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# MEDIUMSHIP:

## ITS LAWS AND CONDITIONS;

WITH BRIEF INSTRUCTIONS FOR



## THE FORMATION OF SPIRIT CIRCLES,

BY

J. H. POWELL,

AUTHOR OF "LIFE INCIDENTS AND POETIC PICTURES," ETC.

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**T**HE psychological student, having settled for himself the question of phenomenalism, naturally enough turns to a consideration of the agencies at work in the production of the marvels he has witnessed at the spirit-circle. Hence mediumship presents a problem for solution.

The sceptic, of course, escapes at a bound the difficulties involved in mediumship, because he self-confidently conceives the absurd idea of "trickery" to be the sole explanation of the whole subject. But the investigator cannot so escape: he meets difficulties which the hypothesis of trickery fails to explain; so he must needs press on, contenting himself with such theories as science and reason shall approve.

What is mediumship? Why does one person possess peculiar mediumistic powers, and not another? These are stereotyped questions on the lips of the uninitiated. To answer them in as many words would but involve the argument in further mystery. To reply that certain persons, sitting at *séances*, find that tables rise from *terra firma*; accordions are played by invisible fingers; phosphorescent lights, spirit-hands

arms, and sometimes bodies, make their appearance; that direct writing and drawing; that flowers wet with dew; that musical and poetic inspirations and improvisations; that correct likenesses of the departed, by photography and pencil; and all the other manifestations of the spirit-séance,—are produced, does not satisfy the sceptic that the cause of these phenomena is spiritual, or in any way dependent on mediumship.

It is easy to show that mediumship is natural, and therefore under the dominion of law. There is little wisdom in the oft-repeated question, Why does one person possess peculiar mediumistic powers, and not another? since Nature, in all her varieties, presents innumerable replies. There are no two things exactly alike. The flowers all differ in size and shade. One flower blooms once a year; another, only once a century. "One star differeth from another star in glory." God never intended it otherwise, or Nature would present a perpetual sameness. Imagine every bird exactly the same, in size, feather, and song; every tree the same, in height, bulk, and leaf; every mole-hill a mountain, or mountain a mole-hill, without difference of measurement; every zephyr a hurricane, or hurricane a zephyr, without variation. Imagine the sea in a calm, and ask why it is not turbulent; or roaring, like a mighty animal, and ask why it is not tranquil. Ask why the waves do not all roll towards the shore with equal bulk and regularity. Imagine human beings subject to a like sameness — every man reaching six feet in height, with a proportionate rotundity, noses all aquiline, eyes all blue, and skin all tan-color, without the faintest variation. Carry the same idea to

the mind: imagine thought universally "cabined, cribbed, and confined;" and ask that all degrees above and below par should end. Fancy every poet a Shakespeare, every divine a Channing, every musician a Mozart, every statesman a Pitt, every mechanic a Stephenson, and every soldier a Garibaldi. I might thus, *ad infinitum*, illustrate the folly of reiterating, Why does one person possess peculiar mediumistic powers, and not another?

Is mediumship a natural gift, capable of being used under favorable conditions? If so, it is of little import that we are puzzled to know why we are not ourselves equally gifted with others.

#### EXPERIMENT HAS PROVED,

*First*, that sensitives of the most varied character exist.

*Second*, that medium manifestations are mostly intermittent, dependent on states of health, the atmosphere, and mental harmony.

*Third*, that physical and psychical states, subject to development, distinguish the character of mediumship.

#### EXPERIENCE HAS PROVED,

*First*, that sittings conducted in ignorance of the necessary conditions mostly end in failure, or something akin to it.

*Second*, that undeveloped mediums, by sitting indiscriminately with persons of strong opposing biases, get injured in their mediumship, and the manifestations given through them are mostly unreliable.

*Third*, that the most beautiful and convincing proofs of spirit-action and spirit-identity are given through developed mediums when the spirits themselves arrange the circle.

Mediumship, as developed in the modern spirit-circles, may be briefly classified : —

*First*, Physical. Under this head may be arranged all the phenomena of table-lifting, rapping, writing, drawing, levitation of furniture, abstraction of articles through walls, healing, &c.

*Second*, Psychical. Under this head may be arranged all the phenomena of dreams, visions, impressions, prophecies, trance discourses, inspirational music and poetry, clairvoyance, clairaudience, psychometry, &c.

Every human being is in some degree mediumistic; and the reason there are so few really good test-mediums, in proportion to the large number of unreliable mediums, is because so few persons sit for development, and so few of those who do sit observe the necessary conditions.

The magnetic laws of attraction and repulsion operate in the microcosm as well as the macrocosm, and no individuals are more sensitive to repellent and attractive natures than spirit-mediums. A recognition of this fact is very necessary; for spirit-manifestations, through mediums, depend in a great measure on their passivity.

The delicate organism of mediums, like musical instruments, may be easily deranged, or the magnetic

laws rendered inoperative. It often happens that spurious communications, which are inconsiderately set down to lying spirits, result solely from the ignorance manifested at circles of the simplest laws of spirit-phenomena. Until more light is thrown upon this subject, I much fear our mediums will continue to be subject to opposing influences, which not only mar the *séance*, but often injure them.

That magnetism is one of the agents, or media, of spirit-phenomena, there is little doubt. In what degree and manner it operates is matter for experiment. Of mineral and animal magnetism, we may be said to have some knowledge; but spiritual magnetism has scarcely been thought worth consideration by advanced scientific minds: hence the absurd prejudices which obtain in scientific circles, to the utter exclusion of all evidence on this most useful study, because it is, in fact, the A B C of the alphabet of the soul's immortality. The simple horse-shoe magnet may be used as illustrative of the marvellous power of mineral magnetism. Place a needle between two pieces of thick plate-glass, and, lo! the north pole of the magnet will attract the south pole, or repel the north or positive pole, of the needle. Take a common mariner's compass, and place a powerful magnet in a room above, and, lo! the magnetic aura will find its way through the ceiling, and influence the compass. These are very simple experiments; but they serve, nevertheless, to show in some degree the operations of a law which keeps worlds in their orbits. Whether the aura emitted from magnets is the same as that possessed in different degrees by human beings may afford fresh theme for experiment;

but that human beings are, in a sense, magnets, I think there can be no reasonable doubt.

Reichenbach, in his experiments, has shown that different-colored atmospheres pass from the hands of persons highly charged with magnetism, or, as he terms it, "od." This substantiates, in a measure, the theories advanced by Mesmer and others. The difficulty is not to prove that human beings possess magnetic powers,—because abundant tests have already been applied, and the fact admitted by the majority of those who have instituted researches for the purpose,—but to show that the magnetism of human can be used by supra-human beings. The French Academy of Medicine at one time decreed that any member known to admit himself a partisan of animal magnetism should be struck off the list of Docteurs Regents. A few years later, the French Academy of Medicine wisely retraced its steps.

The celebrated case of Angélique Cottin, the electric girl of La Perrière, France, may be cited as one of numerous illustrations of the power of human magnetism. While at work in her aunt's cottage with three other girls, weaving ladies' silk-net gloves, the heavy wood-frame, weighing upwards of twenty pounds, to which was attached the end of the warp, would be suddenly upset; the girls accusing each other of the occurrence. This sort of thing occurred more than once. The aunt, possessed with the devil of superstition, took Angélique to the parsonage of La Perrière, demanding exorcism. The curate at first laughed; but Angélique placed her glove on the kitchen chair, and the chair, like the frame, moved without her hand



touching it. The curate then sat in the chair ; but both man and chair were thrown down. Manifestations of this character went on intermittently : the girl was pronounced a witch, and was visited in the space of a few months by upwards of two thousand persons, among whom were distinguished physicians, and men of eminence. Some gave her money. The father of Angélique, notwithstanding the advice and remonstrance of M. de Faremont, Dr. Verger, M. Hebert, and others, who had interested themselves in the phenomena, determined to exhibit her peculiar powers for money. Then commenced a series of mishaps. Before the Academy, the manifestations ceased. The learned academicians hastily pronounced Angélique an impostor, and refused to report further on her case. M. Cohu, a medical man of Montagne, and others by no means deficient in judgment, and some of the French journals, testified to the genuineness of the phenomena.

This case of the peasant girl Cottin is not an isolated one. Robert Dale Owen, to whose account I am indebted for these particulars, refers likewise to a young girl, fourteen years old, apprenticed to a colorist in the Rue Descartes, who exhibited powers quite as marked as those of Angélique Cottin. A professor of one of the royal colleges, sitting near the girl, was raised from the floor along with the chair in which he sat. The phenomena commenced Dec. 2, 1845, and lasted twelve days. "The Atlantic Monthly" for August, 1868, contains facts of a somewhat similar nature to both these cases. An Irish girl, Mary Carrick, is described as possessing remarkable power,

beyond her volition, in the movement of heavy substances. In all these cases, we have evidence only of visible objects moving, but none of the marked action of extraneous intelligences.

The mere physical movements are common to mediums, and not a little puzzling to professors of science everywhere. *Angélique Cottin's* case, and all similar cases, are useful, affording proof of the existence of magnetism in the human system.

Mesmerism brings us a round higher up the ladder of Psychology; and we obtain means therewith to test matters in connection with mineral magnetism of which the natural philosopher could know but little. The normal eye takes cognizance only of the grosser elements; and, so far as it is concerned, the abnormal might have no place in the economy of life.

Mesmerism induces clairvoyance; and, lo! the spiritual eye is open, and inconceivable wonders manifested. Every inanimate and animate object in creation is discovered to possess properties of magnetism peculiar to itself. Plants of every variety exhale aura. Stones, shells, and metals emit perpetually their exhaustless aura. Magnetism and electricity are the life or spirit of every thing, and belt the universe, reaching from star to star, from heaven to earth. We are all far too ignorant on this subject: we see through a glass very darkly the mysterious workings of magnetism. Like the academicians in the case of *Angélique Cottin*, we are apt to rest content with first experiments, and feel assured of our own mightiness.

Mediums, by their own magnetism, draw spirits to them; and manifestations often originate from the com-

bined magnetism of the circle. Taking magnetism as one of the media of spirit-manifestations, we are enabled to see that any opposing currents must, of necessity, affect the manifestations. Harmony *may* induce good manifestations; dis-harmony never can.

Mediums should be protected as much as possible from the anxieties and cares consequent on poverty. That which disturbs the mind destroys the medium's passivity, and renders the communication often contradictory and unsatisfactory. The eagerness often manifested by the poor to turn their mediumship to profit is fatal to development.

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT-CIRCLE ARE DEPENDENT:

*First*, on the quality of the magnetism of the medium and circle.

*Second*, on the passivity of the medium, and sympathy of the circle.

*Third*, on atmospheric conditions, state of the light, and freedom from interruptions.

It is a common mistake, the moment evidence is given of spirit-presence, for persons to question the intelligences in such a way as to confuse both mortal and spirit: confusion in the circle and in the message is the result. It is best to allow the communicating intelligences to elect a conductor of the circle. By this plan, all confusion may be avoided.

With undeveloped mediums, sceptics should not be permitted to sit, lest their influence retard the development. But with developed mediums, sceptics may find

conviction. It is better, however, where the medium is developed, not to make up a *séance* wholly of sceptics. It is a common mistake to suppose, that, if spirits operate at all, they can do so independently of strong opposing influences. The positive force of scepticism may, for a time, successfully oppose spirits desiring to communicate. Mediums, however well developed, gain nothing by such concerted opposition.

It sometimes becomes necessary to isolate, or insulate, the medium before phenomena occur; proving that the magnetic currents of the circle are not favorable to success.

When every care is taken to render known conditions favorable, it often happens that little or nothing important occurs; whilst occasionally, when no manifestations are expected, the most astounding ones take place. This all goes to prove the action of extraneous intelligence; which, though it may not be able to act when opposed by strong scepticism, can and does often act when the will-power of the medium and circle is not exercised. Although spirit-manifestations are of an intermittent character, it by no means follows that they are not subject to law. We need first to assure ourselves that the cause of the occasional cessation of phenomena is neither in the medium nor the circle: we shall then be in a position to attribute such cessation to the inoperative intelligence or intelligences.

If the spirits could always communicate when sittings are formed, and the medium and circle in proper condition, the intermittent character of the phenomena would remain intact, because the human organism, like a thermometer, changes with the weather. All we can

do is to keep the human instrument, as well as we know how, properly attuned for spirit-use. If we could always keep up the quality and supply of magnetism in mediums, doubtless spirit-action through human beings would be less spasmodic; but even then we would have to allow for the individuality of spirits who may, or may not, care to manifest. But when they do manifest, they can only do so by a law as binding upon them as the law of attraction and repulsion is upon us. We have, in the intermittent character of mediumship and spirit-action, the secret of the many failures which take place when academicians and others make up their minds to solve the problem of the "deception" of spirit-manifestations. A single sitting, with a view to the discovery of a trick, is almost sure to end unsatisfactorily. No "trick" is discovered, but the presumed idea of trickery is rather strengthened than otherwise. Psychology, the science of soul, a study almost ignored by learned professors, throws a flood of light on the subject of mediumship. Psychology teaches how the positive influence of sceptics acts on the negative organism of sensitives; and ideas of trickery, and the mystery of non-success, at once vanish. It is in vain that academicians, and men of mark, form committees of inquiry (which is not frequent) on the questions of magnetism and spiritualism, if they ignore the teachings of psychology. By doing so, they bring a strong army of opposing magnetic currents against, it may be, a single sensitive medium. The law of magnets, the weaker being overcome by the stronger, must necessarily act in human magnets, often to their injury. How often are

mediums subject to the cruel taunts of sceptics, who, first in ignorance of the psychological influence they are exerting, disturb their passivity, and then demand to know why spirits do not manifest? Spirits, like mediums, have their own peculiar idiosyncrasies. It is a question for speculation to what extent their own natures color the manifestations given through them. In trance and inspirational mediumship, the peculiar thoughts of the medium are sometimes, not always, reflected in the message. Automatic writing and drawing the same. But, in most cases, the hand of the medium obeys an influence in no wise controlled by her own will. Direct writing and drawing remove the intelligent agent from the medium, and, of course, give conclusive evidence of such intelligent action. Drawings and paintings of a delicate and elaborate character have been produced automatically by mediums who never acquired the art of drawing and painting. Examples are not wanting of this phase of the subject. Rappings, table-lifting, bell-ringing, levitation of the medium, guitar-thrumming, the projection of spirit-hands, and a host of similar phenomena, attest the variety of manifestations given through mediums. I have seen children, five to thirteen years old, exhibit marvellous mediumistic powers, placing the supposition of "trick" out of the range of causes. They have not only possessed physical, but psychical mediumship, and have given astounding evidences of it.

From a gentleman I have known a considerable period, and in whom I can repose trust, I have received a letter detailing a series of *séances* held in

Yorkshire, England, with two child-mediums eight years of age.

These infant mediums are girls, not sisters, but neighbors. My friend writes, —

“I have been to the house of the family where the mediumship first began to develop two or three months ago. Some sharp slaps by spirit-hands were (in the dark) heard upon the table. The little girls saw a little spirit-sister of one of them come into their midst. We have seen spirit-hands many times, and been touched by them often. I have seen a hand ring a hand-bell close to me in the light; also take a handkerchief from me, shake it violently in the air, tie it up into a most curious knot, and throw it upon the floor. I cannot tell how many times I have been touched by hands of indescribable softness. I have heard the door scratched as if with finger-nails.

“Once I tied up the two mediums separately, tying the hands to the body and the rope behind them: almost directly they were put into a closet or pantry, and the door shut. Knockings were heard on the door and on the walls. An accordion was played, and a hand-bell rung violently. All this time the mediums remained tied. Presently spirits untied them, and they came out with the ropes laid across their wrists.

“We have had direct writing produced many times. A card and pencil have been put into a box, and the box locked, when, to my astonishment, the names of my brother and mother have been written on the card.

“The children first see a star, then the spirit. The good spirits have always a crown and a robe and harp; and some are so dazzlingly beautiful that the children

cannot describe them. Sometimes the little mediums see black stars (bad spirits), but they do not like to talk about them. Sometimes they say the place is full of angels and lambs; they often see white lambs: sometimes birds, flowers, and fruit; and they can smell the flowers, and eat the fruit. I had the mediums at my apartments one evening. We saw some very beautiful hands in white muslin sleeves.

“One black spirit showed a hand with deep black sleeve and chalky white hand.

“If you can give any advice I shall be very glad, and so will the friends of the mediums.”

Without running over other ground in search of evidence, I think it best to make this brief illustration do duty for the rest. I could, if necessary, multiply such facts by scores. The account here given, to persons familiar with mediumship, will be accepted, at least as being very like the manifestations that they themselves have witnessed.

How true it is that God has kept a knowledge of these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes and sucklings.

Children five and eight years old are not overburdened either with scientific lore or worldly care. Their passivity is not a difficult matter to manage. Hence spirits can use them with advantage. The responsibility resting upon those who have the care of child-mediums is great. Their organism is a piece of the most delicate mechanism, easily deranged; and this can be effected by magnetic and psychological influence in a manner scarcely to be conceived by persons unacquainted with the operations of magnetism used by



visible and invisible psychologists. Surround the medium with proper conditions, and all may, under judicious management, work well. Allow opposing influences to intervene, and the consequences may prove fatal to development.

It would be dangerous to place a galvanic battery in the hands of a person unacquainted with its power. None know this better than electricians.

If, with mineral magnetism, harm as well as good may result, surely it is not unreasonable to conclude that the same is true of human beings, who are all, of more or less power, batteries of magnetism. Experience in the spirit-circle has shown that mediums, especially the young and undeveloped, feel antagonistic influences seriously, and often suffer in health in consequence. Unless the parents and friends of mediums (especially medium-children) shield them as far as possible against psychological interruption, they had better never sit for phenomena; for the consequences may be extremely dangerous.

Every human being, be he truthful or untruthful, moves in the midst of millions of spiritual beings, and, by the law of affinity, draws about him spirits of a like disposition to himself. It is not, therefore, so much the danger incurred by the medium from the interrupting magnetism of sceptics, or other disharmonious beings, who may sit with her, that is to be dreaded, as the more dangerous psychology of their attendant spirits.

Seeing-mediums, or clairvoyants, not only feel, but see and describe, these invisible operators, who enter with uncongenial persons the spirit-circle. The more

sensitive the medium, the more danger results to her medium-power and health.

Circles, although formed at times of several dozens of persons, are generally found best numbering not more than six or seven, who should be of one accord, i.e., in sympathy with the medium or mediums. In the opening of a circle where the company are of one accord, singing or music, reading an appropriate chapter, a short moral essay or beautiful poem, and finishing with a prayer, will generally be the precursor of spiritual communications of an elevating character. Those, however, who are not in praying humor, may sing, or have music played. Any reasonable performance which keeps the circle from over-anxiety may serve to secure conditions favorable to spirit-action. The character of the communications will depend fully on the character of the persons forming the circle, — like being attracted by like. The hands may be placed lightly on the table; and whilst the table is being charged with magnetism, or aura, a little gentle conversation, not necessarily on spiritual themes, may be indulged. This also will serve to keep the minds of the circle from feeling too anxious, — a condition fatal to passivity, which invariably retards the phenomena. The moment, however, the table moves, or other manifestations, such as writing or speaking, commence, all conversation should instantly cease. The spirits themselves should then be asked to elect a conductor of the *séance*; and in no case should any question be put except through the conductor, without permission of the invisibles. If this plan is strictly adhered to, other conditions being right, it will be found that

the communications will mostly be free from incongruities. The number of raps or tiltings to answer for "Yes," "No," "Doubtful," need not be arbitrary. Circles can arrange these matters with the spirits. The common plan is, one knock for "No;" two, "Doubtful;" three, "Yes;" and five for the alphabet. By the use of the alphabet, messages of various lengths may be obtained by means of raps or tiltings. These are, however, a slow process: hence, writing-mediumship is an important element in the formation of a good circle. The hand of the medium is used by the spirit often with great rapidity; and whole sheets of paper become speedily filled with answers to questions, instructions for conducting the circle, or other matters. If a person is entranced, it is best to leave him to the spirits, and wait patiently the result. By interfering, the magnetic spheres may operate injuriously. It will generally be found that all will go on well under the direction of the spirits. Trance-mediumship is a beautiful addition to the spirit-circle. When the development is not retarded, honeyed eloquence will flow from lips unused to oratory. This phase of mediumship is quite common, and, although subject to abuses and misinterpretations, is always, when developed and reliable, a boon to the spirit-circle.

The planchette may be used by persons preferring it; but my opinion is, that a black lead-pencil, held lightly on paper, will answer equally as well. Any one can sit quietly holding a pencil on paper, and may thereby discover medium-power. The planchette is simply an instrument, and really contains no secret charm in itself: the charm is in the intelligence causing it to move. In

instances where persons fail to get any thing of themselves, it may be well to allow another person to develop them. No one can ascertain the gift of mediumship when it is dormant, without using legitimate means to develop it. But it is desirable that strict care should be taken in selecting a developer. Many mediums are spoiled through subjecting themselves, with the view of being developed, to uncongenial magnetisers.

I have alluded to clairvoyance, or spirit-sight: this is another phase of mediumship, without which no circle can be called complete. A good seer will describe the spirits in the circle, and, if he be clairaudient as well, hear them talk. He is thus enabled to corroborate many statements given by the spirits through the alphabet or the trance-state.

Another and most valuable phase of mediumship is the healing; another is the psychometric: both manifestly dependent on magnetism, or aura.

Circles may be held both light and dark; but the phenomena will depend on the directions of the spirits being fully carried out. In the dark, I have often seen phosphorescent lights of various sizes, and received evidence of a striking character; but I have received more evidence of a convincing nature in the light.

I have thus far briefly animadverted upon the subject of mediumship. I have only entered on the threshold of the great temple of psychology, which embraces not only the action of mineral, but animal and spiritual magnetism.

Many subjects branching out of the one I have at-

tempted to treat demand consideration ; but, for the present, this must suffice.

Objections may be urged *ad infinitum* ; but objections can never nullify facts. It is of little consequence that some sceptic or other self-confidently asserts that spirits, if they manifested at all, would do so without the intervention of mediumship.

We must, if we would learn of Truth, seek her with the submission that waits alike on humility and wisdom. Facts attest the existence and use of mediumship. It is presumptuous in men dictating to Nature ; and none but the most ignorant would so far presume.

The eye is a medium of conveying the image of natural objects to the mind ; the ear, the medium of sound. If the eye be defective, things will appear discolored and disproportioned. Language is a medium of intercourse. Speak in an unintelligible tongue, and you might as well remain silent.

You send a telegraphic despatch from New York to London through the medium of the Atlantic Cable. If you need a medium to send a message some three thousand miles only, while you are embodied, surely, when you become disembodied, you may not be denied a medium to convey a message from the spirit-world. Break the Atlantic Cable, and all communication must stop through that medium. Break the laws that are favorable to mediumship in spiritual affairs, and all communication through that channel must likewise cease.

Mediumship is not a thing to be laughed at, and pooh-pooled out of existence. It is developing in all parts of the known world. Evidences through mediumship convey to a sceptical and perverse age

demonstrative proof of the soul's immortality. When it is considered that the practice of religionists does not accord with the precepts of religion ; that materialism, in the robes of sanctity, has been deifying selfishness ; that hypocrisy and cant, leagued with persecution, have been long in our midst, making the fair earth a lazar-haunt of woes — surely we ought to be grateful to God for mediumship, which gives us an insight into the spiritual worlds, and cuts direct at the root of materialism.