain the unknown, it is not proof against the unknown, except in definition.

Ever ready for the reception of a new fact, science invites the evidence which will bring conviction of a reality or dispel a fancy of the brain.

The testimony of a multitude may be of no value as to the existence or nature of an event, because a trance condition may influence many as easily as one, as is attested by many events in human history. And while it may seem unjust and ridiculous to deny the truth of what is affirmed by an eye witness, yet, nevertheless, it must be maintained as a fact capable of demonstration, that the great majority of men will rank with those who have eyes, but see not, ears, but hear not, neither do they understand the difference between realities in nature external to themselves, and the phantasms which exist only in their minds, the products of abnormal conditions within the brain.