

MRS. ETTA ROBERTS,
THE SO-CALLED CAGE MEDIUM.

HER STRANGE CAREER OF DECEIT,

WITH VARIATIONS.

IF there were not so many blind dupes of fraudulent mediums, the exposure which follows would not be given to the public. Exposure has proved the most effective means of circumventing the arts of imposters. It has driven into obscurity many of the more prominent frauds who used to thrive on the credulity of the simple-minded.

Not a great while ago, Mrs. Roberts began a marauding campaign in Florida, under the patronage of the well-known spiritualists, "Dr." and Mrs. Whitney, which, alas for her, ended ingloriously. The final catastrophe came at a seance held in the private house of her friends at St. Augustine. The guests assembled. If there had been among them no persons of ordinary sanity, perhaps the results would never have been known; but most of them sat waiting in trembling expectation that the ghosts of the dead would put on again their well-known earth forms, and appear to entrance or paralyze the beholder.

Mrs. Roberts entered the cabinet to entice the spirits to "revisit the glimpses of the moon." The manager called for music, and the sitters raised their voices in "Nearer, my God, to Thee," and "Over the River." But the spirits were vainly called from the "vasty deep"; they put in no appearance. But something else happened of mundane origin, not so *inspiring* as the sitters hoped for. After considerable waiting, certain sounds were heard; but they were unlike as could be to the "music of the spheres." Alas! they were the eructations of a human stomach disordered by potations of alcohol. The sounds heard and the odors that attended them were not like those of "Araby the blest"; but this was not the worst. The revolt of the stomach was followed by the rebellion of the intestines. Other sounds were heard, and the involuntary evacuations which followed produced a stench which compelled the opening of the windows to save the sitters from fainting.

But the interested manager was equal to the emergency. It was gravely announced that a "wicked spirit" had controlled the medium, and they must sit perfectly still and not "break the circle," if they would not imperil the life of the "sensitive." And sit still they did for five mortal hours. If a wicked spirit had taken possession of the "sensitive," it must have been such a one as Shakespeare described, "Oh thou invisible spirit of rum! if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil."

The seance broke up in disorder at one o'clock next morning. Mrs. Roberts and her friends saw that St. Augustine would not be a profitable place to produce her "full forms," and made haste to depart. But she did not go alone. At the same time a man by the name of Jennings was missing, who left wife and children without resource except the kindness of charitable neighbors.

Mrs. Roberts then appeared in New York, in company with Jennings, who, in the meantime, had been "developed" into a shining medium by a transformation as sudden as that of St. Paul on his journey to Damascus. Jennings now assumed the high-sounding title of "Prof. Souter." Mr. Henry J. Newton, the most "accurate, patient and critical investigator of spirit mediums," as we are told by Mr. Clegg Wright, in several columns of the *Banner of Light*, and also that Mrs. Roberts was the most extraordinary "sensitive of all the mediums," gave these wandering pilgrims from Florida a warm welcome. Mr. Newton had, before this, given proof of the "critical" nature of his investigations by introducing to the public those renowned "sensitives," Carrie Sawyer and Mary Ann Wells,—those persecuted "instruments of the spirits" so often shown up by the wicked press. Under his patronage and endorsement Jennings and Roberts were enabled to thrive in this new field of their exploits. It was heralded of them that they demonstrated the "immortality of the soul," and "brought consolation to many grief-stricken ones."

When, in the presence of Mr. Newton, one McDonald, a sculptor, caught Jennings and stripped him of his disguises in personating one of Mrs. Roberts' spirits, that trifling circumstance did not disturb Newton's faith in either of these mediums; in fact, it would seem that Newton is never so firmly convinced of the genuineness of a spirit medium as when that medium is exposed in a trick and shown to be thoroughly rotten in character. With him a medium needs no better credentials.

On another occasion Newton's daughter was materialized, and he promenaded the seance room, his arms clasped about her. When this daughter kissed him he "smelt whiskey"; this he afterwards confessed in public, but whether the other St. Augustine odors "materialized" at this time he did not say. Mr. Newton is the most hospitable of men. He takes to his house and family the maimed warriors or soiled doves of mediums, and shelters them from the cold blasts of an ungrateful world. Slade, the slate-writer, who has just been detected at Duluth in nameless vicious practices, thrashed and kicked out by his landlord into the street, was one of Newton's guests. So Jennings and Roberts were invited to the same sumptuous retreat; yet it is not known if, in his intimate association with her, he had opportunity to witness any of the St. Augustine phenomena.

There was one other stage on which they exhibited their great gifts. The Onset Camp is the Mecca to which mediums of all varieties and of every degree of fame annually flock. Newton took his Florida proteges to this famous resort, and introduced them to the throngs of the faithful. For once those old standbys in the art of raising the dead, Ross, Bliss, Fay, and George T. Albro, celebrated as oft-exposed mediums, went into temporary eclipse under the more brilliant blaze of "Prof. Souter" and Mrs. Roberts. These new lights gained the applause and endorsement of Dr. Storer, president of the camp, as well as the approval of the ranks of the believers. "Dr." Storer ranks with Newton in the extent of his knowledge and intimacy with mediums. He carried on a thriving business in mediums, under the taking title of "Bureau of Mediums." His particular star for the materialization phase was Mrs. Bliss, whose "Billy, the Bootblack," has been the admiration of thousands, and whose "spirit raiment" of black cambric and dirty bosom piece are still preserved, a unique relic of that famous spirit. Mrs. Bliss is a reformer, and once had a free-love "contract" union with the lamented "Dr." James A. Bliss, medium and dealer in magnetized brown paper. Mr. Bliss and several Mrs. Bliss were converts to the "contract" system advocated and exemplified by Mrs. Lake, of "Ayer's Temple," Boston. Mrs. Lake practised the free-love "contract" system with a Catholic priest, and subsequently with a Mr. Peck, who abandoned without support his lawful wife and children, to live and travel with her. Mr. Peck was, in California, a medium for materializing spirits under very crucial conditions. He allowed himself to be stripped to nudity before entering his cabinet, and was smart enough to elude his investigators many times. Finally the never-failing method was tried: he was *grabbed*, and between his legs was discovered a small flesh-colored pouch, containing the white material so convincing of the "return of spirits in materializing circles. Mr. Peck is now known as "Prof. Peck," an accredited lecturer for "the cause" in New England, and especially at Onset Camp. Mrs. Lake recently annulled her "contract" with Prof. Peck, by a clause in it to the effect that they should live together only so long as they liked. Her faith in the free-love plan is unshaken, for she has told the public she may make another experiment if she chooses. It will be noticed that the courts of Massachusetts, in considering Mrs. Lake's case, took an adverse view of her example, and ruled "free-love contracts" illegal, and of the same

nature and form as verbal contracts for a day or night, commonly in vogue in the slums of large cities.

This slight explanation of the moral status of other noted mediums seemed necessary before continuing our account of Mrs. Roberts' exploits at Onset. "Dr." Storer was a witness to the "manifestations" of Roberts at a "test seance" on the camp grounds, and, with others, certified to their genuineness in the columns of the *Banner*. Another big "doctor," not far from three hundred pounds in weight, in the cage with Roberts, was landed in a twinkling outside of a locked and sealed wire cage. Still further, "Dr." Storer promenaded arm in arm with a female spirit that came through the cage in "full form," without a scratch. If "Dr." Storer "smelt whiskey, or had his olfactories assailed with the odors of Mrs. Roberts' seance in the ancient city, he did not tell of it. Perhaps he has not the ingenuous candor of Newton.

The crowning event in the career of these mediums at the camp was the public marriage of Jennings and Roberts, "under the direction of the spirits." The spirits of those who have passed over are evidently far more liberal than the hard-hearted denizens of the "earth plane." Though Jennings had at least one loving wife, and Roberts had been many times under "contract," the spirits are so fond of human happiness that they authorized and directed the public nuptials of this man and woman. How much kinder they are than any ordinary earthly tribunal would be! And so the ceremony came off amid immense satisfaction and delight.

But soon there came from a "spirit convention" held on "the other side," the decree that this newly-wedded pair were to separate at the close of the camp, and take different paths. This is inexplicable. Did the spirits find that they had made a mistake in joining these two hearts and hands? or had they some other object in view? Did they intend to bring these parties together by spirit influence at some other camp, and in the presence of enraptured believers, have them married again, to the glory and grace of spiritualism? It is not possible to determine this till the "spirits" will solve the mystery for us.

Of Mrs. Roberts' stay in Boston after the celebration of the nuptials at Onset, little is known. "Dr." William A. Hale, "physician and surgeon,"* and leader of the "Echo" spiritualists, became her manager. The "doctor" was to share in the profits for his services. After a few weeks' run of the business, Dr. Hale found that the "spirit" medium outwitted him in the financial speculation, and he was forced to relinquish managership. The "doctor," with more candor than his co-laborer, "Dr." Storer, reported he "smelt rum" and other odors which, with all his medical knowledge, he could not define. The landlady of Roberts was very pronounced on the subject. Her best rooms were made unfit for human habitation, and an overpowering stench pervaded her whole house, making the fumigating process indispensable before re-letting her rooms. In addition to these horrors, the poor woman was cheated out of her rent by this master instrument of the "unseen powers." But, seriously, how long* will people not in every case deprived of their native wits, allow themselves to believe in such transparent humbugs as Jennings and Roberts? or that it is possible for women who are prostitutes and liars, or men smirched all over, to be instruments of communication between the spirit world and earth?

* The reader must not infer from our frequent use of "Dr." and "Prof." that it implies the least right or qualifications for these titles. It has been the custom of spiritualists, in entering that field to gain a living, to assume a title.