

AN
Apostle of Spiritualism.

A BIOGRAPHICAL MONOGRAPH

OF

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TRANCE MEDIUM.

WITH AN ABSTRACT REPORT OF A LECTURE, ENTITLED
HOMES IN THE HEREAFTER,
(REPRINTED FROM THE "BANNER OF LIGHT.")

BOSTON, MASS. :
COLBY AND RICH, 9, BOSWORTH STREET,
(FORMERLY MONTGOMERY PLACE.)

1886.

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BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS.

AMONG the many called upon to take part in the great spiritual upheaval of the present century but few have risen to such eminent notice among English workers than the well known trance orator whose life is briefly outlined in the following page and who first excited notice in the year 1868 in London, and whose subsequent labours as a platform worker have abundantly justified his selection for that service by the invisible directors of the work in Great Britain.

The early life of this Apostle of Spiritualism was tinged with some little romance, while, like the lives of so many of the world's most useful workers, it bore the bars sinister of misfortune and reverses upon its field; indeed it was so distressful and unpromising at one period as to be utterly devoid of all likelihood of that use to the world it ultimately has become.

Of good family, numbering among its members servants of the English Established Church, officers in the nation's civil service, having a branch devoted

to the farming interest, located in the beautiful county of Surrey; and singularly enough including in its connections a Captain Denton, though whether a relation of our William Denton is undetermined,—however that may be, the family, in itself and its connections, was eminently respectable, and of some social position, thereby ensuring early associations of affluence and social consideration. At the time of Mr. Morse's birth, which event took place on Monday, October the First, eighteen hundred and forty-nine, the family consisted of the parents, Thomas and Mary Morse, and two other children, Charles Edward and Louisa Sarah, residing in the Parish of St. Clements Danes, within the Strand, London, the head of the household following the profession of an Wholesale and Retail Spirit Merchant and Vintner.

Exceedingly delicate in health from birth, always sensitive and retiring, little James was an object of solicitude for all his early years, so much so that he was, when a trifle under three years of age, removed from London to the farmstead of the great-grandfather, at the pretty little village of Hook, near Kingston on Thames, and where he greatly benefited from the free fresh air which swept across Farmer Johnson's lands. About the year eighteen hundred and fifty-three the head of the family retired from business, seeking rest and quiet in the vicinity of Clapham, at that time a quiet retired suburban district, but the desired end was only realized and

enjoyed for a few months. In the summer of the following year the large hearted and loving mother fell a victim to a then prevailing cholera epidemic, and after a brief illness of but a few days' duration the mortal frame collapsed, and was presently interred in the beautiful and flower-decked cemetery at Norwood.

The father, deeply pained and almost disconsolate at the loss of so loving and devoted a companion, found the solitude of a retired life too hard to bear, consequently within a few months of his bereavement he determined to re-enter commercial life. Laudable as seemed his intention, to him, it was, nevertheless, as after events unfolded, fraught with dire disaster to the entire family. At this length of time, though, it looks as if the misfortunes of those years were stepping-stones placed in the river of life by a wiser providence than ours, stepping-stones over which the youngest member of the family must go to reach his work upon the opposite bank. All that needs be recorded here is the fact that the new ventures proved unsuccessful, and that a final difficulty in which the father became involved, through his over trustfulness, absorbed his estate, virtually breaking his heart, and, in effect, sending him to the Higher Life some five years after the departure of his life's associate.

Then commenced a trying period for the youngest born, of some nine years' duration, and in the early

days of which the three orphans were dependent entirely upon the generous kindness of the paternal uncle. Ultimately a disposition of the children was made by which Charles, the eldest, was despatched to Ottawa, Canada, in eighteen hundred and fifty-nine; Louisa, the next in age, was placed in suitable circumstances in the old cathedral town of Norwich, in Norfolk; and James Johnson, the youngest, was placed in the care of a boarding-school keeper, in Greenwich, some five miles from London, which was about as injudicious and injurious a disposition of him as could have well been made, for the school-mistress was a victim to dipsomania in its grossest and most aggravated form. During the time James remained in her care, poor and insufficient food, liberal chastisement, and an utter neglect of all educational matters were the current of events, until, out of the desperation born of sheer misery, he fled, and much to the consternation of the servants of the avuncular mansion presented himself thereat, tired, dusty, footsore, and woe-begone beyond words to express! Subsequent enquiries verified the correctness of his complaints, and he was then transferred to the care of an amiable lady named Croucher, residing in the before mentioned town, and it is a proof of the efficacy of kindly firmness and broad moral teaching, that the trial-tried boy of that period ever remembers, now, with affectionate gratitude, the loving care bestowed upon him by the above named

good soul, herself now almost on the border-land, but who at the period above referred to, was his virtual foster-mother. A couple of years thus passed pleasantly, when family considerations compelled the uncle to arrange a final disposition of the remaining charge of his departed brother's family, and it was decided that the English mercantile marine would afford the proper opportunity for the future medium to make a start in life. It was, therefore, decided that he should be entered as a midshipman on board an East Indiaman, but a rascally agent broke his contract and shipped the youngster on an English coaster, on which he was to be bound as an apprentice.

Quite unfit for such a career, one of the roughest and hardest, and meeting a severe accident, the youthful mariner was discharged at the port of South Shields, and with a trifling sum sent adrift to find his way back to London, some three hundred miles away, as best he could. He arrived in the metropolis exhausted, ill, penniless, and but to find himself confronted with a grave family injustice, the nature of which at once put a peaceful solution out of all question; the indignation aroused in his breast then ended all intercourse with the family, and he permitted the lapse of years to annul all association therewith.

TRIALS AND EXPERIENCES.

The ensuing years, from eighteen hundred and sixty-three to eighteen hundred and sixty-eight, find

the self-exiled member of his family making vigorous efforts to sustain himself in various subordinate positions, until he fancied he saw an opportunity of advancing his fortunes by accepting an offer of employment in an about-to-be-formed news and publishers' office. Alas, further trials awaited him, for the principal of the affair was one of those specious and professing rascals, whose cunning, rather than aught else, keep them from the clutches of the law. The embryo publishing house was never formed, and the to be junior member thereof lost the hard-won savings of several years helping to maintain his future principal, which individual ultimately discreetly disappeared from view, leaving his dupe penniless, after enduring much privation while waiting for the consummation of his expectations.

TWO EVENTS OF INTEREST.

It was during the above described distressful period that the subject of this "brief chronicle" encountered two matters that have exercised an important influence upon his life, and which proved to be the pivots upon which great changes were to turn. The first of these events was his contact with modern Spiritualism, the second his meeting with the lady who subsequently became his wife.

HOW HE FIRST ENCOUNTERED SPIRITUALISM.

In the autumn of eighteen hundred and sixty-eight he was introduced to Mrs. Hopps, the mother

of the Rev. John Page Hopps, the most able and cultured exponent of English Unitarianism at this time, and as the subject of Spiritualism was exciting attention in the public mind, it came up in the course of conversation at the above named meeting. The future apostle laughed, it must also be admitted he sneered, and rallied the lady for expressing belief in such a nonsensical matter ! Questioned as to what he *knew* about it, he, like so many more of us, admitted, NOTHING ! Yet boldly affirmed he believed it was all nonsense, or fraud, or both !

PERSONAL CONVICTIONS.

It may not be out of place here to say a little upon his state of mind at this time upon religious matters in general, for being now some nineteen years of age he was capable of entertaining some definite opinions. On several occasions he had honestly endeavoured to get exercised upon religion, but so far he had utterly failed, either to experience conviction, or conversion, and as a consequence of this failure had earnestly debated within himself whether or not he was helplessly bad, and hopelessly irreclaimable ? Reflection showed him the painful truth that the sorrows he had endured had been caused by certain unworthy followers of their professed Master, and, wisely or unwisely, he felt that it was exceedingly difficult to harmonise practice and profession, and being of a frank and open nature he

was sadly perplexed by a discovery that so many of us are compelled to make. The result was that religious services became distasteful and religious literature absurd. Alternations of despondency and defiance dominated his mind, until much of its chaos was organised, and its gloom dispelled, by a friend placing in his hand a copy of Paine's immortal "Age of Reason," in the pages of which he found food he had long hungered for without fully understanding the nature of his wants. Yes! he must be an infidel! This life was hard enough, why ask for another? Miracles were myths, resurrections but rhetoric, while spirits were too silly to think of in any way but as fancies! At this period it will be seen he was mentally far away from our faith, and a most seeming unlikely recruit for our ranks, while being in the frame of mind indicated will naturally account for his remarks, already cited, when he first encountered modern Spiritualism, which he honestly considered was but a form of superstition on a par with fortune telling. Presently this attitude of hostility was to be changed, and in a singularly striking manner; though deep down in his breast, he admits, there was a faint hope that after death there might be some sort of a life where rest and happiness might be, after all!

THE ENQUIRY BEGAN. HIS FIRST SEANCE.

To return. The result of the meeting with Mrs. Hopps, previously referred to, was that the soon to

be neophyte obtained from her the loan of two books, "Six Months' Experience at Home in Spirit-Communication," from the pen of the Rev. J. P. Hopps, embodying that gentleman's own experiences; and another work, "Experiences with the Davenports," by Robert Cooper, the contents of which books astounded their reader, showing him that as honest men said, "Yes," knowingly, and in good faith, it was presumption for him to say "No," unknowingly, for evidently there was more in the matter than he first suspected. The mere perusal of literature was insufficient, the mind having become stimulated now asked for proofs, facts, evidence, and with all the anxiety of an ardent nature started on a new enquiry; the eager question was put, "Where can I go to see and know for myself?" Armed with an introduction from the before mentioned Mrs. Hopps, he at last approached the mystic portals of the Séance room, and at the close of a fair September Sabbath in the year eighteen hundred and sixty-eight, he presented himself thereat, being received by Mr. R. Cogman, who was the host, and manager of the assembly (a venerable gentleman, and wonderful medium at that time, but who joined the majority some ten years ago), who admitted the half fearful applicant, and welcomed him to the Séance.

The house was that of a comfortable middle-class family, neither better nor worse than thousands of similar households in the Eastern district of the Eng-

lish metropolis, an house of some notoriety in its immediate neighbourhood by reason of the "Spirit-rappings" carried on there. The circle room, a large apartment on the level with the street, and lighted by two large windows. Chairs about the room, the centre occupied with a large oblong deal-topped table, the floor carpeted. The room presently lighted by a lamp, the shade curtains being drawn, some fifteen persons present, exclusive of the host, his wife, and daughter. Nothing "uncanny" or out of the ordinary course of things observable. No wires under the table, no electric buttons upon the floor, so far as foot or hand could discover. An air of orderly quiet, sober earnestness, and propriety pervading all. These were the general circumstances the visitor soon included within the grasp of his mental observations.

The séance begins; each is seated at the table. The host as president, opens a well-worn Bible, reading passages therefrom; he offers a prayer; a simple hymn is sung. The lamp and book are then removed, and all, with hands now resting on the table, resign themselves to a meditative quietness. A tall, pale faced, black haired young man sighs heavily, the muscles of his face twitch with nervous spasms, and his eyes close. He arises, paler than before, and convulsively at first, then with facility he talks some ten or fifteen minutes. It is a "control," but the visitor makes a mental note, and says the other name for it is hysteria! A brief pause,

with might and main, which overcoming all resistance, resulted in an ear-piercing whoop that almost froze your blood. Then for nearly an hour a series of wild and grotesque gesticulations, a current of exclamations, incoherent, gross, and profane, a general exhibition of noisy disturbance produced by the wretched victim,—who, thoroughly conscious of his deeds, but incapable of resisting the influence upon him,—continued to manifest the results of the first, and necessarily imperfect control exercised upon him.

Finally the control desisted, and the now startled enquirer, ashamed of his misbehaviour, but unable to account for it, commenced to apologise to his venerable host, whom he had frequently addressed in the most opprobrious terms. Apologies were courteously deemed unnecessary, as the host intimated he fully understood such exhibition was beyond the control of the subject thereof, therefore no offence was taken. After some sympathy, a little needful rest, and a cordial invitation to “come again next Sunday,” which seemed to the disturbed mind of the new medium like adding insult to injury, the perturbed enquirer wended his way homewards. The remainder of the night was spent in a condition of mental amazement and perplexity which effectually banished sleep for hours, until the tired body at last succumbed from sheer exhaustion.

then it is a female that is affected. This time the eyes are left wide open with a ghastly and stony stare. Her words are soft and low, the utterances full of love, truth, flowers, angels, earth, children, and so on. The visitor wonders: is she mad? what does it mean? Has he got into a company of lunatics? for others were shaking and gurgling by this time; he began to feel sorry for coming, and was heartily wishing himself well out of it, when she exclaimed,—

“Oh! gracious, what’s that?”

The bolt had fallen, the call had gone forth, the portals of future work and destiny were about to be unbarred!

To the neophyte it seemed as if a hand, large, warm, heavy, had suddenly, with force, descended upon his head, a sensation then following as if the brain had been cleft in twain, while into the cavity thus formed, sand, hot and in quantity, had been poured, trickling down over head, face, bust, person, down to finger ends and toe tips. Every sense of motion was paralysed. Eyes were firmly closed, every limb was helpless. Then a swelling of lungs and throat, as though life’s tides were battling frantically to keep their accustomed courses, and all the while a fearful dread circling within the mind of the startled subject of these peculiar experiences. Presently an impulse to stand, then up, upon his feet, erect, next an uncontrollable desire to shout

FURTHER EXPERIENCES.

With the next day came the reaction from the previous evening's excitement, and the enquirer found himself inclined to slip back again to his previous scepticism, inventing sundry plausible reasons for rejecting his experiences as being in any way attributable to "spirits," formulating the opinion that he was hysterical, and if he pursued the matter would no doubt become crazy ! What avails our fancies when arrayed against the potencies of the higher life ? Truly, but little ! So the new medium found, for, presently, indications of the nearness and presence of this power, began to manifest themselves. Hot burning pains, tracing their courses from brain to shoulder, down the arm to hand and fingers—with a sensation like wires, red-hot—came over him, and the index finger of the dexter hand traced out words before him leading to the following questions and answers :—

"Is this a Spirit ?"

"Yes," in a great scrawl by the outstretched finger.

"Is it anyone that I know ?"

"Your mother," again wrote the finger.

The startled querist not wishing to be thus disturbed said, "If I get pencil and paper this afternoon, will you then come and write again ?"

"Yes," again scrawled the obedient finger. The influence subsided, and the medium was again painfully perplexed—was it a "Spirit," was it his mother, what *did* it all mean ?

THE PARENTAL PROPHECY.

Provided with the requisite materials later in the same day, the experiment of obtaining writing was undertaken, the following communication being received :—

“ Yes, my dear son, we are ever watching over you. Fear not, but trust in the Lord, for He is a shield wherein all may trust ; He is a bulwark in whom all can rest their hopes ; He is a terror to evil-doers, and in time will make all the nations of the earth believe in Him. Those who disbelieve now shall believe by-and-by, and shall welcome spirit-communion as a thing to be sought after, and by encouraging it you will get a foretaste of the joy to be had hereafter. *Oh, my son ! follow it, for you will become a great medium ; you will yet do great good in the world.* I am glad to see you so earnest in your desire for spirit-communion, for rest assured great good will result from it, not only to you, but for all ; and when you leave earth you will be conscious of having employed the gift that is within you profitably. Be not afraid of mockers and scoffers, for those that now mock will soon believe. Your dear father is with you as well as I. He is smiling at your efforts, and tries to help you but finds it very hard. He was with you on Sunday. You must not be afraid, you will not be so tormented again. Your ever affectionate parents, Mary and Thomas Morse.”

Here was food for thought, indeed. In some lights it looked wild absurdity, for fortune was just then smiling upon the much tried youth, and future prospects were brightening, how then could he "do great good in the world" upon a matter he was not a believer in? He was not at all inclined to embark as an advocate, or a worker in this strange matter. Then it struck him as peculiar, almost degrading, that his parents should leave heaven, or whatever the next life was like, to come back and write such a message. But, argue as he might, there was still a feeling that there was some truth in it all, yet, on calming down he did his best to dismiss the matter, taking refuge in the opinion that the subject was dangerous and he would have nothing further to do with it under any circumstances. However, the invisible workers had no intention of allowing him to escape the duty before him, so by the time his next opportunity to attend Mr. Cogman's circle came round, he was seized with an uncontrollable desire to attend thereat, to which he yielded, and for the second time he was seated as a participant in the mystic rites, vowing to himself to resist all "influences," observe, note, and sit still.

HIS FIRST TRANCE ADDRESS.

It needs no prophecy to say that such resolves were likely to prove futile, some twenty minutes terminated their intentions and effects, by the end of which space of time the medium was again under strong control,

which this time caused him to open the before mentioned Bible at 14th chapter of Romans, the first verse, upon which he delivered a sermon, or address, which occupied some forty minutes in its delivery! The manifestation afforded the utmost satisfaction and delight to the members of the circle, but it was the source of the utmost astonishment and mystification to the vehicle, who had never exhibited the slightest talent in such a direction previously, and who had never made the remotest attempt hitherto at the consecutive treatment of any subject whatsoever. More food was thus supplied for wonderment and reflection, and out of it came a determination to persevere in the enquiry to the end, and to obtain certainty as to whether the entire question of spirit-return and spirit-power was either fact or fraud.

Shortly after the above narrated events the publisher's scheme, previously noticed, was broached, the effect of which was that the newly developing medium was removed from the sphere of duty he had previously been in, and, through the failure of the enterprise to become a reality, he was unoccupied for nearly eight months, which afforded him the needed leisure in which to attend circles and prosecute his development, which matter was finally accomplished at the house of a Mrs. Main, a person of large sympathies and liberal views, who, with her daughter, a Mrs. Fielden, were very earnest workers at that time in London. By the "tests" obtained through the last named lady, and others

through Mrs. Gender, Mr. Frank Herne, Mr. Davis, and other notable mediums of that period, the enquirer was converted into a believer, and the mental quietude resulting was materially valuable in assisting the development of the mediumship which was soon to come into world-wide notice. In the autumn of eighteen hundred and sixty nine, the medium, now somewhat widely known among private circles, was brought under the notice of Mr. James Burns, who was then, as he is still, the representative of the central Depot of Spiritual Literature and Information in Great Britain, and on Friday, the fifteenth of October of the above year, a series of weekly meetings was established at the above head quarters of spiritual work, from which fortunate circumstance the medium no doubt was put into that position of publicity which ultimately resulted in that extended popularity which has carried his name around the world.

HE IS LAUNCHED UPON HIS PUBLIC CAREER.

The distinctly private part of the narrative may be said to close here, as the subject thereof now passes to the front in a public capacity, taking his position as a professional worker, and maintaining his place as such, down to the present period, his entrance to such work dating from October, eighteen hundred and sixty nine. In the following year he married Miss Marion Lewis, an event foretold to the lady by the spirits some months prior to her ever

having seen Mr. Morse. She is a lady of good Welsh descent, and one child, a daughter, Florence, has been the sole issue of the union.

EARLY PUBLIC UNFOLDINGS.

The purpose of the higher powers was gradually unfolding itself, and the public interest in the weekly séances rapidly increased, so much so, that the spacious reception rooms of the Spiritual Institution were crowded from week to week. Mr. Burns acted as the faithful chairman and considerate friend of the advancing medium, who presently became associated with Mr. Burns in the publishing business conducted at the Institution, and assisting in the issuing of the first number of England's leading spiritual weekly, the "*Medium and Daybreak*." Undoubtedly the connection then existing was one of mutual advantage and pleasure, and was only sundered by the claims upon the time and strength of the medium, precluding him from giving that share of his resources to business that was justly due. Mr. Burns can count the attention and care he bestowed upon Mr. Morse as among the innumerable good and successful efforts he has engaged in during his long and faithful service to the world of spirits.

Up to the period above referred to Mr. Morse had not, it seems, appeared upon the public platform for the purpose of a sustained address being given through him. The spirits were but awaiting the

arrival of the suitable occasion, which was afforded them on Thursday evening, April twenty-first, eighteen hundred and seventy, in the hall of the St. John's Associates, Clerkenwell, London. The invisibles made their first public address at a regular Sunday Service of spiritualists, at the Cavendish Rooms, London, on Sunday, July twenty-fourth of the same year; and the first effort in the provinces was at Northampton, on Sunday, September the ninth, also in the above stated year,—this latter event being in association with our ascended brother, and most remarkable healer, Dr. J. R. Newton. The new medium was now fairly at work, as a regular spiritually controlled and inspired advocate of our cause, and has been in active work ever since. Excepting illness, and needful rest, it is computed he has not been absent from the platform more than two Sundays in each year, while he certainly has averaged three meetings each week, and from records kept it would seem that the spirits must have conducted some *two thousand eight hundred* regular meetings through his instrumentality, independent of the innumerable social sittings given to friends and intimates.

As soon as the ability of the controls had made itself known, the now developed instrument was overwhelmed with calls to visit the various societies in England, Wales, and Scotland, and as a result he has been a frequent visitant, in his capacity as a

public speaking medium, to Derby, Belper, Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Keighley, Chester, Darlington, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Sunderland, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Kirkaldy, Greenock, to Cardiff, Merthyr, Bath, Plymouth, Falmouth, and many smaller towns and localities in various sections of Great Britain, excluding Ireland. In many places his work has materially contributed to the tide of activity and prosperity in our cause that now prevails, and in not a few instances acting as a St. John the Baptist, clearing the ground for others. After some five years of labour the intimation came that he must cross the ocean, leave home, family, and friends, and visit the Birthplace of Modern Spiritualism; consequent thereon he arrived in the city of New York on the twenty-sixth of October, eighteen hundred and seventy-four. During his year's stay, he visited Baltimore, Md.; New York City, New Haven, Conn.; Greenfield, Mass.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Bangor, Me.; Boston, Mass.; and many smaller cities and towns. In several cases he found so much favour that he had to pay return visits. He departed from our shores delighted with his cordial reception, and sincerely missed by hundreds of warm friends. On reaching home a magnificent reception was tendered him in London, at which spiritualists of all classes were represented.