

# MODERN SPIRITUALISM

A HISTORY AND A CRITICISM

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IN TWO VOLUMES

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## PREFACE

**M**Y chief amongst many and weighty obligations for help and counsel given is to Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, who kindly placed at my disposal the material collected for her article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* on "Spiritualism." At a later stage Mrs. Sidgwick read a great part of the following pages in typescript, and gave me many valuable suggestions. To the late Henry Sidgwick I am indebted for some wise counsel in the writing of the earlier part of this work ; that I could not submit to his clear judgment some of the delicate questions dealt with in the last Book I regard as an irremediable loss.

To Dr. R. Hodgson also I owe much. Alike by natural endowment and by his unrivalled experience, Dr. Hodgson is probably better qualified than any living person to deal critically with the history of Spiritualism ; nor did I venture to set about the present work until I had ascertained that he was not prepared to undertake the task himself. I had hoped, however, that he would have been able to contribute to the book his own version of his investigations in slate-writing, and an account of the Eusapia séances, with his own criticisms. Pressure of other work prevented the fulfilment of this scheme ; but my own account of these matters is based, as the reader will see, almost exclusively on Dr. Hodgson's writings, supplemented by his criticisms and suggestions on the completed chapters.

Not to Dr. Hodgson alone, but also to the late Frederic Myers, I, in common with all others who are engaged on the investigation of these obscure and widely neglected problems, am indebted not only for much of the material used, but for the means of using it.

I have ventured to dissent from some of the conclusions formed by these writers, each of whom can claim a wider experience and a more intimate first-hand knowledge of some, and not the least important, aspects of the case. In the very act of combating their views I am forced to rely upon weapons which they have helped to forge. I gladly acknowledge the debt.

To other colleagues and friends who have helped me in various ways I tender my cordial thanks; and especially to Mr. Dawson Rogers and the Council of the London Spiritualist Alliance, who have placed unreservedly at my disposal the valuable collection of books included in their library. I am the more sensible of my obligations in this particular instance, seeing that the Council cannot but have been aware that my views differed widely from their own. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri.* I have tried to profit by the example of tolerance and fair play set by my adversaries in the argument.

F. P.

July, 1902.

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## INTRODUCTION

THE system of beliefs known as Modern Spiritualism<sup>1</sup>—a system which in one aspect is a religious faith, in another claims to represent a new department of natural science—is based on the interpretation of certain obscure facts as indicating the agency of the spirits of dead men and women. The primary aim of the present work is to provide the necessary data for determining how far, if at all, that interpretation of the facts is justified. But the question, Is the belief justified? cannot, as the whole history of mysticism stands to prove, be finally answered until we are prepared with a more or less adequate answer to two subsidiary questions: first, If not justified, what is the true interpretation of the facts? and, second, How can the origin and persistence of the false interpretation be explained?

As supplementary, therefore, to the purely evidential aspect of the inquiry, it became necessary to give some account, on the one hand, of the contemporary history of the movement, and of its social and intellectual environment, and, on the other hand, of the prior systems of belief from which it sprang. For the modern belief in Spirit-intercourse is not,

<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, a certain ambiguity involved in the use of the word "Spiritualism," since that term has been commonly employed, both before and since 1848, to denote a system of philosophy, or more strictly perhaps a philosophical attitude. But whilst in philosophy the connotation of the term is somewhat vague, and there are, moreover, sufficient synonyms to admit of the word being dispensed with, in the alternative sense in which it is employed throughout this book, viz. the belief in intercourse with the spirits of the dead, the meaning is well defined, and no other term in common use will meet the requirements. The only practicable alternative, short of introducing a new word, is to employ "Spiritism"; but "Spiritism" outside France has never won general recognition. Moreover, it is frequently applied by Spiritualists in this country to denote one particular form of their belief, the doctrine of re-incarnation associated with the name of Allan Kardec.

of course, a mere accident of the time. It cannot but be recognised, whatever bearings such an admission may have upon its intrinsic truth or falsity, that the belief in its present form is an organic outgrowth from previous forms of mysticism. Historically, if not also logically, it is the necessary consequent of well-ascertained antecedents.

In 1871 the Committee of the London Dialectical Society, in presenting the results of a prolonged inquiry into the phenomena of Spiritualism, reported that while they were overwhelmed with testimony from believers in the alleged marvels, their appeal had elicited hardly any response from the more numerous body of persons who held the belief to be based upon fraud and delusion.<sup>1</sup> The Committee's experience is typical of the whole history of Spiritualism up to the present time. Within the last fifty years there have been throughout the civilised world scores of periodicals devoted to the propaganda; hundreds, perhaps thousands, of volumes have been published representing the views either of those who have accepted the Spiritualist creed as a whole, or of the minority who, after more or less prolonged investigation, have found themselves unable indeed to pronounce judgment on their ultimate implications, yet convinced of the genuineness of some of the alleged manifestations.

The other side is represented at most by a few score of books, pamphlets, and magazine articles, not one of which can be said to have considered the movement as a whole, or to have discussed the evidence at its strongest. Amongst the more obvious reasons for a neglect, which may well have seemed judicious, one in particular must be mentioned here. There can be no doubt that in each succeeding decade those who, with or without adequate inquiry, had satisfied themselves that the alleged physical marvels at any rate were baseless, were satisfied equally that within a short time the belief in them would die out of itself, and that to treat the matter seriously might even tend to postpone that desired end.

Those expectations have not yet been fulfilled. Ten years ago, indeed, it might have been said with some confidence

<sup>1</sup> *Report on Spiritualism*, p. 1.

that the movement was tending rapidly to decay ; that alike in this country and abroad there was less widespread interest in the subject amongst the educated classes than at any period since 1860 ; that physical mediums and manifestations were less striking and abundant ; and that the ranks of avowed Spiritualists showed a decline, not so marked perhaps in the actual numbers as in the intellectual standing of the recruits.

But within the last decade the strongest evidence adduced in the whole history of the movement for the belief in communion with the dead has been furnished by the trance-utterances of Mrs. Piper, as interpreted in Dr. Hodgson's Report ;<sup>1</sup> whilst within the same period the physical manifestations occurring in the presence of an Italian medium, Eusapia Paladino, have seemed, and still seem to many persons of eminence in this country and on the Continent, worthy of consideration as testifying to the probable operation of forces unknown to science. That men of such distinction in various fields of thought as Sir Oliver Lodge, the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers, Dr. Hodgson, Professor William James, of Harvard, and Professor Charles Richet, of Paris, should have been strongly affected, and in some cases actually convinced by the new evidence, whilst older converts like Sir W. Crookes and Dr. A. R. Wallace maintain their belief unimpaired, is proof sufficient that the movement, if on the decline, is visibly still far from its euthanasia, and may at any moment receive fresh accessions of strength with the discovery of new mediums or new forms of manifestation.

Whether the belief in the intercourse with spirits is well founded or not, it is certain that no critic has yet succeeded in demonstrating the inadequacy of the evidence upon which the Spiritualists rely. That evidence groups itself into two distinct categories ; and in some cases those who accept the one category reject wholly or in part facts coming under the other. In the first place we have to consider certain sub-conscious activities manifesting themselves in trance speaking, automatic writing, seeing of visions, which though they may be readily counterfeited, are not necessarily, or in typical

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. for Psychical Research*, vol. xiii. pp. 284-582.

cases, associated with imposture. In the second place, second in the historical as in the logical order, there are certain physical manifestations, unquestionably, in their later developments, bearing strong resemblance to conjuring tricks, but as unquestionably appearing in the first instance in the presence and through the agency of uneducated and unskilled persons, mostly young children, and in circumstances where the hypothesis of trickery presents formidable moral as well as physical difficulties.

At the outset of our inquiry we must note a significant distinction between the two classes of phenomena. With the exception of one well-defined type of cases—to be considered in detail in the next two chapters—there is, broadly speaking, no parallel to be found in civilised countries, during the last three or four centuries at least, for the physical phenomena alleged to occur in the presence of certain Spiritualist mediums. On the other hand, the annals of Spiritualism contribute nothing new as regards the first class. There is no manifestation of inspired writing and speaking, of spiritual healing, of telepathy, or clairvoyance, occurring since 1848, which cannot be matched amongst the records of Animal Magnetism; and again, before Mesmer, we meet with similar phenomena in the chronicles of ecstasy, obsession, magic, and witchcraft.

Historically, moreover, Spiritualism is the direct outgrowth of Animal Magnetism. In America, the land of its birth—according to the common reckoning, which dates the movement in its present shape from the rappings of 1848—the embryo faith was incubated in the revelations of a “magnetic” clairvoyant, and its first apostles were drawn mainly from the ranks of those who had studied and practised Animal Magnetism, or attended clairvoyant séances. Moreover, not in America only, but in the older civilisations generally, there were many who had adopted, long before 1848, the spiritualistic interpretation of the phenomena of the “magnetic” trance.

For the proper understanding of the subject it is essential to note that the recognition of the trance phenomena, as testifying to the existence of a spiritual world, preceded the

acceptance of the physical manifestations as signs and wonders vouchsafed from that world. The raps and movements of tables did not, in the ultimate analysis, originate anything; they served merely to confirm a pre-existing belief. It is, no doubt, amongst other causes, primarily because of the failure to recognise this historical sequence that most attempts to demonstrate the falsity of the Spiritualist belief have proved ineffectual. It was of little use for the American doctors to prove that the raps could be produced by cracking of the joints, or Faraday that tables could be turned by unconscious muscular action alone; for Maskelyne to imitate the rope-tying feats of the Davenport Brothers; or for hardy investigators at a later date to seize the spirit form at a dark séance. Alike in the larger historical cycle, and in the sequence of each individual experience, the faith in Spiritualism was buttressed by these things, not based on them; and though shaken, could not be permanently overthrown by any demonstration of their futility. Some, indeed, like Braid and Carpenter, approached the subject from the other side, and attempted to show that not only the physical movements, but the visions, inspired writing and speaking, could be traced to such recognised, if insufficiently familiar, causes as automatism and hallucination. If these attempts also met with no substantial success, it was apparently because the analysis did not go deep enough, and especially because it failed to take adequate account of those rarer and more dubious phenomena of the trance, which were interpreted by believers either as indications of new faculty or as tokens of a new world of being.

On various grounds, therefore, it seemed essential to preface the detailed account of the movement since 1848 with a sketch of earlier mystical beliefs and especially of the cult of Animal Magnetism in America and Europe. And for other reasons a brief history of Animal Magnetism seemed germane to the present inquiry. The more striking phenomena of the induced trance and of automatism, such as suggestional anæsthesia, hallucination, catalepsy, involuntary speaking and writing, are now, it may be presumed, fairly established.

But it must not be overlooked that it is only within the last generation, almost, it may be said, within the last decade, that these phenomena have come to be recognised as genuine accompaniments of a genuine if still obscure cerebral condition. They have occurred sporadically for centuries; and since the last quarter of the eighteenth century they have been reproduced experimentally in every civilised country; they have been studied by more or less trained observers; they have been recorded, in bewildering variety, in innumerable treatises; and have yet failed until yesterday, not merely to secure a favourable verdict, but even to gain entrance to the Court of Science. The history of Animal Magnetism affords a most striking illustration of that dichotomy of opinion which seems, at a certain stage, to be the inevitable condition of the growth of knowledge. For more than three generations such part of the instructed world as took any note of the phenomena which we have now learnt to call hypnotic were divided into two sharply opposed camps. On the one side were those who believed in the phenomena and a good deal more, and ascribed them to the operation of a subtle fluid; in the other and larger camp were those who rejected them as merely the results of mal-observation, when they did not actually stigmatise them as fraudulent. And, precisely as in the process of organic evolution, all forms of belief intermediate between these two extremes tended to extinction and oblivion.

To us, looking back over the past century, two names stand out prominently in the early history of Animal Magnetism. Bertrand in France and Braid in England separated themselves from all their contemporaries by accepting the phenomena in general as genuine, whilst attempting to relate them to the known facts of physiology. It is instructive to note what manner of treatment they met with from those contemporaries. Bertrand, it may be said, died too young for fame; but the indifference shown to Braid's remarkable work is one of the most singular episodes in the history of science. That the medical authorities of his day turned a deaf ear to his enunciation, a generation before Bernheim and the Nancy School, of an explanation essentially the same as the modern

theory of suggestion, is matter of common knowledge; it is probably not so well known that, despite his endorsement of the genuineness of most of the phenomena, including those of Phreno-Mesmerism, his writings and his very existence were almost completely ignored by those who, like him, believed in the facts. No contribution from Braid, nor any review of his numerous writings, appears in the *Zoist*; and the whole thirteen volumes of that periodical contain but two or three contemptuous references to his views. Nature, it may be said, abhors a Mugwump.

Now this recent episode in the history of science has a direct bearing upon one of the problems presented to us by Modern Spiritualism. Side by side with the now admitted manifestations of automatic activity, which, as said, form the bulk of the psychological phenomena, there have been found from very early times, and more abundantly perhaps in the records of Animal Magnetism and Mesmerism, facts which seem to indicate some mode of perception, or some form of communication between mind and mind, as yet unrecognised. It would be difficult to maintain that these indications are as clear and unmistakable as the evidence for the establishment by suggestion of a state of complete insensibility to pain. But the recollection that fifty years ago the medical profession and the leaders of science generally were practically unanimous in rejecting the evidence for the one class of facts accumulated by the demonstrations of Esdaile and others is full of encouragement for those of us who now are inclined to think that the case for thought-transference has not yet had a fair hearing. But the exponents of mesmeric anæsthesia were with one or two exceptions tainted with theories of a mystical character; Elliotson and Esdaile believed, on evidence which we can now see to have been quite insufficient, in the operation of an invisible fluid emanating from the magnet and other bodies; and their medical contemporaries felt themselves thereby absolved from any inquiry into the alleged anæsthesia. In the modern case of thought-transference, the grounds alleged for an indifference, which, it must be admitted, is neither so marked

nor so unanimous, are similar, but without equal justification. For the modern belief in the possibility of a new mode of perception is not necessarily associated with any mystical or transcendental doctrine; and, indeed, if fairly examined, will be found the most effectual solvent of all mystical beliefs, for it furnishes a rationalist explanation of phenomena hitherto commonly interpreted, by those who found themselves forced to admit the facts, as due to the interference of spiritual agencies. For my own part, at any rate, I see no reason to doubt that, if the existence of thought-transference should eventually be demonstrated—and I do not claim that the demonstration is or ought to be considered at present complete—the explanation will be found to lie strictly within the region of natural law. To assist in the elucidation of this particular question, which is, to my thinking, the key to some of the most perplexing problems of Spiritualism, I shall endeavour in the course of the present work to present, as fully as practicable, examples of the experiments and observations which seem to point to some faculty of the kind supposed. It must be admitted that the older evidence is far from demonstrative; possibly, apart from two recent items—the experiments at Brighton conducted by Professor and Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, and the records of Mrs. Piper's trance utterances—the question of the reality of such a faculty would hardly seem worth discussion. But the existence of the recent evidence gives a retrospective importance to all the scattered hints which we meet with in the literature of Animal Magnetism and Spiritualism, and makes the presentation of records of mesmeric clairvoyance and of experiments in community of sensation, in themselves not sufficiently impressive, seem worth the pains.

MODERN SPIRITUALISM

BOOK I

THE PEDIGREE OF SPIRITUALISM



# THE PEDIGREE OF SPIRITUALISM

## CHAPTER I

### POSSESSION AND WITCHCRAFT

THE belief in the overshadowing presence and continual intervention of spiritual beings underlay, it need hardly be said, the whole of the popular thinking and much of the philosophy of the Middle Ages. But this belief differed widely from the Spiritualism of to-day. The later alchemists, such as Paracelsus and some contemporary and succeeding mystics, believed, indeed, in the agency of immaterial beings, but for the most part of a non-human and non-moral order. The spirits which intervened in mortal affairs were in their view parasitical on mankind, or even mere temporary products of man's misdirected spiritual energies. Spiritual entities never formed the mainspring of the alchemical philosophy; and by the chief followers of Paracelsus in this country in the seventeenth century their agency, as will be shown in a later chapter, appears to have been practically discarded. Again, amongst the unlearned generally, in ecclesiastical societies, and even with many who represented the best culture of their time, belief in the active intervention of angels and devils continued to exert a powerful influence down even to the earlier decades of the eighteenth century. In all matters the belief in spiritual presences still counted for much; the unfamiliar and mysterious were referred to such agencies as naturally as in recent times they have been referred by the ignorant to electricity. But these supposed beings, diabolic or, on occasion, divine in their nature, were not identified with the spirits of deceased men and women. Though accessible to human prayers or threats, and conversant with human speech, they stood outside and apart from the human order.

#### 4 THE PEDIGREE OF SPIRITUALISM

Amongst the phenomena which down even to the eighteenth century have been commonly held to indicate such spiritual operation, the most notable are those outbreaks of spontaneous trance, ecstasy, and speaking with tongues which have from time to time appeared like an epidemic in religious communities of various denominations. One of the most famous epidemics of the kind in comparatively recent times is that of the Ursuline Nuns of Loudun in 1632-4. Urbain Grandier, a curé of Loudun, had been accused of grave immorality; but whether because he boasted powerful friends, or because he was innocent, his accusers had so far failed to procure his conviction. But in 1632 there broke out in a convent in the town—a convent to which Grandier had unsuccessfully sought to be appointed spiritual director—a singular epidemic. Several of the nuns, including the Mother Superior, were seized, now with violent convulsions, now with symptoms of catalepsy—rigidity, insensibility to pain, etc.—or again, in a state of ecstasy poured forth all manner of blasphemies and obscenities. Naturally in those days it was held that they were bewitched; and, indeed, the devils confessed themselves through the mouths of their victims. Various ecclesiastical and judicial inquiries were held, and in the sequel the hapless Grandier, whom all the possessed indicated as the author of their troubles, was burnt alive in April, 1634. The feature of the epidemic which is of special interest for our present purpose, is that the possessed persons were commonly reported to speak in foreign tongues—a faculty which, as is well known, is one of the four principal signs of the presence of a demon. The anonymous author of the earliest history of the outbreak<sup>1</sup> has as little doubt of the reality of the portent as he has of the guilt of Grandier. He cites the testimony of a doctor of the Sorbonne and other prominent personages to the effect that the devils understood questions put to them in Latin, Greek, Turkish, Spanish, a Red Indian language, and so on, and in many cases made answer in the same tongues. But he does not write from first-hand knowledge; he gives no authority for his statements, and his testimony in any case is vitiated by his theological bias. From a much later work, also anonymous,<sup>2</sup> written from a Protestant standpoint, we have details of some of the actual examinations. From these it appears that some of the nuns, chiefly the Mother Superior, did

<sup>1</sup> *La Véritable Histoire des Diables de Loudun . . . par un Témoin, à Poitiers*, 1634. Translated and edited by Edmund Goldsmid. London, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire des Diables de Loudun*. Amsterdam, 1693.

indeed answer in Latin the remarks addressed to them in that language, but that their answers were frequently incorrect, causing the bystanders to comment on the bad Latinity of the demon. Thus, when exhorted, *Adora Deum tuum*, the nun replied to her interlocutor, *Adoro te*.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, when asked *Quoties* she replied as if the question had been *quando*,<sup>2</sup> and exclaimed *Deus non volo* when she meant *Deus non vult*.<sup>3</sup> Or again, if the question proved too difficult, she constantly evaded a reply by exclaiming, *Nimia curiositas*. The Mother Superior further excused herself from replying in Greek, on the ground that there was a pact between the demon and Grandier not to speak in that language.<sup>4</sup> Of other foreign languages we hear nothing at all.

There seems no need to adopt the hypothesis of the later historian that the nuns had been coached up by Grandier's enemies, and had learnt their lesson badly; such little knowledge of Latin as they betrayed could probably, as suggested by Bertrand, have been picked up from constantly attending the offices of the Church. It is noteworthy that various witnesses credited the possessed with the power to read the thoughts of those present and to respond to mental questions.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the eighteenth century similar phenomena, but attributed by the subjects to celestial inspiration, occurred amongst the persecuted peasantry of the Cevennes. Many of them fled to England, and their recitals were collected and published in London in 1707.<sup>6</sup> The symptoms of this epidemic possession in the most marked cases were very similar to those observed amongst the nuns of Loudun; to wit, convulsions, rigidity, insensibility to pain, and loss of consciousness. These alternated with an ecstasy, in which the subjects spoke fluently and with authority as if inspired, preaching good works, repentance, and salvation. The utterances appear generally to have been couched in excellent French, whereas to the natives of the Cevennes, as I can testify from personal experience, French is to this day a foreign language. Thus Jean Vernet writes that his mother, under the inspiration, talked in French for the first time in her life.<sup>7</sup> An idiot shepherd boy expressed himself fluently in good French;<sup>8</sup> nay, an infant fourteen months old was heard by one witness to speak from the cradle and exhort his

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Page 129.

<sup>3</sup> Page 65.

<sup>4</sup> Page 163.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the writers already cited, see Bertrand, *Du Magnétisme Animal*, p. 336, etc., and *Traité du Somnambulisme*, p. 328, and *Bibliothèque du Magnétisme Animal*, tom. iv. pp. 83-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Le Théâtre Sacré des Cevennes*.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Page 31.

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hearers to repentance.<sup>1</sup> Many persons who were unable to read are said to have quoted long passages of Scripture as if they knew the Bible by heart.

Manifestations of this kind are no doubt to be explained, due allowance being made for exaggeration on the part of the reporter, by that extraordinary exaltation of memory which we shall later have occasion to note as a frequent accompaniment of the trance. A single illustration may be given. The following is extracted from an address given under inspiration by Elie Marion, an unlettered peasant, unable in his ordinary state to speak French.<sup>2</sup>

“ En vérité, mon enfant, je viens payer ces villes abominables qui répandent le sang de mes enfans ; je m'en vais au premier jour, les détruire entièrement. Ma colère m'embrasse tous les jours contre ces peuples rebelles à mes commandemens. Sache que j'ai la verge en main, et qu'elle ne s'en retirera point qu'elle n'ait frappé entièrement la terre et ses abominations. Je vengerai mes enfans, ma cause ; votre sang sera vengé, mes enfans, vous sortirez de la poussière, mon peuple. Je vous élèverai sur des trônes, je mettrai ma force en Sion. Sache que j'y viens faire ma demeure éternelle dans peu de jours. C'est la forteresse de l'éternel, ton Dieu, qui doit défendre son peuple d'entre les mains du diable du monde. Les oiseaux de proie, dans peu de jours se repaîtront des choses abominables de la terre, je m'en vais leur livrer l'impudicité du monde. Le ravage qui sera fait sur la terre par mes exécuteurs sera terrible. Sache qu'il y aura un carnage horrible. Le sang découlera de tous côtés sans que personne l'arrête. Faut que la terre s'enivre du sang impur du monde.

The alleged power to discern the thoughts of men's hearts manifested itself chiefly in the detection of spies, who frequently attended the meetings of the proscribed devotees. Of the exercise of the power in other directions there are few traces ; and the speaking in “ unknown tongues ” appears to have consisted in the fact that some of the ecstasies occasionally poured forth sounds unintelligible to their hearers, which they afterwards themselves translated under the same inspiration.<sup>3</sup>

Similar phenomena are said to have been witnessed amongst some of the votaries who crowded round the tomb of the Jansenist Deacon Paris, in 1730 and onwards—the Convulsionaries of St. Medard, as they came to be known.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Traité du Somnambulisme*, pp. 307-8. Bertrand does not say from what source the quotation is taken. The testimony of Elie Marion is printed in *Le Théâtre Sacré*, but I cannot find this speech recorded there.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Théâtre Sacré*, p. 37.

Insensibility to pain, even the pain of burning, and to severe blows and other ill-treatment was repeatedly demonstrated. The ecstasies frequently preached under inspiration, and are commonly reported to have spoken in Greek, Latin, and other languages, which they had never learnt, and occasionally in unknown tongues. The evidence, again, for the speaking in *recognised* foreign languages is defective; but there seems to have been no question that the ecstasies did occasionally pour forth unintelligible sounds, which the bystanders assumed to represent utterances in an unknown tongue. Here is an account given by a witness of one of these outpourings, the ecstatic in this case being the Chevalier Folard: "Il se met tout à coup à parler par monosyllabes; c'est un baragouin où personne n'entend goutte. Quelquesuns disent qu'il parle alors la langue esclavone; mais je crois que personne n'y entend rien."<sup>1</sup>

The most recent and perhaps the most instructive outbreak of the kind occurred just a century later in London. The speaking with tongues in Edward Irving's congregation began in 1831. Irving himself seems, indeed, for some years to have believed in and looked for an outpouring of spiritual gifts, such as is described in the Acts as having taken place amongst the early Christians. This belief and expectation were raised to an acute point with him and some of his more prominent followers by the outbreak, in 1830, amongst some pious Scotch peasants, of speaking with tongues and apparently miraculous gifts of healing. In the course of the following year, at a time when grave ecclesiastical troubles were impending over the minister and his congregation, he instituted a series of services in his church at 6.30 a.m., and there prayer was offered up day after day for the bestowal of the miraculous gifts which the worshippers held had been promised to the Church. At last, in July, 1831, expectation was fulfilled, and one after another of the little band of believers began to speak with tongues. It was not, indeed, without hesitation that the manifestations were accepted by Irving himself as supernatural, still less as divine. But seeing that those who spoke were true believers and persons of honest and good life, and that their utterances conformed in all things to the Christian Faith which he himself held, Irving, after some weeks of doubt and trial, yielded his belief freely to these utterances. From Robert Baxter, who had shared Irving's anticipations, and who himself

<sup>1</sup> From *Histoire d'un Voyage littéraire fait en 1733*, quoted in *Bibliothèque du Magnétisme Animal*, vol. v. (1818) pp. 210-11. See also Bertrand, *op. cit.*

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became eminent amongst the "gifted" persons, we have a very detailed and instructive account of the matter. Baxter had not been present at the earlier manifestations, but had heard of them, and was almost persuaded. In December he came to London, and both heard in others and experienced in himself the working of the new power. To his brother he writes, on December 29th, 1831, as follows:—

"When I was in London I attended at one of the meetings, at which a Mr. T. and a Miss C. spoke; the first in a tongue, the other in prophesying. The prophesying was upon the near coming of our Lord, and rebuking those who did not faithfully declare it; it was delivered in a tone and energy which carried conviction to my soul, that it was the presence, in power, of the Holy Ghost. As the prophesying proceeded, in rebuking the unfaithfulness of those who did not declare the near coming of the Lord, I found laid open the very misgivings of conscience with which I have for the last six months been exercised. . . . In fact, the secrets of my heart, which I had told to none, were laid open; and I felt myself openly rebuked; the effect upon me was that tears ran down my cheeks; and my anguish of soul increasing, I was obliged to hide my face and as far as I could suppress my groanings. This, however, lasted only a few minutes, when the power of the Spirit was so great upon me, that I was obliged to call out, as in agony, for pardon and forgiveness, and for strength to bear a faithful testimony. In these cryings I was, however, at the time conscious of a power of utterance carrying me beyond the natural expression of my feelings. . . . I was conscious of a strained utterance, not my own; and of a power and pressure of the Spirit, quite unutterable in a natural way. After this I was silent, but, with composure of mind, my whole body was convulsively agitated; and for the space of more than ten minutes I was, as it were, paralysed under a shaking of my limbs, my knees rapping one against the other, and no expression except a sort of convulsive sigh. During this period I had no other consciousness than this bodily emotion, and an inexpressible constraint upon my mind, which although it left me composed and sensible of all I was doing, yet prevented my utterance and gave no distinct impression, beyond a desire to pray for the knowledge of the Lord's Will. This increased so much that I was led to fall on my knees and cry in a loud voice, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth': and this I repeated many times, until the same power of the Spirit which I had before felt, came upon me, and I was made to cry out with great vehemence, both of tone and action, that the coming of the Lord should be declared, and the messengers of the Lord should bear it forth upon the mountains and upon the hills, and tell it to the winds, that all the earth should hear it and tremble before the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Narrative of Facts characterising the Supernatural Manifestations in Members of Mr. Irving's Congregation*, by Robert Baxter. London, 1833, pp. 147-8.

Baxter for the next few months spoke much "in the power." These discourses, delivered in most impressive language, conveyed rebuke, warning, exhortation, or encouragement to his hearers; sometimes he would speak "with tongues"; on one occasion he tells us that when sitting at home "a mighty power came upon" him, and he uttered sentences in French, Latin, and in many languages unknown to him; his wife, who was present, identified some of the words as Italian or Spanish. Often the power would direct his doings; he would be called on abruptly to leave a meeting, or cease from some particular course of action. Once he was made, in the power, to declare that he was to go into the Chancellor's Court and there testify, and that for the testimony he would be cast into prison. Not without misgivings he went to the Court and there stood for three or four hours; but no utterance was given to him, and he came away much disheartened.

A singular circumstance noted by Baxter is that when speaking under the influence he could often meet the unspoken thoughts of his hearers. That the "tongues" should solve the religious difficulties of others, as they had already, as we have seen, solved his own, is not perhaps a matter that calls for any supernormal explanation. But he mentions cases in which, meeting with strangers who came to him for counsel, he gave them such information about their private circumstances as convinced them of his supernatural powers.<sup>1</sup>

At a later stage there came through Baxter's lips "an appalling utterance" that the Lord had set him apart for the spiritual ministry; that he was to separate from his wife and family; and that at the end of forty days he would receive a full outpouring of spiritual gifts. The failure of these and other prophecies; the evasive replies of the "Tongues" when asked to account for the non-fulfilment; the appearance of unclean spirits in the congregation; the fact that one or two members had already confessed that they were deluded by false spirits; and finally, the discordant nature of the doctrines preached through the tongues, some of which, delivered in Irving's Church and confirming Irving's special view of the nature of Christ's fleshly Body, appeared to Baxter "fearfully erroneous"—all these considerations, backed by the influence of his wife, who had from the first given a less complete adhesion to the new faith and was naturally unwilling to accept the authority of some of the later utter-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 14, 18, 70, 72, 135, etc. In none of these cases is the evidence sufficiently detailed to enable us to endorse Baxter's opinion.

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ances, finally convinced Baxter that he had been deceived. But even then it never occurred to him to doubt the supernatural inspiration of the utterances; he inferred that the source was demoniac, not, as he had at first supposed, divine.

It is impossible after reading Baxter's narrative to doubt his honesty in the matter. The impulse did, manifestly, come to him without conscious volition on his part, and the words without premeditation—they were "given to him." This, by the testimony both of Irving and Baxter, was the general characteristic of the utterances. One Miss H., indeed, was pronounced a false prophetess, and admitted the justice of her sentence, mainly because on two or three occasions she had meditated utterances beforehand.<sup>1</sup>

Often the utterances began in "an unknown tongue" and then passed into English, the English being by some regarded as merely a peroration, by others as an interpretation of all that had preceded. One witness gives the following description:—"The *tongue* invariably preceded (the English speaking), which at first I did not comprehend, because it burst forth with an astonishing and terrible crash, so suddenly and in such short sentences that I seldom recovered the shock before the English commenced."<sup>2</sup>

Another characteristic of the speaking was that the phrases used seem almost always to have been taken from the Scriptures, as we have seen was the case with the prophets of the Cevennes; and the same phrase was frequently repeated over and over again, as in the following utterance, preserved by the *Record*: "He shall reveal it! He shall reveal it! Yea, heed it! Yea, heed it! Ye are yet in the wilderness. Despise not His Word! Despise not His Word! Not one jot or tittle shall pass away."<sup>3</sup> But there are few authentic records of the actual words spoken, possibly because the "Spirit" on more than one occasion forbade the writing down of utterances.<sup>4</sup>

As regards the content of the utterances, Baxter notes, among other characteristics of the "power," its secrecy and unwillingness to be examined; its evasiveness when called upon to explain contradictions and failures; its general debasement of the understanding and exaltation of blind faith in authority; finally, the bitterness of spirit shown, and the extraordinary exclusiveness—the whole world outside the one little congregation was denounced and condemned

<sup>1</sup> Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by W. Wilks, in his *Life of Irving*, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Mrs. Oliphant's *Life of Irving*, p. 331.

<sup>4</sup> Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

to perdition, under the names of Babylon and the Abomination of Desolation.

But enough has been said for our present purpose. There is no need at the present time to defend the spontaneous nature of the utterances, nor the good faith of those who spoke in the power. But no one, apparently, professes to have recognised with certainty the unknown utterances; and Baxter is of opinion that they represented no language whatever, but only a "jargon of sounds."<sup>1</sup>

One other aspect of this singular outbreak should perhaps be noted. There were several cases in which persons were professedly possessed with evil spirits, and were rebuked by the bystanders, and the evil spirits bidden to come forth. In one such case, recorded by Baxter on the authority of Irving and another eye-witness, the "possessed" man, when released by the "tongue," fell upon the ground crying for mercy, and later lay there "foaming and struggling like a bound demoniac."<sup>2</sup>

All these cases, it will be seen, present the same general features. We find a highly contagious epidemic, manifesting itself in convulsions and ecstasy, and variously interpreted by the subject and the onlookers, according to their prepossessions, as demoniac or divine possession. The more marvellous features—the speaking in foreign languages unknown to the speaker, the speaking with unknown tongues, the reading of thoughts—rest upon evidence which must be adjudged quite insufficient. On the other hand, it appears to be fully established that the "possessed" persons were able to speak with extraordinary fluency, and sometimes in a language with which they were at best very imperfectly acquainted.

For the rest, apart from its fluency, the most notable characteristics of the utterance when intelligible appear to have been its grandiose character, both in manner and diction, and its tendency to make use of a limited number of sonorous phrases, drawn generally from biblical sources. In its more elementary forms it seems to have degenerated, as in one of the instances quoted above, into mere emphatic repetition of one or two sentences.

In the history of Modern Spiritualism we shall come across many cases of similar possession, less violent and prolonged, indeed, but apparently equally spontaneous.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Page 26; see also p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Book II. chap. iv. and Book IV. chap. vi., the case of Mr. Le Baron. The ecstasies of the early Quakers—"witchcraft fits," as their enemy Muggleton called them—were no doubt of this kind.

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In the cases just described the supposed intercourse with the spiritual world came, unless perhaps we make an exception in the case of the Irvingites, unbidden. But there were some who by means of magical incantations, or by visions in the crystal, sought such intercourse for themselves.

One of the best-known examples of this supposed communing with spirits is afforded by the diary of Dr. Dee.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Dee was a scholar and learned mathematician in the sixteenth century, some of whose writings on Euclid, the reform of the calendar, and other matters are still extant. The revelations which he records were obtained through visions in the crystal by one Edward Kelly, Dr. Dee acting the part of scribe and director of the séances. The typical crystal seer was, of course, a young boy without sin. How far Dee's scryer was from fulfilling that ideal may be gathered from the fact that by common report he had, before meeting Dr. Dee, committed forgery and desecrated graves, and had for one or both these offences lost his ears in the pillory; that later Dr. Dee saved him from being dragged away to meet a charge of coining; that the diary itself records his drunkenness on one occasion, and on another the casting out of him of no fewer than fifteen devils. Crystal vision is not, of course, necessarily associated with moral excellence; but it is clearly impossible, with such a *dossier*, to have much confidence in Kelly's good faith. But after all the interest of the revelations does not depend upon the seer's veracity. It is enough for our present purpose that they apparently reflect with fair accuracy the ideas of the time. They form, indeed, a valuable link in the historical series, for while generally they appear, as Kelly himself on one occasion points out, to be founded on earlier mystical writings, they in many respects foreshadow with singular fidelity the utterances of later clairvoyants.

The method of divination was as follows: The sittings commonly began with prayer; thereafter Kelly would see in the crystal the figure of a spiritual being, who would speak to him, or show him words or visions in the crystal, which he would duly report to Dr. Dee. None of these spiritual beings—Madini, Gabriel, Uriel, Nalvage, Il, Morvorgran, Jubanladace, and the rest—appear to have been identified as human spirits, though some of them are spoken of as angels, and all are understood to be of good character. Neither

<sup>1</sup> *A true and faithful Relation of what passed for many years between Dr. John Dee . . . and some Spirits . . . out of the original copy written with Dr. Dee's own hand . . .* edited by Meric Casaubon, D.D. London, 1659.

Dr. Dee himself nor the Polish Count Albert Lasky were privileged to see anything in the crystal, and Dee's son, Arthur, who tried to act for a few days during Kelly's recalcitrancy, saw no visions that were worth recording.

The spirits revealed to Kelly many strange things that were to have taken place in the world; a glorious future was prophesied for their patron the Polish Count, who was ultimately to become King of Poland. Again, the destruction of the kingdoms of this world and the restoration of Jerusalem were foretold, all which things were to take place in the days of the Emperor Rudolph, for whom a grand career was to be opened if he would hearken unto the words of the Lord's prophet, Dr. Dee. This latter vision, fortunately enough, came whilst Dee and Kelly were staying at Prague, immediately after the former had been honoured by a private audience with the Emperor.

A great part of the crystal revelations consists of tables ruled in small squares which are filled with letters, numerals, and mystical symbols, understood to be the alphabet of the primitive language. Moreover, much of the book is taken up with the dictation of various invocations or "calls" to spirits. These invocations are given in the primitive language, accompanied by its translation, word by word. There follows also a detailed account of the constitution of the spiritual hierarchy, of their subjects and principalities, and of the lordship exercised over the kingdoms of the earth. The details of this description, as Kelly took occasion to point out, agree with that given by Cornelius Agrippa, who had himself borrowed it from Ptolemy.<sup>1</sup>

Of the primitive tongue itself we are given many specimens; it is read backward, like Hebrew, which indeed (and not Gaelic, as some in these later times do vainly pretend) represents the corrupted form of that primæval tongue which prevailed after the Fall. The primæval speech, employed by the angels, and by Adam in his state of innocency, has very singular properties:—

"Every letter signifieth the member of the substance whereof it speaketh: Every word signifieth the quiddity of the substance . . . signifying substantially the thing that is spoken of in the center of his Creator, whereby even as the minde of man moveth at an ordered speech, and is easily perswaded in things that are true, so are the creatures of God stirred up in themselves, when they hear the words wherewithal they were nursed and brought forth . . . the creatures of God understand you not, you are not of their

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 158.

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Cities; you are become enemies, because you are separated from Him that governeth the City, by ignorance. . . . Man in his Creation, being made an Innocent, was also authorised and made partaker of the Power and Spirit of God, whereby he did know all things under his Creation, and spoke of them properly, naming them as they were."<sup>1</sup>

This doctrine, that the original speech of man, and that of angels now, bore an organic relation to the outer world, so that each name expressed in itself the properties of the thing spoken of, and that the utterance of the name had a compelling power over the creature, was, without doubt, borrowed by Kelly from an earlier philosophy. We shall meet with similar ideas again amongst the German clairvoyants of the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

There are many references in the early part of the diary to a book, in the primæval language, which Dr. Dee was to write under spirit influence. Apparently the task was not congenial, or the learned doctor was not so good a medium as some of the American automatic writers whose productions we shall consider later,<sup>3</sup> for, on his professing one day that he was "wonderfully oppressed with the Work prescribed" for him to perform, the mother of Madini undertook to carry out the task instead.<sup>4</sup> The rest of the revelations are concerned mostly with allegorical visions, prophecies that failed, and dreary pages of what Casaubon calls "Sermon-like Stuff"—matters which are common to all later clairvoyants.

Finally we have a record of an abortive physical phenomenon. Kelly confesses that he had tried consulting the spirits on his own account, and had left written questions in the window; and "Nalvage" tells him, through the crystal, that the devil had taken those questions away. "Kelly went down to see if it were true, and he found it true."<sup>5</sup> But Dee does not appear to have been as much impressed as he should have been.

The spiritual beings, it will be seen, which by the popular belief of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries intervened in mortal affairs, were not human spirits. The nuns of Loudun were possessed by demons; the Tremblers of the Cevennes were inspired by a divine afflatus. The spiritual entities of the Rosicrucians and of Paracelsus were creatures of the elements—sylphs, gnomes, undines, salamanders—or

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> See below, Book II. chap. v.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Book I. chap. vii.

<sup>4</sup> Pages 26, 27. <sup>5</sup> Page 80.

beings still more remote from humanity. The spirits who presented themselves to Kelly in the crystal appear never to have been identified with human prototypes. The idea of intercourse with distinctively human spirits, if not actually introduced by Swedenborg, at least established itself first in the popular consciousness through his teaching. Emanuel Swedenborg is therefore deservedly ranked as the first Spiritualist in the restricted sense in which the term is here used. Of his philosophy, from which the main conceptions which underlie the Spiritualist creed are no doubt derived, it is not necessary to speak in detail; and the less because in its general outlines it is not peculiar to himself, but forms a part of the great mystical tradition. His special contribution to the Spiritualist belief consists in his conception of a future life. Well versed himself in the science of the day—he held from the King the post of Assessor of Mines, and his published works include treatises on metallurgy, human anatomy, and various mathematical and philosophical subjects—he carried the methods and results of physical science into the region of the Unseen. For him there was no gulf fixed between this earthly life and that which he believed to lie beyond death. The great principle of continuity is preserved; Nature makes no leap, even over the grave, and heaven and hell are seen in his prosaic pages to be much like Stockholm or London. In short, he believed in intercourse with the spirits of those who had once lived as men and women, and in the future life as a state admitting of much the same variety of character and circumstance as life on earth—the two chief articles of the Spiritualist creed. It is true that Swedenborg held them with a difference. Himself the son of a bishop, he is still sufficiently under the influence of theological tradition to conceive of the future state as divided into heavens and hells and peopled by angels and devils, though his descriptions of them by no means accord with orthodox conceptions. Again, the intercourse with spirits in which he believed was not a gift common to any or all of mankind, but a special privilege conferred by the Lord on him, alone of all the sons of men. And the spirits with whom he talked were of such quality as accorded with this high embassy; saints and philosophers, kings and popes, Calvin, Luther, Moses, Paul, and John.

Thus the small and singularly exclusive sect which soon grew up and called itself after his name refused to recognise any supplement to the revelations of their master, and taught—an uncharitable view for which they found ample

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warrant in the seer's own writings—that all later pretenders were deceived by lying spirits. But outside this narrow circle Swedenborg's example counted for more than his direct teaching.

The mystical beliefs hitherto touched on were either based on isolated manifestations, and confined to small groups of believers; or, as with the alchemists, formed part of a traditional philosophy to which only the learned had access. The only earlier movement which at all compares with Modern Spiritualism in the extent to which it affected popular belief is no doubt the witchcraft epidemic. Apart, however, from its wide diffusion, and from the demonstration which it affords of the willingness, even of the educated classes, to believe on wholly insufficient grounds in supernatural interference, it is not clear that the bulk of the witchcraft manifestations had much bearing upon the *evidential* aspects of Spiritualism. For most of the evidence upon which the belief in witchcraft depended, when not merely traditional, consisted, as a brief analysis will show, partly of the preposterous exaggeration of trivial coincidences, but chiefly of statements made by ignorant peasants, which can most readily be ascribed to mental delusion, especially to that form which consists in mistaking past dreams and imaginations for actual occurrences.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence for witchcraft falls under four main heads: (a) the confessions of witches themselves; (b) the corroborative evidence of lycanthropy, apparitions, etc.; (c) the witchmarks; (d) the evidence of the evil effects produced on the supposed victims.

(a) The confessions, as is notorious, were for the most part extracted by torture or the fear of torture, or by lying promises of release. In England, where torture was not countenanced by the law, the ingenuity of Matthew Hopkins and other professional witch-finders could generally devise some equally efficient substitute, such as gradual starvation,

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Gurney's remarks in *Phantasms of the Living*, vol. i. p. 118: "There is a characteristic of uneducated minds which is only exceptionally met with in educated adults—the tendency to confuse mental images, pure and simple, with matters of fact. This tendency naturally allies itself with any set of images which is prominent in the belief of the time; and it is certain now and then to give to what are merely vivid ideas the character of *bona-fide* memories. The imagination which may be unable to produce, even in feeble-minded persons, the belief that they *see* things which are not there may be quite able to produce the belief that they *have seen* them—which is all, of course, that their testimony implies." See also Mr. Gurney's "Note on Witchcraft," *ibid.*, pp. 172-85, for an exhaustive analysis of the evidence for the alleged marvels.

enforced sleeplessness, or the maintenance for hours of a constrained and painful posture. But apart from these extorted confessions, there is evidence that in some cases the accused persons were actually driven by the accumulation of testimony against them, by the pressure of public opinion, and the singular circumstances in which they were placed, to believe and confess that they were witches indeed. Some of the women in Salem who had pleaded guilty to witchcraft explained afterwards, when the persecution had died down and they were released, that they had been "consternated and affrighted even out of their reason" to confess that of which they were innocent.<sup>1</sup> And there were not a few persons who voluntarily confessed to the practice of witchcraft, nocturnal rides, compacts with the devil, and all the rest of it. The most striking instances of this voluntary confession are afforded by children. At Antoinette Bourignon's Girls' School at Lille, in 1639, the whole thirty-two children ultimately accused themselves of witchcraft, confessed to having intercourse with the devil and to riding through the air nightly to attend his infernal banquets. All but one of the children recanted when examined by the magistrates. The one girl who maintained her guilt to the last was imprisoned; and Mademoiselle Bourignon expressed a pious regret that for the good of her soul she had not been burnt.<sup>2</sup>

The children at Moira, in Sweden, who also (with many of their elders) confessed to infernal compacts and nightly rides to Blockula, where they met the devil, danced, feasted, and engaged in various dull, if unquestionably diabolic, diversions, were not so fortunate. Fifteen of them, if Dr. Horneck's narrative is to be believed, were put to death, and many others were cruelly whipped.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "And indeed that Confession that it is said we made, was no other than what was suggested to us by some Gentlemen, they telling us we were Witches, and they knew, and we knew it, and they knew that we knew it, which made us think that it was so," etc., etc. (*An Historical Essay concerning Witchcraft*, by Francis Hutchinson, D. D., etc. London, 1718, p. 85). Another instance of an extorted confession is given by Sinclair (*Satan's Invisible World Discovered*), who tells us that the facts are attested by "an eye and ear-witness—a faithful Minister of the Gospel." The woman in this case, immediately before her execution, attested that her confession was a false one, made through sheer weariness of life, after the persecutions which she had undergone.

<sup>2</sup> *Complete works of Antoinette Bourignon* (Amsterdam, 1686), vol. ii. p. 200. There are three separate accounts of this case of witchcraft: two by Bourignon herself, *La Parole de Dieu* and *La Vie Extérieure*; one, *La Vie Continuee*, written some years later by a friend. It is a valuable lesson in evidence to compare this last version with the first-hand accounts.

<sup>3</sup> See Dr. Horneck's *Account of what happened in the Kingdom of Sweden in 1669, 1670 and upwards*, quoted by Glanvil, in *Sadducismus Triumphatus*,

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In both these cases, it should be noted, the confessions, though *voluntary*, were by no means spontaneous. They were, in fact, suggested; in the first case by Antoinette Bourignon, who from the very first seems to have been troubled by the conviction that her little charges were not as pious as they should have been, and ultimately got it into her foolish head that they were in league with the devil, and made no secret of her opinion. The only grounds adduced for this belief, prior to the confession of the children themselves, were that on one occasion she saw little black figures with wings flying around them, and straightway told the children what she had seen; and that, some time later, one of the girls who had been locked up for some trivial misdemeanour managed to escape from her confinement. It is difficult to know how far, in a case of this kind, the "confessions" were intended seriously by the children themselves; but the fact that they were persisted in before the priests who were called in to investigate the matter certainly tends to prove that they were not merely jest. Probably the children themselves could not have given a very clear account of the matter. In the Moira case the whole population seems to have been the victims of an epidemic delusion, to which children would naturally fall easy victims; and the force of the suggestion was no doubt aided by leading questions from the Commission appointed by the King to examine into the matter.

But it is hardly necessary to labour the point. For even among the earlier writers on witchcraft the opinion was not uncommonly held that the nocturnal rides and banquets with the devil were merely delusions, though the guilt of the witch was not lessened thereby. And in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at least in English-speaking countries, this belief seems to have been held generally alike by believers in witchcraft and their opponents. Thus Gaule, "But the more prodigious or stupendous (of the things narrated by witches in their confessions) are effected meerly by the Devill; the witch all the while either in a Rapt ecstasie, a charmed Sleepe, or a melancholy Dreame; and the Witches imagination, phantasie, common sense, only deluded with what is now done, or pretended."<sup>1</sup> Even Antoinette Bourignon, observing her scholars eat "great

<sup>1</sup> *Select Cases of Conscience touching Witches and Witchcraft* (London, 1646, p. 109). To the same effect, Increase Mather, *Cases of Conscience concerning Evil Spirits*, etc. (London, 1693; London Reprint of 1862, p. 279). Beaumont, *A Treatise of Spirits* (London, 1705, pp. 388, 389). See also Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 76, and the Preface to the anonymous edition of the *True and Exact Relation of the trial of the Chelmsford witches of 1645* (London Reprint of 1837, p. 111).

pieces of Bread and Butter" at breakfast, pointed out to them that they could not have such good appetites if they had really fed on dainty meats at the devil's Sabbath the night before.

(*b*) But if the witch's own account of her marvellous feats may be explained as, at best, the vague remembrance of a nightmare, it is hardly necessary to go beyond this explanation to account for the prodigies reported by others. In most cases there is no need to suppose even so much foundation for the marvels, since the evidence (*e.g.* for lycanthropy) is purely traditional. And when we get accounts at first hand, they are commonly concerned, not with such matters as levitation, or transformation of hares into old women, but merely with vague shapes seen in the dusk, or the unexplained appearance of a black dog. Even so the evidence comes almost exclusively from ignorant peasants, and is given years after the events. The corroborative evidence on which the Salem witches were put to death consisted largely of statements from various neighbours that six, eight, or fourteen years ago the deponent awoke to find the shape of the accused in his bedroom, which thereupon grievously assaulted him and then disappeared; or that, on dates not stated, he saw a black pig approaching him, or was much beset by the gambolling of phantom puppies which ran between his legs.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, it is not easy to find any respectable evidence in the annals of witchcraft for any marvel which even seems to call for explanation by sensory hallucination. One of the best-attested cases occurs in the trial of the Chelmsford witches in 1645 before referred to. At that trial Matthew Hopkins, the witch-finder, John Sterne, gentleman, and six others, testified that on the previous night they had sat up in the room where the accused was confined in order to watch for the appearance of her imps; that the accused promised that her imps should appear; and that the witnesses saw them, to the number of five or six, enter the room in the shape of cats, dogs, or other animals.

The evidence of a professional witch-finder, who was well paid for his services, is perhaps not more worthy of credence than that of a professional medium at the present day. But John Sterne seems to have been a credible person, and was so convinced of the truth of what he saw that he afterwards wrote a pamphlet about it; and the interval was so short that it is difficult to suppose a hallucination of memory. It

<sup>1</sup> *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, by Cotton Mather, D.D. (London, 1693; London Reprint of 1862, pp. 130-50).

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is to be noted, moreover, that the witnesses had apparently sat with the supposed witch for some hours, watching for the appearance of her familiars, and that the witch's own promise to them had raised expectation to the highest pitch. The circumstances were therefore undoubtedly favourable for the production of sensory hallucination.

(c) The evidence for "witch-marks" does not greatly concern us. The insensible patches on which Matthew Hopkins and other witch-finders relied may well have been genuine in some cases. Such insensible areas are known to occur in hysterical subjects, and the production of insensibility by means of suggestion is a commonplace in modern times. The supposed witches' teats, which the imps sucked, appear to have been found almost exclusively, like the imps themselves, in the English-speaking countries.<sup>1</sup> Any wart, boil, or swelling would probably form a sufficient warrant for the accusation; we read in Cotton Mather of a jury of women finding a preternatural teat upon a witch's body, which could not be discovered when a second search was made three or four hours later;<sup>2</sup> and of a witch's mark upon the finger of a small child, which took the form of "a deep red spot, about the bigness of a Flea-bite."<sup>3</sup> And the witch-mark which brought conviction to the mind of Increase Mather in the case of George Burroughs was his ability to hold a heavy gun at arm's length, and to carry a barrel of cider from the canoe to the shore.<sup>4</sup>

So far, then, we may search the annals of witchcraft in vain for any testimony for material marvels at all comparable to the evidence adduced in recent years for the physical manifestations of Spiritualism. Let us now turn to the last head of evidence.

(d) Of most of the evidence based upon the injuries suffered by the witches' supposed victims, it is difficult to speak seriously. If a man's cow ran dry, if his horse stumbled, his cart stuck in a gate, his pigs or fowls sickened, if his child had a fit, his wife or himself an unaccustomed pain, it was evidence acceptable in a court of law against

<sup>1</sup> See Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 57. "I meet with little mention of Imps in any country but ours, where the Law makes the feeding, suckling, or rewarding of them to be Felony." <sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Increase Mather, *op. cit.*, p. 210. See Hutchinson, *Historical Essay*, pp. 140, 173, 180; and Gaule, *Select Cases*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Pages 125, 126, 286. "Had I (Increase Mather *loquitur*) been one of his judges, I could not have acquitted him; for several persons did upon oath testify that they saw him do such things as no man that has not a Devil to his Familiar could perform."

any old woman who might be supposed within the last twelve months—or twelve years—to have conceived some cause of offence against him and his. Follies of this kind are too well known to need repetition.

But there is another feature of witchcraft, at any rate of the cases occurring in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England and America, which is not so well recognised, and which has a more direct bearing upon our present inquiry—the predominant part played in the initial stages of witch persecution by malevolent or merely hysterical children and young women.

In Glanvil's collection of cases in *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, the first eight narratives deal with witchcraft of the ordinary type. In the first three of these the protagonists are young children; in two others a servant girl plays the principal part. One of these five cases—the Drummer of Tedworth—will be discussed in the next chapter. Again, in the *Collection of Modern Relations*<sup>1</sup> we find a case of a woman who was tried for a witch apparently upon the sole evidence of a Poor Woman's Boy who was struck dumb by coming upon her suddenly crouching behind a bush; and in another case in the same collection the afflicted person and chief witness was Mistress Faith Corbet, aged ten or eleven, who fell into convulsions because poor old Alice Huson had carried off her gloves. In a sixteenth-century case at Chelmsford one of the chief witnesses was Agnes Brown, a child of twelve, who testified to seeing a big black dog with a pair of horns on his head, and a face like an ape. This fearsome being entered the dairy where she was churning butter, and conversed with her.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, was started by Abigail Williams, aged twelve, and her little friend, Elizabeth Parris. It was a boy of eleven who started the persecution of the Lancashire witches (1634); it was some silly children, the eldest only sixteen, who were the first and chief witnesses against the Samuel family, known as the Witches of Warbois (1593). Rose Cullender and Annie Duny, known as the Suffolk witches, who were tried before Sir Matthew Hale in 1665, were condemned on the testimony of young children, who fell into fits and vomited nails and crooked pins. It would be easy to lengthen the list; but, in effect, it is enough to point out that these cases of child evidence constitute the type to which most of the

<sup>1</sup> London, 1693.

<sup>2</sup> *The examination and confession of certain Witches . . . in 1556.* London, 1864; reprinted from a pamphlet in the Library of Lambeth Palace.

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cases of spontaneous<sup>1</sup> origin at this time will be found to conform.

The symptoms of the alleged bewitchment were, in all these cases, monotonously alike. The victims would fall into fits or convulsions, of a kind which the physicians called in were unable either to diagnose or to cure. In these fits the children would commonly call out on the old woman who was the imaginary cause of their ailment; would profess, at times, to see her shape present in the room, and would even stab at it with knife or other weapon. (In the most conclusive cases the record continues that the old woman, being straightway sought for, would be found attempting to conceal a corresponding wound on her person.) These fits, which sometimes lasted, with slight intermission, for weeks together, would be increased in violence by the approach of the supposed witch; or, as Hutchinson notes,<sup>2</sup> by the presence of sympathetic spectators. The fits, as was also commonly noted by contemporary chroniclers, would diminish or altogether cease when the witch was imprisoned or condemned: on the other hand, if the supposed witch were released the victim would continue to suffer horrible tortures, insomuch that, at the Salem trials, one old woman who had been acquitted by the jury was, because of the hideous outcry from the afflicted persons in court, straightway re-tried and condemned.<sup>3</sup> The witch's touch would always provoke severe attacks; indeed, contact with the witch, or the establishment of rapport between her and her victim by means of some garment worn by the latter, as in Mistress Faith Corbet's case, was generally regarded as an essential prerequisite of the enchantment. Once this rapport established, the mere look of the witch, or the direction of her evil will, would suffice. The afflicted in Salem were, as the Mathers testify, much tortured in court by the malevolent glances of the poor wretches on trial; and two "visionary" girls added greatly to the weight of the evidence by foretelling, with singular accuracy, when such or such of the afflicted persons then present would feel the baleful influence, and howl for anguish.<sup>4</sup> It should be added—though the evidence, as we now understand the word, for the fact alleged is of course practically negligible—that it was commonly reported that the witch's

<sup>1</sup> From this generalisation are excluded, of course, all such cases of witch persecution as were initiated from the outside, by the direct interference of royal, priestly, or professional witch-finders.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Essay*, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, pp. 139, 215, etc.

victim could, although blindfolded, distinguish her tormentor by the touch alone from all other persons, and could even foresee her approach and discern her actions at a considerable distance.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of the convulsions and cataleptic attacks, which modern science would unhesitatingly dismiss as being simply the result of hysteria, was heightened in many cases by manifestations of a more material kind. It was a common feature for the victim to vomit pins, needles, wool, stubble, and other substances; or for thorns or needles to be found embedded in her flesh. In a case recorded by Glanvil an hysterical servant girl, Mary Longdon, in addition to the usual fits, vomiting of pins, etc., was tormented by stones being continually flung at her, which stones when they fell on the ground straightway vanished. Her master bore witness in court to the falling of the stones and their miraculous disappearance. Moreover, the same Mary Longdon would frequently be transported by an invisible power to the top of the house, and there "laid on a board betwixt two Sollar beams," or would be put into a chest, or half suffocated between two feather-beds.<sup>2</sup>

Gross as these frauds appear to us, it is singular that for the most part they remained undetected, and even, it would seem, unsuspected, not merely by the ignorant peasants, for whose benefit the play was acted in the first instance, but in the larger theatre of a court of law. But there are some notorious instances of confession or detection. Edmund Robinson, the boy on whose accusation the Lancashire witches were tried, subsequently confessed to imposture. Other youths were detected with blacklead in their mouths when foaming in sham epileptic fits, colouring their urine with ink, concealing crooked pins about their persons in order to vomit them later, scratching the bedposts with their toes, and surreptitiously eating to repletion during a pretended fast.<sup>3</sup> But commonly the spectators were so convinced beforehand of the genuineness of such portents that they held it superfluous to examine the claims of any particular performance of this kind on their credence.

It is difficult to know in such cases where self-deception ends and where malevolent trickery begins. Nor would the examination of these bygone outbreaks of hysteria—trivial in themselves as terrible in their consequences—be of interest

<sup>1</sup> *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, pp. 286-8, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, edition of 1726, pp. 313-26.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, *Historical Essay*, pp. 185-224.

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in the present connection, except for the fact that we find here the primitive form of those Poltergeist manifestations which gave the popular impetus in 1848 to the belief in Modern Spiritualism, and which are still appealed to by those who maintain the genuineness of the physical manifestations of the séance room as instances of similar phenomena occurring spontaneously. The type remains the same, though its modes of expression have slightly changed. The neurotic children who, two or three centuries ago, attracted to themselves the interest of their little world by posing as martyrs to supernatural malevolence, now minister to their diseased egotism by professing to be the agents of spiritual beings or the unconscious vehicles of occult forces. Pseudo-epileptic fits and vomiting of pins are out of date; but throwing of stones and mysterious transportations of the human subject, as in Mary Longdon's case, occur in many modern Poltergeists, notably in the historical instance of the Phelps children at Stratford (Connecticut) in 1850.<sup>1</sup>

Since, then, this survival from the witchcraft beliefs of the Middle Ages, in itself insignificant, has assumed adventitious importance, both from the part which it has demonstrably played in recent history and from the weight still attached to the subject by some competent persons, it has seemed worth while to examine in detail, in the next chapter, some typical instances of the modern Poltergeist manifestations.

<sup>1</sup> Described at length in Book II. chap. i. below.

## CHAPTER II

### ON POLTERGEISTS

**M**YSTERIOUS knocks and rappings, accompanied by throwing of stones, ringing of bells, breaking of crockery, and other more violent disturbances, have been commonly reported in all civilised countries for the past two or three centuries, to go back no further. It is here proposed, rather for the reasons indicated in the last chapter than from any exaggerated appreciation of their intrinsic merits as evidence, to analyse some of the best-known and most frequently quoted cases of the kind occurring before 1848 for which we have testimony at first hand.<sup>1</sup>

The case to be first quoted goes far to justify the statement made in the last chapter that the so-called Poltergeist performances in modern times are a direct legacy from the witchcraft of the Middle Ages. For whilst we have in this case the same general type of disturbances which characterise the nineteenth-century cases, there is a seventeenth-century reference to the malicious action of a supposed wizard, and the cessation and later renewal of the manifestations are reported to have shown that singular correspondence with the condemnation and subsequent escape of the suspected agent, which forms so marked a feature in the sufferings of the witch's alleged victims. The evidence offered for the disturbances, it will be seen, is about on a level with that for the witchcraft phenomena in general.

<sup>1</sup> That the reader may have some assurance that the cases analysed in this chapter have not been chosen as unduly favourable to the rationalist interpretation, I think it well to state that my selection is based on a letter from the distinguished naturalist, Dr. A. R. Wallace, which appeared in the *Journal of the S.P.R.* for February, 1899. Dr. Wallace, in advocating the supernormal character of the Poltergeist manifestations, quotes nine cases as affording good evidence; three of these cases, however, present no first-hand evidence, and one occurred after 1848—the limit assigned in the text. The five remaining cases, viz. the Drummer of Tedworth, the Castle of Slawensik, Bealings Bells, Mary Jobson, and the Wesley Case, are dealt with below.

## THE DRUMMER OF TEDWORTH

In March, 1661, John Mompesson, of Tedworth, in the county of Wilts, caused a certain vagrant drummer to be arrested and taken before a Justice of the Peace. The drum was confiscated, and in the middle of April, during Mr. Mompesson's temporary absence, was taken to his house. On his return, Mompesson learnt that great noises had been heard in the house; the noises thereafter came night after night, in the shape of thumping and drumming. An invisible drum was constantly heard to beat Roundheads, Cuckolds and Tat-too, and would also knock at request a given number. Sometimes the manifestations were accompanied by "a bloomy noisome smell," as of sulphur; also chairs, boots, a board, and other objects were seen to move across the room of their own accord; a bed staff hit the minister on the leg, but without hurting him; "the old Gentlewoman's" clothes were flung about the room, and her Bible hid in the ashes; mysterious lights were seen; the manservant was terrified by the vision of "a Great Body with two red and glaring Eyes"; a gentleman found all his money turned black in his pockets; and Mompesson's horse was found one morning with a hind leg fixed so firmly in its mouth that it was difficult for several men to get it out with a lever. But the disturbances were especially frequent and violent in the neighbourhood of the younger children. The bedsteads would be beaten and shaken as they lay in them, and a sound of scratching, as with iron talons, would be heard. Moreover, "it would lift the Children up in their Beds, follow them from one Room to another, and for a while haunted none particularly but them." The disturbances ceased when the drummer was sentenced to transportation, and recommenced when "I know not how ('tis said by raising Storms and affrighting the Seamen) he made shift to come back again."

The whole of the account is given in Glanvil's own words, but it is founded, as he tells us, partly on the oral relation of Mr. Mompesson and the other witnesses to him, partly on Mompesson's letters. There are also extant two letters of Mompesson's, dated respectively 1672 and 1674. But he gives in these no detailed confirmation of Glanvil's account; indeed, when the second letter was written he expressly says that he had lent Glanvil's book "for the use of Lord Hollis" the previous year, and did not know what the account contained. Glanvil first published his narrative, as we learn

from the Preface to the third edition of *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, in 1668. It had been in part written some years previously, but not apparently from full notes, for only two precise dates are given in the whole narrative. But even if we assume that Glanvil had accurately put down, possibly some years later, all that he had heard from Mompesson and others, it does not amount to much; for it does not appear that Mompesson himself witnessed any of the more marvellous incidents—the drops of blood, the chairs moving by themselves, “the Great Body with two red and glaring Eyes,” and all the rest of it. These things were witnessed by neighbours, by men-servants, by a “Roomfull of People,” or by an undistributed “they.” So that Glanvil’s account of them may be third hand or tenth hand. The only first-hand account which we have is Glanvil’s own. Glanvil paid one visit to the house “about this time”—the last date given on the previous page being January 10th, 1662. Glanvil’s account of all he saw and heard is, in brief, as follows: On hearing from a maid-servant that “it was come,” he, with Mr. Mompesson and another, went up to a bedroom; “there were two little modest Girls in the Bed, between seven and eleven Years old, as I guest.” Glanvil heard a scratching in the bed “as loud as one with long Nails could make upon a Bolster.” This lasted for half an hour and more, and Glanvil could not discover the cause; it was succeeded by a panting, like a dog, accompanied by movements in the bedding; also the windows shook; also Glanvil saw a movement in a “Linnen Bag” that hung against another bed, but was not apparently sufficiently sure of the accuracy of his observation to mention this incident in the first (1668) edition. Further, Glanvil was aroused by an untimely knocking next morning; and his horse fell ill on the way home, and died two or three days later.<sup>1</sup>

I pass over the Cock Lane ghost (1762), because though we may admit with Mr. Lang<sup>2</sup> that the so-called “exposure” was inconclusive—no exposure in matters of this kind ever is conclusive—not even Mr. Lang can persuade us that, apart from the pleasing literary aroma that pervades it, the case presented for us in contemporary newspaper gossip is worthy our serious consideration. Nor need we linger over the Stockwell case (1772). It is true that the evidence here is first hand; but for practical purposes it is of little value.

<sup>1</sup> *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, by Joseph Glanvil, F.R.S.; third edition, 1689. Also Preface to second part, containing two letters from Mompesson.

<sup>2</sup> *Cock Lane and Common Sense*, pp. 161-70. London, 1894.

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Six persons signed a general statement of the disturbances, setting forth that various articles of furniture, crockery, pickle jars, and so on were thrown about and broken, without any apparent cause for the movements. The narrative does not explicitly state that any of the six persons saw any particular thing done, and collective testimony in such matters is as vain a thing as collective responsibility in another sphere. But we may no doubt accept the statement that five pails were filled with the fragments of the broken china, and that the servant girl, Ann Robinson, a young woman of twenty, betrayed a surprising restlessness, being always present on the scene of action and walking backwards and forwards the whole time.<sup>1</sup>

### THE CASTLE OF SLAWENSIK

Councillor Hahn and a friend, a young officer named Charles Kern, spent some months in the winter of 1806-7 in the lonely Castle of Slawensik, in Silesia. Shortly after their arrival—apparently in December, 1806—various disturbances broke out: bits of lime fell or were thrown about the room; then strange noises were heard; knives, spoons, snuffers, and all manner of small objects were flung about; occasionally objects were seen to rise from the table and fall on to the ground. The disturbances lasted for about two months, and the nuisance finally became so great that the young men had to move to other apartments.

The disturbances are said to have been witnessed by two other officers and various other reputable persons whose names are given, but we have only one account, written by Councillor Hahn on November 19th, 1808, and by him given to Kerner in 1828. From the fact that no dates are given it may be inferred that Hahn did not keep notes—at any rate, not accurate notes. There is no apparent reason for doubting Hahn's honesty, but his studies of Kant and Fichte are no guarantee of his competence as a witness. In any case, his unsupported testimony, given eighteen months or more after the events, is not good evidence, even for things which he saw, or believed himself to see, with his own eyes. But many of the marvels are only given at second hand. It was the dauntless Kern who saw in the glass the white figure of a woman looking at him; Hahn stood before the glass for a

<sup>1</sup> The authority for the Stockwell ghost is a contemporary pamphlet entitled *An Authentic, Candid, and Circumstantial Narrative of the Astonishing Transactions at Stockwell*, etc. London, 1772. The account is quoted by Mrs. Crowe, *Nightside of Nature*, third edition, pp. 412, etc.

quarter of an hour and saw only his own reflection. It was Kern, again, who saw the white dog; Hahn only heard the dog's footsteps. Again, it was Kern and Hahn's servant, during Hahn's absence at Breslau, who saw a jug of beer rise from the table, as if lifted by an invisible hand, and pour out a glass half full, and the glass then raise itself in the air and tilt its contents (which disappeared without leaving a trace) down an invisible throat. In default of corroborative evidence of any kind from the other witnesses, it seems not improbable that the whole affair was an elaborate practical joke at Hahn's expense.<sup>1</sup>

## BEALINGS BELLS

On the 2nd of February, 1834, the housebells at Bealings, near Woodbridge, in Suffolk, the residence of Major Moor, F.R.S., began to ring violently—sometimes singly, sometimes three or more together—without any apparent cause. They continued so to ring at intervals until the 27th March, when the disturbances finally ceased. The cause was never discovered.

The evidence for this singular outbreak is at first hand; it is practically contemporaneous, being based on notes made at the time and written out in full at intervals within a few days of the occurrences; the witness is a Fellow of the Royal Society, who devoted, on his own showing, much time and ingenuity to the search for a cause for the manifestations, and who recorded with scrupulous care the atmospheric conditions and the readings of barometer and thermometer during their progress.

If the evidence then fails to impress us as it undoubtedly impressed Major Moor, it is because Major Moor himself gives us good cause for distrusting his competence as a witness. He is practically the sole witness, and from the outset he had made up his mind, not only that the phenomena could not be explained, as he justly points out, by "the known laws of the electric theory" or the expansion of metals by rise of temperature, but that they were inexplicable by any cause known to science; for on February 5th, 1834—that is, three days after the bell-ringing began—he writes: "I am thoroughly convinced that the ringing is by no human agency" (p. 5), and later (p. 22) he repeats his conviction that the bells "were not rung by any mortal hand."

<sup>1</sup> *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, edition of 1832, vol. ii, pp. 236-52. A translation of Hahn's account is given by Mrs. Crowe (*The Seeress of Prevorst*).

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That this conviction rested on grounds wholly insufficient, and that Major Moor was the kind of man who could make a strong-sounding statement of this kind without fully realising its meaning, is shown by the fact that in the interval (p. 9) he had admitted the possibility of the bell-ringing being due to trickery. But he gives us other and stronger grounds for discounting his testimony. Though he devoted many pages to describing the courses and the attachments of the wires, the state of the atmosphere, and so on, Major Moor never tells us of whom his household consisted, and never describes a single occasion on which, when they were all gathered together in his presence, the bell-ringing occurred. He boasts, indeed, that he took no such precautions against trickery. A writer in the *Ipswich Journal* had made the sensible suggestion that Major Moor should begin his investigations by gathering all his household into one room and posting trustworthy friends round about the house. Major Moor, in quoting the letter, adds, "I did not in any way follow the advice therein offered."

Major Moor's testimony is freely quoted by Spiritualists and other advocates of the Poltergeist theory; but in fact the book might plausibly be interpreted as a gentle satire on those who are ready, on such evidence as that here offered, to believe in supernatural or even unfamiliar agencies.<sup>1</sup>

#### MARY JOBSON

Mary Jobson was a child of twelve or thirteen, who at the latter end of 1839 was smitten with a mysterious malady, the most prominent symptoms of which were bloodshot eyes, constipation, swelling of the abdomen, occasional convulsions, and the occurrence of insensitive areas on the body. The phenomena occurring in her presence consisted chiefly of raps and knocks, the opening and shutting of doors, and beautiful music; occasionally water was mysteriously thrown on the floor, and astronomical designs on one occasion made their appearance on the ceiling of the bed-chamber. The case is recorded by Dr. Reid Clanny, F.R.S.

Dr. Clanny himself, indeed, neither saw nor heard anything of the alleged phenomena. Of the five medical men, besides Dr. Clanny, mentioned by name as having visited the girl during her illness, two only, Mr. R. B. Embleton and Mr. Drury, both young men, have given an account of what

<sup>1</sup> *Bealings Bells: an Account of the Mysterious Ringing of Bells, etc., etc.*, by Major E. Moor, F.R.S. Woodbridge, 1841.

they witnessed. Neither saw anything out of the way; but both heard knocks and loud scratchings—apparently on the foot of the wooden bedstead in which the child lay. Dr. Drury on one occasion, calling on the child after her recovery, heard at her suggestion "most exquisite" music. His account of the manifestation is as follows: (I experienced) "much difficulty in drawing her into conversation, but at last she suddenly exclaimed, 'Oh, what music!' and on listening I distinctly heard most exquisite music, which continued during the time I might count a hundred." Dr. Drury does not give the date of this incident, and the letter from which the above extract is taken is dated simply "Sunday morning, 2 a.m." It was certainly written some time after the occurrence.<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion Mr. Embleton was specially invited to hear "the voice." This voice, which Mr. Embleton describes as realising his ideas of angelic sweetness, dictated as follows: "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, etc. . . . I am the physician of the soul. . . . This is a miracle wrought on earth. . . . Mark, I am thy God sounding out of the heavens," etc. The knocks, the throwing about of water, and so on, which are described by the other eleven witnesses, all of whom were apparently superstitious villagers, so illiterate in some cases as to be unable to write, appear to have been simply the puerile trickeries of a mischievous girl.

A remarkable feature in the case is the occurrence of visions, like some of those attested in witchcraft trials, which are best to be explained as hallucinations either of sense or memory. Thus one witness testifies to having seen the figure of a lamb passing, unseen by all others, through the house; and three witnesses, two of them a husband and wife, quite illiterate, recount that at the child's bidding they looked up at the ceiling of her room and saw there a beautiful representation of the sun, moon, and stars "in a variety of pleasing and brilliant colours."<sup>2</sup> From another witness we learn that the colours were green, yellow, and orange. As no reference is made to this vision by any member of the family who were said to have been present, and as no trace of it apparently remained on the ceiling, it is difficult to suppose that it had any objective foundation.

The ailment, which baffled all the physicians (or rather the three physicians who have written about the case), was

<sup>1</sup> It appears only in the second edition of Dr. Clanny's pamphlet.

<sup>2</sup> The wording is apparently that of Dr. Clanny, who wrote down the account, as the actual witnesses were unable to do so.

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as obviously hysterical as "the voices" were blasphemous; the cure was as mysterious as the disease. After eight months of dropsy and convulsions (Dr. Embleton), brain disease (Dr. Clanny), intolerable torture (all the witnesses), she suddenly turned her sympathising relatives out of the room, dressed herself in a quarter of an hour, and was completely restored to health. Dr. Clanny's enthusiastic belief in the genuineness of the case may perhaps have been due to the fact that the girl (amongst whose affable spirits were the Virgin Mary and a large circle of apostles and martyrs) told him that his name had been favourably mentioned to her at different times by Jesus Christ, St. Paul, and St. Peter. Dr. Clanny quotes this amazing statement in all seriousness.<sup>1</sup>

### THE EPWORTH CASE

I have reserved until the last what is at once the most fully authenticated case in the literature of the subject and the most instructive for those who read with understanding—the disturbances in the Parsonage at Epworth, the birthplace of John Wesley. The main disturbances lasted with intervals for two months, December and January, 1716-17, with occasional outbreaks after that date. The record consists (1) of letters written to Samuel Wesley (John's elder brother) by his mother and his two sisters, Susannah and Emilia. These letters are dated January, February, and March, 1717, that is, within a few weeks of the disturbances. (2) A copy of an account written by Samuel Wesley (John's father). The copy was made by Samuel Wesley, the son, in 1730, from a copy made by John Wesley in 1726. (3) Letters written by Mrs. Wesley and four of her daughters to John Wesley in the summer and autumn of 1726, more than nine years after the occurrences. The evidence comprised under (1), (2), and (3) was first published in 1791 by Priestley. A copy of the letters and diary in the handwriting of Samuel Wesley (John's brother) had been given to Priestley, as he explains, by the Rev. S. Badcock, who had himself received the MSS. from a granddaughter of Samuel Wesley.<sup>2</sup> (4) An account compiled in 1726 by John Wesley from the letters and from conversation with some of the other spectators, and published in the *Arminian Magazine*.

<sup>1</sup> *A Faithful Record of the Miraculous Case of Mary Jobson*, by Dr. W. Reid Clanny, F.R.S. Monkwearmouth, 1841.

<sup>2</sup> *Original Letters by the Rev. John Wesley and his Friends*, by Joseph Priestley, LL.D., F.R.S., 1791.

A. *First-hand Contemporary Accounts.*

We will take first the contemporary letters and diary, and in the first instance we will consider only the statements made by the actual eye- or rather ear-witnesses of the things described. Mrs. Wesley writes on January 12th, 1717, that, beginning from an early date in December, she heard unaccountable knockings, mostly in the garret or the nursery:—

“One night it made such a noise in the room over our heads as if several people were walking; then run up and down stairs, and was so outrageous, that we thought the children would be frightened, so your father and I rose and went down in the dark to light a candle. Just as we came to the bottom of the broad stairs, having hold of each other, on my side there seemed as if somebody had emptied a bag of money at my feet, and on his as if all the bottles under the stairs (which were many) had been dashed in a thousand pieces. We passed through the hall into the kitchen, and got a candle and went to see the children. The next night your father would get Mr. Hoole to lie at our house, and we all sat together till one or two o'clock in the morning, and heard the knocking as usual. Sometimes it would make a noise like the winding up of a jack; at other times, as that night Mr. Hoole was with us, like a carpenter plaining deals; but most commonly it knocked thrice and stopped, and then thrice again, and so many hours together.”

That is practically all that Mrs. Wesley relates of her own personal experience.

There are two letters from Miss Susannah Wesley, dated January 24th and March 27th. In the first she records her own experience as follows:—

“The first night I ever heard it, my sister Nancy and I were set in the dining-room. We heard something rustle on the outside of the doors that opened into the garden, then three loud knocks, immediately after other three, and in half a minute the same number over our heads. We enquired whether anybody had been in the garden, or in the room above us, but there was nobody. Soon after my sister Molly and I were up after all the family were abed, except my sister Nancy, about some business. We heard three bouncing thumps under our feet, which soon made us throw away our work and tumble into bed. Afterwards the tingling of the latch and warming-pan, and so it took its leave that night.

“Soon after the above-mentioned we heard a noise as if a great piece of sounding metal was thrown down on the outside of our chamber. We, lying in the quietest part of the house, heard less than the rest for a pretty while, but the latter end of the night that

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Mr. Hoole sat up on, I lay in the nursery, where it was very violent. I then heard frequent knocks over and under the room where I lay, and at the children's bed head, which was made of boards. It seemed to rap against it very hard and loud, so that the bed shook under them. I heard something walk by my bedside, like a man in a long nightgown. The knocks were so loud that Mr. Hoole came out of their chamber to us. It still continued. My father spoke, but nothing answered. It ended that night with my father's particular knock, very fierce. It is now pretty quiet, only at our repeating the prayers for the King and prince, when it usually begins, especially when my father says: 'Our most gracious Sovereign Lord,' etc. This my father is angry at, and designs to say *three* instead of *two* for the royal family. We all heard the same noise, and at the same time, and as coming from the same place."

There is one letter from Miss Emily, undated, but obviously written at about this time. She describes various noises, more particularly groans, the sound as of "a vast coal" being thrown down in the kitchen; the sound as of a stone being thrown in among the bottles under the "best" stairs; "something like a quick winding up of a jack at the corner of the room by my bed's head"; knocks on the floor and elsewhere, mostly three times running.

The account by old Mr. Wesley was apparently in great part written very shortly after the disturbances. It is not, however, dated; and it is clearly not a day by day record, as in a diary, for he is occasionally uncertain of the exact dates, and the account is mostly written as a continuous narrative. Mr. Wesley was the last to hear the noises, though he had been told what other members of the family had heard. On December 21st he was awakened by nine loud knocks, apparently in the room next to his bedroom. Two or three nights later Mr. and Mrs. Wesley were both aroused by the loud and continuous noises, and searched the house, with the result already described in her narrative.

Thereafter he frequently heard the knocks; they answered him when he rapped with his stick knock for knock; they came on the children's bedstead, in his own study, and in almost every room in the house; they would make a great noise at family prayers at the names of King George and the Prince. He often spoke, but never received any articulate answer, "only once or twice two or three very feeble squeaks, a little louder than the chirping of a bird, but not like the noise of rats, which I have often heard." Often the latch of his bedroom would be lifted when he was in bed. Finally, he records: "I have been thrice pushed by an invisible

power, once against the corner of my desk in the study, a second time against the door of the matted chamber, a third time against the right side of the frame of my study door as I was going in."

#### B. *Second-hand Contemporary Accounts.*

These are all the experiences which are given in the earlier accounts at first hand. We will now turn to the contemporary second-hand evidence. Emily Wesley tells us that her sister Hetty heard coming down the stairs behind her "something like a man, in a loose nightgown trailing after him"; that the knocks would answer Mrs. Wesley if she stamped on the floor and bid them do likewise; that Mrs. Wesley had seen something under a bed "like a badger, only without any head that was discernible"; and that Robin Brown, the man-servant, had seen the same creature twice, the last time in the appearance of a white rabbit.

Miss Susannah adds, under date March 27th, 1717:—

"Last Sunday, to my father's no small amazement, his trencher danced upon the table a pretty while without anybody's stirring the table."

Mr. Wesley has also much to say of the experiences of others: that Mrs. Wesley had seen a thing "most like a badger"; that "one night when the noise was great in the kitchen, and on a deal partition, and the door in the yard, the latch whereof was often lift up, my daughter Emilia went and held it fast on the inside, but it was lifted up, and the door pushed violently against her, though nothing was to be seen on the outside"; and that Robin Brown saw "something come out of the copper-hole like a rabbit, but less."

#### C. *Later First-hand Accounts.*

To turn now to the letters written in 1726. Mrs. Wesley adds to the account which she had given nine years before, that on one occasion the sounds answered her when she knocked; that at another time, "Upon my looking under the bed, something ran out pretty much like a badger"; and gives the following variant of the noises heard on the nocturnal journey round the house, undertaken by herself and Mr. Wesley:—

"Near the foot (of the stairs) a large pot of money seemed to be poured out at my waist, and to run jingling down my nightgown to

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my feet. Presently after we heard the noise as of a vast stone thrown among several dozen of bottles which lay under the stairs, but upon our looking no hurt was done. In the hall the mastiff met us, crying and striving to get between us."

Thus, in the later version the one sound, diversely interpreted, has become two successive sounds, and various decorative details—the jingling down the nightgown, the search among the bottles, the fright of the mastiff—have been added.

So sister Emily, in the later account, adopts and enlarges upon the description already given in her father's account (but wanting in her own earlier letter) of seeing the latch of the kitchen door move, and finding the door itself resist her efforts to shut it. So in sister Susannah's later account, what had been described in her earlier letter as "the tingling of the latch and warming-pan," is now amplified into "the latch of the door then jarred, and seemed to be swiftly moved to and fro."

Sister Molly and sister Nancy (who were not represented in the earlier correspondence) also gave accounts of their experiences to their brother Jack in 1726. From the latter's account, which is written in the third person, apparently as representing John Wesley's notes of a conversation with her, the following extract may be quoted:—

"One night she (Nancy) was sitting on the press bed, playing at cards with four of my sisters, when my sisters Molly, Etty (Hetty?), Patty, and Kezzy were in the room, and Robert Brown. The bed on which my sister Nancy sat was lifted up with her on it. She leaped down and said, 'Surely old Jeffery would not run away with her.' However, they persuaded her to sit down again, which she had scarce done when it was again lifted up several times successively, a considerable height."

This incident is not mentioned by Molly, or indeed by any of the others.

Lastly, we have an account given by Robin Brown, the servant, in 1726, to John Wesley, confirming the story of the white rabbit, already quoted, and adding this new incident:—

"Soon after, being grinding corn in the garrets, and happening to stop a little, the handle of the mill was turned round with great swiftness. He said nothing vexed him but that the mill was empty. If corn had been in it, old Jeffery might have ground his heart out for him."

John Wesley's own account, based apparently exclusively—since he was not himself a witness of any of the phenomena—on the correspondence and on conversations with his family and others in 1726, it is not necessary to consider at length. It introduces, however, one or two sensational details, such as his father's threatening the unseen author of the disturbances with a pistol, which find no place in the earlier narratives.

Now a record of this kind suggests two questions: First, What precisely are the things to be explained? Second, What may the explanation be? Most of the writers who, from the days of Glanvil, have formed from a mass of similar narratives collections of supernatural seemings, have, as already shown, passed at once to the second question, and have found the search for a solution so fascinating that they have never returned to look for an answer to that indispensable preliminary inquiry. Let us in this instance reverse the customary procedure, and ask first, What are the things to be explained in the Wesley case? To begin with, we are not called upon to explain what it was that made the handle of the mill turn round, to the amazement and chagrin of Robin Brown. The real problem is a simpler, if also a less alluring one—to find out, to wit, what made Robin Brown believe, nine years after, that he had seen the handle of the mill move. Again, we have got to ask, *not* what was the badger-like form which Mrs. Wesley saw, but how it came about that Mrs. Wesley's husband and daughter, in 1717, and Mrs. Wesley herself, in 1726, testified that she had seen such a form. Nor need the vagaries of Mr. Wesley's trencher, nor Robin Brown's spectre somewhat like a white rabbit, nor the door which resisted the stoutest efforts of Emilia, perplex us. The problem, in fact, as now simplified is to search for a rational explanation of various noises, suggesting, indeed, an intelligent, but not obviously a supernormal origin, which disturbed the Wesley household for a couple of months in 1716-17.

Old Samuel Wesley had at the time seven daughters living, of whom two, Patty and Keziah, were children, and five were, apparently, sufficiently grown up to write letters. Of these five, two are represented in the earlier correspondence, four in the later. One only, Hetty (Mehetabel), has contributed no account at all. There is no obvious reason for this silence, for Hetty, as we learn from John Wesley's account, was nineteen at the time. She had apparently undertaken to write, but failed to carry out her promise;<sup>1</sup> and,

<sup>1</sup> See Miss Susannah's letter of March 27th, 1717.

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by the testimony of all those concerned, she seems to have enjoyed more of Jeffery's attention than any other member of the household. Consider, for instance, these extracts from the correspondence:—

Mrs. Wesley writes, January 25th and 27th, 1717: "All the family, as well as Robin, were asleep when your father and I went downstairs (on the nocturnal exploration already described), nor did they wake in the nursery when we held the candle close by them, only we observed that Hetty trembled exceedingly in her sleep, as she always did before the noise awaked her. It commonly was nearer her than the rest." Or again, this extract from Miss Emily's letter (1717): "No sooner was I got upstairs, and undressing for bed, but I heard a noise among many bottles that stand under the best stairs, just like the throwing of a great stone among them, which had broken them all to pieces. This made me hasten to bed; but my sister Hetty, who sits always to wait on my father going to bed, was still sitting on the lowest step of the garret stairs."

And again: "It never followed me as it did my sister Hetty. I have been with her when it has knocked under her, and when she has removed has followed, and still kept just under her feet."

Again, in Mrs. Wesley's later account, after describing loud noises which they heard in their bedroom, she writes: "Mr. Wesley leapt up, called Hetty, who alone was up, and searched every room in the house."

In sister Susannah's later account: "Presently began knocking about a yard within the room on the floor. It then came gradually to sister Hetty's bed, who trembled strongly in her sleep. It beat very loud, three strokes at a time, on the bed's head."

And, once more, in John Wesley's version of Mr. Hoole's experience: "When we" (*i.e.* Mr. Wesley and Mr. Hoole) "came into the nursery it was knocking in the next room; when we were there it was knocking in the nursery, and there it continued to knock, though we came in, particularly at the head of the bed (which was of wood), in which Miss Hetty and two of her younger sisters lay."

After the perusal of these extracts, Miss Hetty's inexplicable reticence seems more than ever to be deplored. Perhaps the conjunction of this reticence with Miss Hetty's singular habit of trembling in a sound sleep when loud noises were going on all round her, and with the notable predilection shown by the Poltergeists for her person, is not in itself

sufficient, in the absence of fuller details, to justify the charge of trickery against her; but it hardly seems worth while to inquire whether the noises which perplexed the Wesley family did indeed proceed from a supernatural source.<sup>1</sup>

Those who are familiar with the history of geology will remember that it has frequently happened that naturalists have been puzzled by some stray bone, tooth, or other fragment which seemed for a time not to belong to any known organic type, and to foreshadow an impossible, or at least a paradoxical monster; until later research, by bringing to light a complete skeleton, resolved the difficulties and showed that the anomalous fragment fitted into the general scheme. Now the Wesley narrative is like the complete skeleton of the pterodactyl or the dinosaur. Nearly all other Poltergeist narratives are mere organic fragments. For the most part the evidence is so imperfect that we infer a monstrosity; it is only when, as here, we find the case complete, that our monstrosity proves to be a harmless but instructive Saurian.

But to drop the metaphor, the Wesley case indicates pretty clearly that the main reason for the apparently inexplicable element in these narratives is the defect of the evidence. When we have only second-hand accounts, or accounts written down months or years after the events, as in Glanvil's and Hahn's narratives, or accounts from uneducated or irresponsible persons, as in Mary Jobson's case, we find an abundance of marvellous incidents; when, as here, we have almost contemporary accounts at first hand from sober-minded witnesses, the element of the marvellous is reduced to a minimum. But the peculiarly instructive feature of the Wesley case is that we can see how the witnesses, whilst in the earlier letters they narrate of their own personal experience only comparatively tame and uninteresting episodes, allow their imaginations to embellish the ex-

<sup>1</sup> The Spiritualist writers contend that the Wesley Poltergeist continued to manifest for more than a generation later. The inference is founded on a single passage in a single letter of Emily Wesley's, dated February 16th, 1750, given in Adam Clarke's *Memoirs of the Wesley Family* (London, 1823, p. 195). The passage runs as follows: "Another thing is that wonderful thing called by us Jeffery. You won't laugh at me for being superstitious if I tell you how certainly that something calls on me against any extraordinary new affliction; but so little is known of the invisible world, that I at least am not able to judge whether it be a friendly or an evil spirit."

It will be seen that the writer does not even mention in what form the spirit "called"; and it seems probable that the warnings referred to may have been purely subjective. At any rate, no reason is given for assimilating them to the earlier disturbances.

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periences of other members of the household; and that these same embellishments, *nine years later*, are incorporated in the first-hand accounts as genuine items of personal experience.

I have elsewhere dealt with the results of the investigation by the Society for Psychical Research of some recent British Poltergeist cases.<sup>1</sup>

The conclusions drawn from those investigations may be briefly summarised as follows:—

1. We have positive evidence, by confession or detection, or both, that in some cases tricky little girls or boys have thrown about the crockery and upset the kitchen furniture with their own hands, whilst the onlookers have accepted the portent as a manifestation of supernormal powers.

2. We have, speaking broadly, *no good evidence* for anything having been done which could not have been done by a girl or boy of slightly more than the average cunning and naughtiness.

3. In the few cases where the records are sufficiently full to admit of such a comparison being made, it is found that when second-hand accounts and first-hand accounts of the same incidents are compared, or when accounts written down long afterwards are compared with accounts written down at the time, or accounts given by an excitable and ignorant witness with those of an educated and competent observer, the more marvellous features which appear in the one set of reports are almost or altogether wanting in the other.

4. The author or centre of the disturbances is nearly always a child, generally a young girl; and the outbreak is very often associated with some abnormality or disease on her part. In no case that I have yet seen recorded has any adequate or intelligible motive beyond that of mere childish vanity and love of excitement been assigned for the performance.

The peculiar difficulty of investigating the ordinary Poltergeist is that the phenomena cannot as a rule be produced to order; and that any insistence on conditions or even betrayal of suspicion is liable to stop them altogether. The Poltergeist is a delicate organism, which flourishes only in a favourable environment. Actual exposure of the fraud practised becomes therefore extremely difficult; and as a matter of fact, in many of the recorded instances, as with Major Moor in the Bealings Bells case, those who attest the

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings S. P. R.*, vol. xii. pp. 45-115. *Studies in Psychical Research*, chap. v.

phenomena seem to have made up their minds from the outset that they were privileged to witness, if not something supernatural, at least something which the known laws of physics would not explain. There are, however, a few recorded cases of "electric" girls, which form a partial exception to this rule, inasmuch as the manifestations recurred in their presence with tolerable regularity, and investigation was therefore within certain limits practicable. Cases of this kind possess a special interest for us, since they furnish an illustration of the development of the Poltergeist performance into the phenomena of the séance-room. The best-known instance is Angelique Cottin, who practised in Paris at the beginning of 1846.

Angelique was a peasant girl of fourteen living in a small village near Mortagne, in Normandy.<sup>1</sup> On the evening of January 15th, 1846, when she was engaged with three other girls in weaving gloves, the frame at which they were working began to jump about. The movement was soon seen to be connected with Angelique, though apparently there was no conscious agency on her part, nor any visible connection between her and the object moved. The mere touch of her garments, or even the approach of her hand, seemed to be sufficient to move heavy pieces of furniture, or to throw scissors or light articles across the room. The matter was investigated by the curé, to whom the girl was taken in the first instance under suspicion of witchcraft, and by various local celebrities. Finally, her parents, willing to profit by the curiosity excited by these mysterious movements, brought the child to Paris. There Dr. Tanchou, happening in to his bookseller's one morning, heard of the prodigy, and straightway investigated. His observations are summarised as follows: Chairs and sofas held down by one or more men, exerting all their strength, were violently forced away when Angelique sat down on them; a heavy table was moved from its place by the mere contact of her petticoats; a small piece of paper would at her approach be blown away or made to rotate upon a pin thrust through it; balls of pith or of feathers hung upon a silken thread would be alternately attracted or repelled by the force emanating from her body; she could distinguish by the touch between the poles of a magnet, the north pole giving her a shock, whilst the south pole exercised no effect. It was reported further that a

<sup>1</sup> The account which follows of Angelique Cottin is taken from a contemporary pamphlet, *Enquête sur l'authenticité des phénomènes électriques d'Angelique Cottin*, par le Dr. Tanchou. Paris, 1846.

magnetic needle would be violently agitated in her presence. Dr. Tanchou sometimes noticed a cold wind, like a breeze upon his hands, during the progress of the phenomena.

All this Tanchou reported to Arago, who himself took the girl to his observatory, and there witnessed violent movements of a chair held by two of his colleagues. Arago reported to the Academy of Sciences, which straightway nominated a Commission of six, amongst whom were Arago himself, Becquerel, and Isidore Geoffroy St. Hilaire, to investigate and report further. Three weeks later, at the sitting of the 9th March, 1846, the Commission reported. They found that the magnetic needle experienced no disturbance in the girl's presence, and that the girl herself was not able to distinguish between the north and south poles of the magnet; the only phenomena which the Commission had observed were the sudden and violent movements of a chair on which the girl was sitting. They were not satisfied, however, that these movements were not due to muscular force; but, after they had expressed their doubts on the point, the girl's manager reported that the power had temporarily waned: and no further opportunity had since been offered for investigation. Thus far the Commission.

Tanchou, Hébert de Garnay, and other persons remained convinced that the phenomena testified to the operation of some new force, probably electrical in its nature. But no evidence is offered for this conclusion that will bear examination. And even in the naïvely sympathetic reports from himself and his friends that Tanchou prints there are many observations which are singularly suggestive of fraud. It was constantly observed, for instance, that the contact of the girl's garments, particularly the lower extremity of her petticoats, was necessary to the production of the phenomena;<sup>1</sup> and several observers noticed, in connection with the throwing about of chairs and other objects, that there was a double movement on the part of the girl, a movement first in the direction of the object thrown, and afterwards away from it, the first movement being so rapid that it generally escaped detection.<sup>2</sup>

The contact of the lower edge of the petticoats with the object moved recalls the similar proceeding reported of the Italian medium, Eusapia Paladino;<sup>3</sup> whilst the violent movement of a chair in opposition to the efforts of the men who tried to hold it down is curiously like the feats of skill and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Pages 3, 21, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See below, Book IV. chap. i.

strength performed in recent years by a Mrs. Abbott, who styled herself the "Little Georgia Magnet."<sup>1</sup>

We read that a few years earlier, in 1839, two "electric" girls from Smyrna, whose phenomena seem to have closely resembled those of Angelique Cottin, had landed at Marseilles with the intention of giving public performances, but found that the atmosphere of France was too humid to admit of the display of their powers.<sup>2</sup> There are accounts of other "electric" girls in the early literature of American Spiritualism.

<sup>1</sup> See a report on her performances by Professor Oliver Lodge (*Journal S. P. R.*, vol. v. pp. 168, 169). Mrs. Abbott's performances, though Professor Lodge shows that they could all be explained by the deft exercise of the muscles, combined with some knowledge of human nature, seem for a time to have completely baffled the Press and the public.

<sup>2</sup> From the account given in the *Boston Weekly Magazine*, December 28th, 1839, quoted by Rogers, *Philosophy of Mysterious Agents*, p. 100.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SYMPATHETIC SYSTEM

THE men who, because of the theory of physical effluence which informed all the speculations of the Animal Magnetisers, rejected the genuine phenomena of the induced trance, were, no doubt, justified in their suspicions of the theory. For, in fact, not only did Mesmer borrow his theories ready-made from earlier mystics, but even the name "magnetic" was in common use in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to denote the sympathetic system of medicine which was founded on those mystical doctrines. Paracelsus is commonly reputed to be the founder of this magnetic philosophy. He did, indeed, employ the actual magnet in medicine, recommending its use, inasmuch as it attracted martial humours, in fluxes, inflammatory diseases, hysteria, and epilepsy. But with Paracelsus the "magnet" was commonly spoken of in a metaphorical sense, and with his later disciples its actual use in therapeutics seems to have been almost entirely discontinued. Maxwell, in his treatise *De Medicina Magnetica*, hardly mentions the magnet at all; and Fludd uses it simply as illustrating by its behaviour the interaction of living bodies in the sympathetic system. In brief, the mystics of this period regarded the magnet less as possessing a special virtue in itself than as presenting in miniature a picture of the forces which governed the universe. The action of the magnet at a distance was ascribed to a force or fluid—for its exact nature is usually left undefined—radiating from its substance; and a like force is inferred to radiate from the stars, from the human body, and from all substances in the universe: each body thus reciprocally affecting and being affected by all the rest. Moreover, these rays were not lifeless or fortuitous, but were guided in their incidence and their operations by the indwelling spirit of the body from which they proceeded—a spirit of which the stream of light or other palpable rays formed merely

the gross vehicle. Thus Fludd writes: "The Etheriall Sperm, or Astrallicall influences, are of a far subtiler condition than is the vehicle of visible light. . . . It is not the starry light which penetrateth so deeply, or operateth so universally, but the Eternal Centrall Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Again, the duality of the forces resident in the magnet was interpreted as typifying the dual or reciprocal action which, manifesting itself as flux and reflux, light and darkness, heat and cold, masculine and feminine, systole and diastole, centrifugal and centripetal force, formed the rhythm of the material universe.

Further, the man himself was understood to be a microcosm, or miniature reflection of the whole complex world; as Fludd puts it, "Man containeth in himself no otherwise his heavens, circles, poles, and stars, than the great world doth."<sup>2</sup> It followed, therefore, that man comprised in his body the virtues of a magnet; nay, that his body, like this planet, was one large magnet, though philosophers differed as to the exact disposition of the corporeal poles. Moreover, any substance, especially any living thing, to which was imparted of the body of the living man, or even any of his waste products, such as sweat and the clippings of the nails or hair, became indued with the like magnetic properties.<sup>3</sup> And from the living tissues of the man, or from such waste products, could be compounded a magnet of wondrous remedial virtue. It is this magnet—the *magnes microsmi*—which Paracelsus and his successors commonly understood by the words "magnet" and "magnetical."

It is, then, on these ideas—the radiation from all things, but especially the stars, magnets, and human bodies, of a force which would act on all things else, and which was in each case directed by the indwelling spirit, together with the conception of a perpetual contest between reciprocal and opposing forces—that the mysticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mainly depends. Again, upon these ideas, combined with the Paracelsian doctrine of Signatures, and the proposition, itself a corollary from the doctrine of the

<sup>1</sup> *Mosaical Philosophy* (London, 1659), p. 221. Cf. Maxwell, *De Medicina Magnetica* (Frankfort, 1679), p. 3. "Ab omni corpore radii corporales fluunt, in quibus anima sua praesentia operatur, hisque energiam et potentiam operandi largitur." And again, Aphorism xvii., "Stellae vitalem spiritum corpori disposito ligant per lucem et calorem, eidemque iisdem mediis infundunt." And again, Alkindus, quoted by Fludd, "Mundus elementarius est exemplum Mundi Syderei . . . manifestum est quod omnis res hujus mundi radios faciat suo more ad instar Syderum."<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>3</sup> Quodlibet corpus, cui mumia viva in alio homine propinatur, illico fit magnes (Paracelsus, quoted by Fludd, *op. cit.*).

*magnes microcosmi*, that a dissevered portion of a body retains something of the virtue of the body from which it was taken, and can act magnetically upon it, the theory of sympathetic medicine was based; a theory familiar probably to most readers through the medium of Sir Kenelm Digby and his weapon-salve. The practice of anointing the weapon instead of the wound was in fact a logical deduction from the general theory. As Fludd puts it, if I may venture to paraphrase his statement of the doctrine, it would be useless to attempt to heal the wound so long as a portion of the vital spirits, remaining in disastrous union with the weapon which wrought the mischief, should by its antipathetic influence react upon its fellow-spirits in the body of the patient. But if we act upon that portion of the vital spirits which still adheres to the weapon, which we can most conveniently do by applying an appropriate ointment, then "the Oyntment so animated by those spirits" (*i.e.* the spirits on the weapon) "will become forthwith magneticall, and apply with a magneticall aspect and regard unto those beamy Spirits which stream forth invisibly from the wound," and the patient shall be ensured a speedy recovery.<sup>1</sup>

It was a necessary consequence of this doctrine that the physician might affect his patient, or generally that one man might affect another, if the requisite conditions were fulfilled, "at any reasonable but unlimited and unknown distance."

<sup>1</sup> *Mosaicall Philosophy*, p. 262. The entire passage, since it presents a succinct, if not altogether perspicuous, statement of the theory, seems worth quoting:— "If, after the wound is made, a portion of the wound's external blood, with his inward spirits, or the internal spirits onely, that have penetrated into the weapon, or any other thing which have searched the depth of the wound, be conveyed from the wound at any reasonable but unlimited and unknown distance, unto an Oyntment, whose property is Balsamick, and agreeing specifically with the nature of the creature so wounded, the Oyntment so animated by those spirits will become forthwith magneticall, and apply with a magneticall aspect and regard unto those beamy Spirits which stream forth invisibly from the wound, being directed thereto by the Spirituall bloody spirits in the weapon or other thing which hath received or included them: and the lively and southern beams, streaming and flowing from the wound, will with the northern attraction of the Oyntment, so magnetically animated, concur and unite themselves with the northern and congealed, or fixt, bloody spirits contained in the oyntment, and stir them to act southerly, that is, from the center to the circumference; so that by this reciprocall action, union or continuity, a lively southern beam will act and revive the chill, fixt or northern beams which do animate the oyntment with a magneticall vertue, and quickened spirits of the oyntment, animated by the spirits of them both, and directed by the spirits which were first transplanted into it, doth impart by the said union or continuity his balsamick and sanative vertue unto the spirits in the wound, being first magnetically attracted, and they afterwards by an unseparable harmony, transfer it back into the wound. And this is the reason of that Sympatheticall or anti-patheticall reference and respect, which is by experience observed to be between the Oyntment and the wound."

Thus Paracelsus: "By the magic power of the will a person on this side of the ocean may make a person on the other side hear what is said on this side . . . the ethereal body of a man may know what another man thinks at a distance of 100 miles or more."<sup>1</sup> Fludd expresses the same idea more generally: "How, by relation of naturall things unto one another, they do, after a corporall contact or touch is made between them, operate wonderfully, and that by a Magnetical concert and Spirituall continuity . . . by a mutuall operation at an unknown distance."<sup>2</sup> And Maxwell definitely applies the principle to the relation between physician and patient: "Qui spiritum vitalem particularem efficere novit, corpus, cujus spiritus est, curare potest ad quamcunque distantiam, imploratâ spiritus universalis ope."<sup>3</sup>

The reader who will compare these ideas with Mesmer's own statement of his theory<sup>4</sup> will see that the later mystic contributed little of his own to the philosophy which he borrowed. His peculiar service consists in the fact that, whilst exploiting the mystical doctrines for his own private advantage, he hit upon a practical application of them which has already proved of singular interest to psychology and of some value to therapeutics, and whose ultimate developments we are yet unable to foresee.

The writers whose views we have briefly considered, widely though their methods and results differ superficially from those of modern science, were still animated by something of the scientific spirit. They essayed to relate phenomena to one another by comparison, observation, and analysis, and to subsume them under universal laws. The main difference would seem to be that the mystics, with an impatience, and even contempt, for the mere brute fact, which was part of the disastrous inheritance from earlier centuries, built up their magnificent generalisations on the basis of a few bare hints from the external world. They lacked both the inclination and the means to wait for the slowly maturing results of experimental investigation. They did, indeed, it may be said, interrogate Nature after their own fashion; like jesting Pilate, they asked, "What is truth?" and, anticipating the slow accents of the reluctant Sphinx, took the echo of their

<sup>1</sup> *Philosoph., Sag. i. cap. 60*, quoted by Hartmann, *Life of Theophrastus Bombastes*, p. 296. <sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 252. <sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, aphorism 69.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted below, at the beginning of chapter iv. A detailed comparison of Mesmer's ideas with those of earlier mystics, including, besides those mentioned in the text, Van Helmont, Kircher, Borel, and others, is given in Thourret's *Recherches et doutes sur le Magnétisme Animal*, Paris, 1784. See also Bertrand, *Du Magnétisme Animal en France* (Paris, 1826), pp. 13-18.

own voices for the answer. The mystical philosophy, in fact, was an attempt at a short cut to knowledge, a premature synthesis of the universe. But it was, nevertheless, a synthesis on rationalist lines. The factors in the explanation offered were not spiritual beings acting by arbitrary will, but effluences radiating under ascertainable laws. It was this rationalist view, which culminated in the eighteenth century, and, naturally enough, in France, which Mesmer and his immediate followers adopted; and even at the present day Paris, faithful to her old tradition, remains the headquarters of the rationalist school of Mysticism. Baraduc, de Rochas, Luys, Gibier, and others stand as the supporters of fluids as against spirits.<sup>1</sup>

The rivalry between the two schools of interpretation, it need hardly be said, dates from a very early period in the history of Mysticism. At the very time when Fludd and Maxwell were expounding the magnetical system of medicine, marvellous cures were being effected throughout the country by methods which curiously foreshadowed those employed in our own times by the hypnotic treatment. But the seventeenth-century healer ascribed his success to a divine gift, just as some of Mesmer's contemporaries saw in the "magnetic" crisis signs of spiritual intervention.

Valentine Greatrakes, the son of an Irish Protestant gentleman of Affane, co. Waterford, was born in 1628. He served for some six years as a lieutenant in the army in Ireland. On his retirement in 1656 he lived on his own estate, was made a Justice of the Peace, and acted for some time as Registrar of Transplantation. In 1662 he had "an Impulse or strong Persuasion" in his own mind that on him was bestowed the gift of curing the King's Evil. Straightway many came to him from the country round, and were cured by the laying on of his hands. Three years later there came a similar Impulse, foreshadowing the gift of curing the ague, a suggestion which the next day was successfully put to the proof. "Within some small time after this," he continues, "God was pleased by the same or the like Impulse to discover unto me, That he had given me the gift of healing." Thereafter Greatrakes laid his hands on all that sought his aid. He was so besieged by sufferers that he had to set aside three days a week whereon, from six in the morning to six in the evening, he received all who came to him. The matter came to the ears of the Bishop of the Diocese, who forbade

<sup>1</sup> Since this sentence was written two of those named, Luys and Gibier, have passed away.

Greatrakes to exercise his powers. Greatrakes answered that he could not obey a command to cease from works of charity, and so continued.

In January, 1666, at the request of Lord Orrery, he came to England, and though he failed entirely to cure the Countess Conway, on whose behalf he had been summoned, he continued to exercise his gift with surprising, though not uniform, success, first in the provinces, and later in London. He was successful in curing or sensibly alleviating such diverse maladies as the King's Evil, palsy, dropsy, epilepsy, ulcers, the stone, wounds and bruises, lameness, deafness, partial blindness, "Pthysick," besides innumerable cases of vaguely described pains and weakness. His cures are attested by a considerable number of grateful patients and other credible witnesses, doctors, divines, and persons of quality, including Robert Boyle, Sir William Smith, Dean (afterwards Bishop) Rust, Richard Cudworth, and Andrew Marvell.

His method of operating was to stroke with his hand the part affected, by which means the pain was gradually dislodged from the diseased part, and ultimately driven to the extremities—fingers, toes, or even nose or tongue—and so out of the body. Sometimes the pain divided. On one occasion part thereof fell into the great toe of the patient's left foot, and the other part into the little toe of the right foot, and so left the patient. It was noted that the fingers or toes during the process were commonly rendered insensible to pain inflicted from the outside, as by pinching or pricking.

A contemporary medical witness gives the following explanation of this method of expelling disease:—

"These considerations made me think that God had been pleased to bestow upon Mr. Greatricks such a Complexion and Temperament, that his Touch or Stroking should instantly mature Diseases, or render them Turgent; whereupon the part touched being strengthened, and the blood and spirits Invigorated, a Heterogeneous Ferment or paine (which if not occasioned by some evident and externall cause, is caused by a Heterogeneous Ferment) is expelled from the corroborated place to some other more Weake; that being corroborated, it is driven upon another, and so on, till it be quite ejected."<sup>1</sup>

Greatrakes himself, whose entire honesty in the matter can hardly be doubted—he practised without fee or reward of any

<sup>1</sup> *The Miraculous Conformist*, p. 17.

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kind, and at enormous expenditure of time and energy—was clearly of opinion that his power of healing was not a natural endowment, but “an extraordinary gift of God.” He even records an experiment made on one occasion which went to show that the power did not consist in any physical effluence from himself. And many of the diseases which he cured he conceived to be caused by the possession of devils, who were driven out under his hands.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Brief Account of Mr. Valentine Greatraks, and divers of the Strange Cures by him lately Performed; written by himself in a Letter addressed to the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq., etc., etc.* (London, 1666.) See also *The Miraculous Conformerist; or an account of Severall Marvailous Cures performed by Mr. Valentine Greatarick*, by Henry Stubbe, Physician at Stratford upon Avon (Oxford, 1666), p. 34. “Mr. Greataricks would often affirm that, in his opinion, it was some Evill Spirit gotten into the Body of the Child.”

## CHAPTER IV

### MESMER AND HIS DISCIPLES

**M**ESMERISM, like chemistry, is a French science. For even though the birthplace of Mesmer himself—which, indeed, as in the case of greater men, is to some extent uncertain—was not in France, yet France was the country of his adoption; it was by Frenchmen that his doctrines were first welcomed, and it is on French soil, under the various names of Animal Magnetism, Mesmerism, Hypnotism, Hysteria, or Suggestion, from the days of Bergasse and Puységur to those of Charcot and Bernheim, that they have borne most abundant fruit.

Franz Antoine Mesmer was born in or about 1734. He studied for the medical profession, and took his doctor's degree at Vienna in 1766, choosing as the subject of his inaugural thesis *De planetarum influxu*, or, as he himself translated it later, "De l'influence des Planettes sur le corps humain." It is from the publication of this essay that Mesmer himself dates the discovery of Animal Magnetism.<sup>1</sup> But his ideas on the nature and extent of this influence, as already said, seem to have contained little that was original, being founded on the writings of various older mystics.<sup>2</sup> The best exposition of his views is contained in his own statement drawn up some years later in a series of propositions, of which a few may be here quoted:—<sup>3</sup>

1. Il existe une influence mutuelle entre les corps célestes, la terre et les corps animés.

2. Un fluide universellement répandu et continué de manière à ne souffrir aucun vuide, dont la subtilité ne permet aucune comparaison, et qui, de sa nature, est susceptible de recevoir, propager

<sup>1</sup> *Précis historique de faits relatifs du Magnétisme Animal*, p. 1. Paris, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> See preceding chapter.

<sup>3</sup> In 1779; *Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme*, p. 83.

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et communiquer toutes les impressions du mouvement, est le moyen de cette influence.

3. Cette action réciproque est soumise à des loix mécaniques, inconnues jusqu'a présent.

4. Il résulte de cette action, des effets alternatifs qui peuvent être considérés comme un flux et reflux.

6. C'est par cette opération (la plus universelle de celles que la nature nous offre) que les relations d'activité s'exercent entre les corps célestes, la terre et ses parties constitutives.

9. Il se manifeste particulièrement dans le corps humain, des propriétés analogues à celles de l'aimant ; on y distingue des pôles également divers et opposés qui peuvent être communiqués, changés, détruits et renforcés ; le phénomène même de l'inclinaison y est observé.

10. La propriété du corps animal qui rend susceptible de l'influence des corps célestes et de l'action réciproque de ceux qui l'environnent, manifestée par son analogie avec l'aimant, m'a déterminé à la nommer *Magnétisme Animal*.

14. Son action a lieu à une distance éloignée, sans le secours d'aucun corps intermédiaire.

15. Elle est augmentée et réfléchie par les glaces comme la lumière.

16. Elle est communiquée, propagée, et augmentée par le son.

He professes to have spent many years in testing and verifying his ideas by experiment and observation on all kinds of diseases ; but it is not until 1773 that he actually gives details of any cures effected by the applications of his methods. The first patient was a young woman afflicted with periodical attacks, which, from the description given, seem to have been of an epileptic nature. He applied magnets to the limbs of the sufferer, and a rapid cure was effected. Publicity was given to this case by the Jesuit, Hell, who had, it appears, furnished the magnetic plates used by Mesmer, and who claimed that the cure was due to the application of principles discovered by him. There ensued a bitter controversy between the two men. The next few years seem to have been spent by Mesmer in vindicating his own prior claim to the discovery, in the practice of the therapeutic virtues of Animal Magnetism, and in knocking at the doors of the various learned societies of Europe. No door was opened to him ; and finding little honour and less profit in his own country, he came in 1778 to Paris, and there took up his abode. From the learned societies of Paris he met with as little recognition as from those of Vienna, Berlin, and London. One of his first converts, however, was M. D'Esion, medical adviser to the Count d'Artois. In

September, 1780, D'Esion summoned a general meeting of the Faculty of Medicine to lay before it a statement of Mesmer's doctrines. He began by reciting the propositions from which extracts are given above, and then made on Mesmer's behalf a formal proposal that the Faculty should investigate the subject by choosing twenty-four patients, of whom twelve should be treated by Animal Magnetism, and the remainder by the orthodox methods, and should then compare the results.<sup>1</sup> The reply of the Faculty was to reject the proposal and to warn D'Esion that his name would be struck off the rolls at the end of the year if he had not in the interval formally recanted his heretical beliefs.

But if Mesmer found little favour with the wise and prudent, he met with a reception more cordial and much more profitable from the general public. So much attention did his cures—or the rumour of them—excite, especially, as it would seem, in the fashionable world, that in March, 1781, the Minister de Maurepas was commissioned by the King to offer him a pension of 20,000 livres, and a further sum of 10,000 livres annually to provide a suitable house, on condition that he would establish a school and communicate the secret of his treatment. Mesmer rejected the terms, ostensibly because he held it beneath his own dignity and the dignity of the great truth which he proclaimed to be a party to such a bargain. But it is not difficult to infer that if the terms, sufficiently liberal as they seem to us, had been commensurate with his appetite, he would have been willing to take the cash and let the credit go. For, two years later, in 1783, a subscription was set on foot to which each would-be pupil contributed 100 louis (2,400 livres), and a sum of no less than 340,000 livres (nearly £14,000) was handed over to Mesmer. In return he gave a course of lectures on his system. Before admission to these lectures he had required each pupil to sign an undertaking that he would not practise on his own account, nor impart the secret to others without Mesmer's permission. As the price of this permission he subsequently proposed that they should establish centres of magnetic treatment in every town of importance in France, and should hand over to him half of all the fees that they received. His pupils, many of them men of position, who had no desire to practise for money, formed themselves into a *Société de l'Harmonie*, and vindicated their claim to the title by repudiating, after an unseemly squabble, their part of the contract.

<sup>1</sup> *Précis historique*, etc., p. 113.

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In the following year the Government took a further step and charged two learned bodies, the *Faculté de Médecine* and the *Société royale de Médecine*, with the task of examining into Animal Magnetism. The Commissioners chosen from the *Faculté* asked the King to add to their number some members of the Academy of Sciences, and five delegates from that body, including Benjamin Franklin, Bailly, and Lavoisier, were accordingly directed to co-operate with the four members of the *Faculté*. This Commission was appointed on the 12th of March; on the 11th of August the same year they presented a Report, signed by all nine Commissioners. They had decided, for reasons which are not stated in the report, to make their observations on the magnetic treatment as practised, not by Mesmer himself, but by his friend and disciple D'Eslon. The Report commences with a description of the methods employed to set the hypothetical fluid in motion, methods which D'Eslon had borrowed without substantial change from Mesmer. In the middle of a large room was placed a circular tub, called the *baquet*, of considerable dimensions. The report does not mention the internal arrangement of the *baquet*, but we learn from Puységur (whose book, *Du Magnétisme Animal*, has as a frontispiece to its second edition a picture of a *baquet*, of the size of a large bath, with patients sitting round it) that it was filled with bottles "arrangées entr'elles d'une manière particulière," and covered with water up to a certain height.<sup>1</sup> In the lid of the *baquet* were several holes, through each of which passed an iron rod connecting with the interior, and bent in such a way that the patients, who sat round in rows, could apply the point of the rod to any part of their persons. The patients were tied together by a cord which passed round the circle, and sometimes another chain was formed by holding hands. A pianoforte in the corner of the room played various airs during the performance; and sometimes there was singing. The operator carried an iron rod, ten or twelve inches long.

The Report then describes the scenes which ensued as the charm worked: there were violent movements, profuse sweating, spitting, often of blood, vomiting, etc., piercing cries, hiccoughs, immoderate laughter, and extraordinary and long-continued attacks of convulsions. This was called the *crisis*,

<sup>1</sup> Puységur, *Mémoires pour servir*, vol. i. p. 9. A fuller description of the *baquet* is given by another writer of this time, an Englishman named Bell, in his book on the *Principles of Animal Electricity and Magnetism* (London, 1792). See below, chap. viii.

and was supposed to be beneficial in accelerating and guiding the course of the disease to a successful issue. The crisis was frequently succeeded by the collapse of the patient from sheer exhaustion into a lethargic condition.

The Commissioners conceived that there would be little profit in attempting to study the curative effects of the treatment, because of the extreme difficulty and uncertainty which always attend the purely empirical method in medicine, so much so that even if cures could be demonstrated they would prove little, since they might be attributed with equal plausibility to Nature or to the imagination of the patient. Moreover, to press these questions too closely might annoy the distinguished sufferers who thronged M. D'Esion's *clinique*. They resolved, therefore, to confine themselves to the search for evidence of the new physical force which was claimed as the agent for the effects observed. They found, of course, little difficulty in demonstrating that no such evidence was forthcoming; and that, as a matter of fact, those effects could be produced by the aid of the imagination alone. A single illustration must suffice of their method of experiment. The veteran Franklin—he was then in his seventy-eighth year—was unable to attend the meetings in Paris. But D'Esion came down to his house at Passy, bringing with him a suitable subject. A tree was "magnetised"; the subject, a boy of twelve years, was brought into the garden with his eyes blindfolded. He was then introduced successively to four trees, which stood at varying distances from the magnetised tree; the characteristic phenomena of the crisis developed themselves with unusual rapidity, and he collapsed in a swoon at the fourth, without having approached within twenty-four feet of the tree actually magnetised.

The Commissioners concluded that the magnetic fluid could not be perceived by any of the senses, and that its existence could not be inferred from any effects observed either in themselves or in any of the patients examined. And they pointed out, further, that the methods employed by D'Esion and Mesmer in their treatment were liable to ~~cause serious mischief~~ to the patients themselves and, by imitation, to others. Further, in a confidential report to the Minister they emphasised the dangerous consequences which might result from the spread of these practices, and recommended their legal suppression.

The Report signed five days later by four members of the *Société royale de Médecine* was to the same effect, but pre-

sented with less literary grace. One member, however, of this second Commission, submitted a Minority Report.<sup>1</sup> M. de Jussieu began by suggesting that the Commission had perhaps acquiesced in too narrow an interpretation of their mandate. "Sans remonter à une théorie peut-être trop sublime," it appeared to him that it was within the scope of that mandate at least to verify the physiological facts alleged, to endeavour to ascertain their proximate causes, and the possible utility of the medical treatment which they had witnessed. And to be able to pronounce decisive judgment on these points, it was essential that the mere observation of a crowd of patients passing through the wild convulsions of the magnetic crisis should be supplemented by experiments and observations on individual cases, with a view of disentangling the complicated relations of cause and effect. This M. de Jussieu, so far as circumstances would permit, had endeavoured to do. And one of the observations which he records is of considerable interest. He had seen on several occasions a young man pass through the crisis, then become silent, and walk up and down the hall, touching and magnetising the other patients. When he returned to his normal state he remembered nothing of what had passed, and no longer knew how to magnetise.<sup>2</sup> In this incidental observation—not the less valuable because the observer altogether failed to realise its significance—we have the first indication of the somnambulant trance, the master fact alike in the Animal Magnetism of the first half of last century and in the Hypnotism of to-day.

But the experiences which most interested M. de Jussieu were those which seemed to indicate action at a distance, independently of the patient's imagination. On several occasions he states that he succeeded in provoking or directing the course of the crisis by merely pointing his finger or an iron rod towards the patients without their knowledge, *i.e.* behind the back; or in the case of a blind patient, towards the epigastrium at a distance of six feet. M. de Jussieu appears to have been a careful and critical observer, and to have been on his guard against obvious sources of error in the experiments; but the conditions under which they were made, generally in the large hall in the midst of a crowd of patients and medical men, were clearly not such as to admit of accurate observation. Such as they were, however, he thinks himself justified in deducing

<sup>1</sup> *Rapport de l'un des Commissaires chargés par le Roi de l'examen du Magnétisme Animal.* Paris, 1784.

<sup>2</sup> *Rapport*, p. 15.

from them the possible existence of a fluid or agent which can exercise a sensible influence on the human body at a distance. This fluid he provisionally identifies with Animal Heat. But the Animal Heat of which he speaks is not the radiant energy with which we are familiar, the result of chemical action, and capable of affecting the mercury in a thermometer. It is the principle of life itself, the special vital modification of the universal energy, which in its material manifestation he identifies with electricity. De Jussieu points out that "Animal Heat" conforms to the same laws as electricity, it constantly seeks equilibrium, it radiates preferably from points (the finger or the *baguette*), it produces a feeling of heat in the recipient and of cold in the giver, it surrounds the body as with an atmosphere; and the existence of this *atmosphère particulière* can be occasionally demonstrated to the senses. But, unlike the material energy, the operations of this vital force are directed and intensified by the human will.

In short, de Jussieu's theory of Animal Heat is almost as far-reaching as Mesmer's theory of a universal magnetic fluid. He does not, indeed, make the planets the pivot of his speculations, but he cannot bring himself to leave them out. The really important modification of the theory which de Jussieu introduces is the presentation of the distinctively human element in the case, which he supposed to depend on the will of the operator, but which modern science, more justly perhaps, attributes to the imagination of the patient. It is probable, indeed, that Mesmer himself believed the human will to be the active agency in directing and concentrating his universal fluid; and that, as expressly stated by Puységur, the secret upon which he put so high a price was precisely this recognition of the part played by the will. But it was by his published pronouncements that he elected to be judged, and in these we find no hint of anything beyond an indifferent mechanical or vital agency. Later magnetists, however, followed de Jussieu, and this theory of a specific organic emanation, controlled and directed by the will of the operator, dominated all speculations on the subject throughout Europe for more than two generations, persisting even after Bertrand had formulated the modern doctrine of Suggestion.

Of the significance, as indicating action at a distance, of the facts observed by de Jussieu we shall have occasion to speak hereafter. It is enough to point out here that on these and similar *seemings* (if I may so translate the exotic

21) \$75<sup>128</sup>  
 15<sup>33</sup>  
 84

57<sup>2</sup>  
 175<sup>5</sup>

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"phenomena") depends not merely the theory of a magnetic or mesmeric fluid, but, in great measure, the whole movement of Modern Spiritualism.

Such were the reports of 1784. It will hardly be thought that the Commissioners failed conspicuously in the discharge of their trust. The spectacle of the hysterical mob of fashionable men and women at the height of the "crisis" round the magnetic tub—*enfer à convulsions*, as someone called it—must have seemed as futile to science as it was repulsive to common sense. It must be remembered, however, that barbarous though the treatment seemed, it was not altogether ill-suited to the medical ideas of the time: even the magnetic crisis might have seemed a merciful alternative to the lancet and the moxa. Indeed, the very violence of the treatment no doubt recommended it to the patients, for the more excessive the remedy the greater seemed its probable efficacy. Puységur, for instance, expressed doubts whether one of his patients was really cured, because he had "not yet experienced the painful crises which, I believe, are necessary to cure so grave a malady."<sup>1</sup>

But whilst it must be admitted that the spectacle offered at first sight little material for scientific investigation—less, probably, than the cures of modern faith-healing—it is still matter for regret that the Commissioners held it no part of their duty to inquire as to the actual curative effects of the treatment. That medical science is not to be judged by results is a dangerous admission for doctors to make. It was liable to, and did in fact provoke, inconvenient retorts.<sup>2</sup> It might have been plausibly urged that, after all, it is the business of the physician to cure, and that if cures were effected—and it is certain that a large section of Parisian Society so believed—it might be profitable to ascertain the cause, even if it should prove to be only the imagination of the sufferer. But these reports of 1784 are remarkable chiefly for what they do not include. None of the more striking and characteristic phenomena of Hypnotism as we know it at the present day appear to have been observed at all. We hear nothing of the varied hallucinations and the muscular feats which any itinerant lecturer can now demonstrate on his subjects: there is no mention of that insensibility to pain, which was to be so bitterly disputed

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires pour servir*, etc., vol. i. p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Bergasse, *Considérations sur le Magnétisme Animal*, p. 21. "Ce qui a fait dire à quelques hommes de mauvaise humeur, que la médecine et l'art de guerir sont donc deux sciences qui n'ont rien de commun entr'elles."

upwards of half a century later, and which has to-day grown to be almost a commonplace. Most singular omission of all, we have but one incidental reference to the condition of induced somnambulism—the eponymous fact of modern Hypnotism. Probably if the Commissioners had observed these things they would have passed them by, as they were passed by in this country more than fifty years afterwards, as being explicable by deliberate deception, and generally as offering no evidence which a responsible inquirer could afford to take into account; but from de Jussieu's careful analysis it seems probable that they were not observed.

The effect of the publication of the reports was what might have been anticipated. Whatever chance the theories of Mesmer might have had of attracting the attention of the scientific world was dissipated. The universal magnetic fluid was definitely classed with the philosopher's stone and the secret of Hermes Trismegistus; and the medical men of the day no doubt stifled whatever unprofessional inclination some of them may have felt to meddle with the new treatment. But the sufferers, aristocratic and other, who had been cured, and the great multitude who believed themselves to have been cured, naturally continued the cult of the *baquet* and the bent iron rods.

The close of the year 1784 saw the publication of a number of replies to the reports by partisans of the new theory, amongst whom D'Eslon himself, another doctor, Bonnefoy, and Bergasse are the most notable. In the course of the same year de Puységur began his cures at Busancy, and circulated a privately printed account of his experiences. M. Jumelin, as we learn from Bailly's report, was also practising magnetism at the time in Paris, and arriving at the same results by a different method. Bergasse, who collaborates with a marquis and dedicates his book to a marchioness, mentions incidentally some half-dozen persons as having a reputation for the cures which they had performed, amongst them another marquis and three counts; he states also that there were societies for the pursuit and study of Animal Magnetism then established in six French provincial cities; also at Turin, Berne, Malta, and in the French West Indies.<sup>1</sup> Societies of Harmony were indeed springing up in various centres, of which that at Strasbourg, founded in 1785 by de Puységur, attained to considerable repute, and published three volumes of Proceedings, from 1786 to 1789. Books and pamphlets on the subject followed

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 135, 136, etc.

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each other in rapid succession until the last-named year. From that date, until the publication in 1807 of Puységur's *Du Magnétisme Animal* inaugurated a new era, very few books on the subject appeared. France during those years had something else to think about, and the atmosphere was not favourable to Societies of Harmony.<sup>1</sup>

At the moment when the Commissioners were incurious and reluctant spectators of the hysterical antics at D'Esion's *clinique* in Paris, de Puységur, himself a pupil of Mesmer, was obtaining surprising results of quite another kind on his own estate at Busancy, near Soissons. In May, 1784, he writes enthusiastic letters to his brother and to friends at Paris, describing the use which he had made of the wonderful gift of healing which he had derived from Mesmer's teaching. His first patient was the daughter of his bailiff, whom he had cured of toothache. He soon found other patients, and to husband his own powers he magnetised a large tree in his grounds, fastened cords to it, and invited the sufferers to attach themselves. The tree proved a most efficacious *baquet*, and the peasants flocked in from all the country round; on one morning upwards of one hundred and thirty persons availed themselves of its healing virtues. "Every leaf," he writes, "radiates health."

One of his earliest patients was a young peasant of twenty-three, Victor by name, who was confined to his bed with inflammation of the lungs. The invalid, after being magnetised for a quarter of an hour, fell asleep in the operator's arms. In this sleep he began to talk. The somnambulist sleep, as Puységur describes it from his observations on Victor and many other somnambules, is at this time sufficiently familiar. It is important to remark that its most characteristic feature—a feature for which Puységur was apparently not prepared—the complete oblivion on waking of all that had happened in the sleep, seems to have appeared from the outset, as we have already noted in the observations of de Jussieu.

Of other phenomena described by the early magnetists many were grouped under the general name of *rapport*. The magnetic subject could hear no voice but that of the operator,

<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, *Histoire Critique du Magnétisme Animal*, vol. i. pp. 427, 428, explains the discredit into which Animal Magnetism fell during the last decade of the eighteenth and the opening years of the nineteenth century as partly due to the fact that many prominent disciples of Mesmer afterwards became patrons of Cagliostro. This may have no doubt contributed to the result. But there is hardly need to go beyond the cause assigned in the text. Probably no one in France during those years had much leisure for writing of books in any department of thought.

could feel no touch, and obey no influence but his. But his influence would be felt and obeyed when expressed not only by speech or gesture, but even by silent will—and this sometimes when the operator was in another room, with a thick wall intervening. It was this *rapport*, as shown by the unreceptiveness of the subject to all alien impressions, that was regarded by the writers of this date as the surest test of the true magnetic sleep.<sup>1</sup>

Further, the somnambule would diagnose his own maladies with greater skill than his physician, and would prescribe with more confidence and with happier results. And he would thus diagnose and prescribe with equal success not merely for his own ailments, but for those of other patients introduced to him by the magnetiser. He would predict also, with the most minute accuracy, the date of a future epileptic seizure, or other crisis in his malady, and the precise term of the treatment. Tardy de Montravel describes how one of his somnambules walked about the town with her eyes fast closed in the magnetic sleep, as easily as if she was wide awake; she could see, he writes, without eyes, and hear without ears. He relates further how she would tell the nature of an object by placing it to the pit of the stomach.<sup>2</sup>

As to the explanation of these phenomena, the curative effects of magnetism, the crisis itself, the manifestations of silent willing, and of the *rapport* generally, seem to have been attributed by all the animal magnetists of this period to the effluence of a sensible fluid. Some somnambules could see the fluid radiating as a brilliant shaft of light from the person of the operator,<sup>3</sup> from trees, and other living

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Puységur's reply to those who inquired of him how they should recognise the magnetic state: "Rien n'est plus aisé que de s'en apercevoir; il ne doit d'abord avoir d'analogie avec aucun autre que celui qui l'a magnétisé, il ne doit répondre et n'obéir qu'à lui" (*Mémoires pour servir*, vol. i. p. 192). It would seem that observations which were held to indicate a special relation between magnetist and subject were made very early in the practice of Animal Magnetism, though owing to the sudden break, already referred to, in the published records of these early years, information on the point is somewhat scanty. Puységur's book, from which the above extract is taken, though not published until long after, was apparently in great part written shortly after the experiments which it recounts, i.e. before the Revolution. But the question of the exact date of the origin of the belief in *rapport* is not of so much importance as some writers have supposed in its bearing on the reality, or rather non-reality, of the phenomena so explained. In the induced trance the observer always finds what he looks for; and the idea of a reciprocal influence between physician and patient is, as shown in the preceding chapter, at least as old as the Sympathetic System.

<sup>2</sup> *Essai sur la Théorie du Somnambulisme Magnétique* (London, November, 1785), pp. 64, 65.

<sup>3</sup> An occasional device for the frontispiece of books on the subject of animal magnetism is a gentleman in evening dress, with dotted lines proceeding from his eyes and fingers and impinging upon the person of a lady seated in an armchair.

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objects, and would note differences in colour and brightness according to the diverse sources. There was a magnetic effluence from the sun, and yet another, differing in glory, from the earth. Iron and glass would conduct and even augment the magnetic current, but wax or copper dispersed it, and silver reflected it back on the rod. Mesmer had already stated that the fluid was reflected by a mirror, but Tardy bettered this observation. It was not the glass of the mirror, which was already proved to act as a conductor, but the metal backing which operated in the reflection.<sup>1</sup>

So again the fluid could be seen in passing into water and milk. The substance under such treatment would become luminous; and magnetised milk could be retained by a stomach which would at once reject all other nourishment. The tree which Puységur had magnetised retained its virtues long after the operator had left for Strasbourg, and patients continued to resort to it and experience the crisis and the healing influence. Puységur goes further than Tardy de Montravel, and identifies the fluid with the "dephlogisticated air"—then a new discovery—which is given out by plants under the rays of the sun, and finds in it the active principle of vegetable as well as animal life. He even extends its influence to the mineral kingdom, and points to the "revivification" of metals by phosphorus as a probable instance of its action. Puységur's science, no doubt, was a little out of date even then, for in 1784 the new chemical conceptions of Lavoisier had captured Paris, if they had not yet reached Strasbourg and Soissons. But in the matter of animal magnetism Puységur, I think, showed himself the better philosopher of the two. With the facts and "seemings" above described before him, it was not perhaps less reasonable for Puységur to believe in a magnetic fluid than for Priestley to believe in phlogiston. Puységur was not indeed a man of wide learning or conspicuous ability, but he was a good soldier and an honest man, and he faithfully described what he saw. Any board-school child can learn now that both he and Priestley were misled by a false theory; but even Lavoisier might have added to his laurels by studying the one set of phenomena with the same clear vision which he turned upon the other. The generations which succeeded were the poorer for the lost opportunity.

Yet another theory of the physical forces at work in the induced trance was advanced by a medical man who rejected the term "Animal Magnetism" altogether, and whose ob-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

servations incidentally furnish perhaps the best evidence to be found in the literature of the period for some new mode of transmission of ideas and sensations. J. H. Désiré Pététin, a doctor at Lyons, was perpetual president of the medical society of that city, and had held several public appointments from the Government. He published in 1808 *Électricité Animale*, describing observations which he had made for many years past on several cases of spontaneous catalepsy. The disease is, of course, sufficiently rare, and it is, as Bertrand subsequently pointed out, a little remarkable that a single provincial practitioner should have come across no less than eight cases in one district. But the phenomena which Pététin's subjects presented were more remarkable still. In the cataleptic state the patient generally remains motionless, and gives often hardly any sign of life at all, pulse and respiration being alike almost imperceptible. Pététin found that his patients, though they would show no signs of intelligence if questions were directed in the usual way to their ears, would answer either by voice or gesture if the speaker addressed himself to the pit of the stomach, the tips of the fingers, or sometimes even the toes. Not only so, but they would appear to taste, smell, and even see with those parts of the body, even when strict precautions were taken to exclude the intervention of the normal organs of sense. Pététin gives details of several occasions on which, due precautions being taken, his patients were able to describe medals, letters, playing cards, and other small objects placed under the bedclothes on the epigastric region, or even hidden in the pockets of the interlocutor.<sup>1</sup> It is not necessary to consider in detail the explanation which M. Pététin offers of these curious manifestations. It is again a purely physical one, and rests on a theory of Animal Electricity which, from our standpoint, does not differ essentially from the hypothesis of Animal Magnetism. His observations afforded him abundant proof that the phenomena depended on electrical action. Thus he found that the most convenient way to speak to the patient was for the interlocutor to place one hand on the stomach (duly covered with clothes) and to address his remarks to the finger-tips of his free hand. The human body being of course a conductor, the patient would then hear and reply. The same results would follow if the operator stood at the remote end of a chain of persons holding each other's hands, of whom the last only touched

<sup>1</sup> Some of the experiments are quoted in *Phantasms of the Living*, vol. ii. pp. 345-7.

the patient. But if a stick of wax were placed in the circuit, communication at once ceased. Again, the patient would not hear music played close to her by any person not actually touching her. But if the performer were connected with the patient by a moistened thread, she would hear music even in a distant part of the house, and would respond to questions addressed to the far end of the thread.

The experiments in "seeing" with the pit of the stomach on one occasion, Pététin tells us, so amazed and affrighted the spectators that calm was not restored until, by showing that objects wrapped up in wax or silk could not be "seen," he satisfied them that the phenomena had a natural cause, and were not due to the intervention of demons.

The spectators of these marvels were not always so easily satisfied. A *religieuse*, the aunt of another patient, could not understand why the physician should place the fingers of one hand on the patient's stomach and mutter to the fingers of his other hand. She accused him of sorcery; and when, to clear up the matter, he placed her rosary, unseen by the patient, where his fingers had been, and the patient described it correctly, the poor lady's suspicions became so acute that she could not be content until by direct inquiry—addressed, of course, to the same region of her niece's person—she had ascertained that the sufferer still retained her hold on the Christian verities.

Another figure of importance in the early history of Animal Magnetism is J. P. F. Deleuze, who since 1795 had held the post of Assistant Naturalist at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, and in 1828 was appointed Librarian of the Museum of Natural History. He had first witnessed the magnetic treatment in 1785 at a friend's house. Thereafter he continued to practise and observe as opportunity offered; but his first published work on the subject, his *Histoire Critique du Magnétisme Animal*, did not appear until 1813. Deleuze, though his scientific training and native common sense preserved him from the extravagances into which some of the earlier followers of Mesmer had fallen, was still firmly convinced of the magnetic theory. We miss, indeed, the fine cosmic flavour which distinguished the writings of Mesmer himself, and some of his immediate disciples. For him Animal Magnetism is no longer "un rapprochement de deux sciences connues, l'Astronomie et la Médecine."<sup>1</sup> But he is convinced of the existence of the magnetic fluid, on the word of all the somnambules whom he had consulted. Many

<sup>1</sup> Mesmer, *Précis historique*, etc., 1781, p. 2.

had seen the fluid raying from the operator's fingers; some had smelt it, or perceived its effects in their own persons. Moreover, Deleuze had satisfied himself, by direct experiment, of the existence and physical properties of the fluid. It is not, he points out, apparently identical with the electric fluid, though both are probably modifications of a universal medium. It has many analogies with nerve-force. It forms an atmosphere round each of us, which does not make its presence continually felt, only because it is necessary, for any sensible effect to be produced, that it should be concentrated and directed by the will. How it is that the will directs the fluid, we know as little as how our will moves our own organism. *C'est un fait primitif*: we cannot go behind it.

It is in accordance with this conception of Animal Magnetism, as a definite physical agent, that Deleuze attributes painful effects to it in some diseases. Generally speaking, it has a tonic action, and may be usefully employed when stimulating agents are indicated. But when the system is already irritated and excited, as by poisons, for example, he finds that the effect of magnetism is to increase the irritation and the suffering, and frequently to bring on convulsions. Again, in many diseases where it can be usefully employed its first effect is generally to increase the pain and accelerate the crisis.

So far, it will be seen, no theories of a transcendental nature have been advanced. If the somnambule can see without eyes and hear without ears—a fact of which Deleuze has no manner of doubt—it is, according to him, because the impressions from without are conveyed directly by the magnetic fluid, a medium of extreme tenuity, to the brain without the intervention of the external organs or even the sensory nerves.<sup>1</sup> The same explanation will apply to the supersensible influence of the operator on the subject, and to the subject's perception of diseases in himself or in those placed in *rappor*t with him. Deleuze, relying indeed partly on his own observations, but mainly on those of others, has as little doubt of the reality of such supersensible phenomena as he has of their explanation by material causes.

Puységur, again, expressly repudiates any attempt at a transcendental explanation. It was said in Parisian Society that his subject Madeleine could divine people's thoughts. Puységur characterises the statement as absurd. In obeying his silent will she simply acts "as an animated magnet." His will, directing the magnetic fluid, moves her organism

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire Critique*, second edition, vol. i. pp. 189, 200, etc.

in the same way that his will, directing the nerve currents, acts on his own body. The effect in each case is a purely physical one.<sup>1</sup> Pététin, again, gently ridicules those who believe in clairvoyance at a distance;<sup>2</sup> and the faculty of prevision, on which some observers had laid so much stress, is, Deleuze points out, susceptible of explanation by physiological causes. The patient's previsions are concerned, for the most part, with the course of his own malady; and he could in such a case predict correctly, because in the magnetic trance he had a wider and more accurate knowledge of his own bodily processes and of their probable results.<sup>3</sup>

But it is not easy to explain the manifestations exclusively in physical terms without exercising a rigid discrimination amongst the marvels reported. Tardy de Montravel is inclined to ascribe the clairvoyance of external objects and of the interior of the human organism, and the foreseeing of the future, to a sixth sense, which he regards as at once the source and the sum of all the other partial senses. He further identifies it with the instinct of animals, and with the nerve soul or psychic body of other writers—the intermediary between the spiritual part of man and his gross external organism.

Moreover, the manifestation afterwards so well known as "travelling clairvoyance" was not unknown at this time. Puységur quotes<sup>4</sup> a letter written to him in March, 1785, from a gentleman in Nantes, in which a case of the kind is described, but not apparently at first hand, as having occurred at Nantes six months previously. The subject in this case, a young girl, followed the movements of the magnetiser, her uncle, when he left his chateau to go into the town, and was able to report to those around her correctly whom he met, and what he was saying and doing. It was not easy to find a fluidic explanation to fit such facts, if they were to be admitted at all.

Again, as we shall see hereafter,<sup>5</sup> there were from the beginning of the movement mystics who claimed that the true interpretation of the trance was to be found in the spiritual world; and Deleuze himself later appears to have given a partial assent to their views.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires pour servir*, pp. 180, 229, etc.    <sup>2</sup> *Électricité Animale*, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> As stated in the next chapter, this is probably not the true explanation of the "prediction" of fits and other crises.

<sup>4</sup> *Du Magnétisme Animal*, pp. 225-30. Paris, 1807.    <sup>5</sup> Below, chap. vi.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SECOND FRENCH COMMISSION

SUCH were the conceptions of Animal Magnetism which up till 1820 or thereabouts held the field as an explanation of the phenomena of the somnambulist trance, and which, even after a juster and more philosophic view had been propounded, continued to flourish for many years, and still linger not merely in the remoter bypaths of human experience. The inauguration of a new era in the science is due to Alexandre Bertrand, a young Paris physician, who, in 1823, published his *Traité du Somnambulisme*. In this, and another work published in 1826, *Du Magnétisme Animal en France*, he reviews the work and theories of his predecessors, and puts forward an explanation of the multifarious phenomena which does not greatly differ from that held at the present time.

He begins by relating the artificial trance with spontaneous noctambulism, the somnambulist states associated with certain diseases, and the states of ecstasy epidemic from time to time in religious communities. The various phenomena observed by his predecessors—the magnetic crisis; the sensations of heat and cold; the influence of the *baquet* and the iron rod; the tree at Busancy; the stream of light seen by Tardy's somnambules; the conduction by iron, the reflection from mirrors, the dissipation by copper; the effects of wax, silk, wet cords, etc., as observed by Pététin—the whole machinery on which the earlier writers relied as demonstrating the existence of a fluid—celestial, magnetic, or electric—he sweeps away in a word by attributing the results to the imagination of the subject, preternormally alive to the least suggestion, by word, look, gesture, or even unexpressed thought, from the operator. It is not necessary to follow Bertrand in detail through the steps of his argument. His theory of suggestion is the modern theory, and by it, as we know, are explained most of the phenomena which to the

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earlier observers appeared most inexplicable. Indeed, it is surprising how modern Bertrand's book is. It might have issued within the last decade from the *Hôpital Civil* at Nancy. It would need but a slight change in names, dates, and other unessential particulars to make it fit the times. For the magnetic crisis we should now substitute the three classic stages of the trance as observed in Paris, and for the names of Pététin and Deleuze those, say, of Charcot and Gilles de la Tourette. The transfer of diseases, the influence of magnets and metals, the presence of a nerve atmosphere have all been demonstrated as conclusively within recent years at the Salpêtrière or the Charité as they were more than a hundred years ago at Busancy or Lyons; whilst the most brilliant results of Tardy de Montravel have been outshone in modern Paris by Dr. Luys, Colonel de Rochas, and M. Baraduc. For modern scientific appliances have enabled these later observers to claim that they can photograph the fluid which the earlier writers could only take on trust from their somnambules. And to complete the parallel, the scientific world, and the mass of medical men in this country, at any rate, are hardly more concerned about the whole business than they were sixty or a hundred and twenty years ago. As has been said of another subject—

*"Hic liber est in quo quærit sua dogmata quisque  
Invenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua."*

It is no doubt this uncertainty—or rather this certainty that the observations will vary with the preconceptions of the observer—which has throughout the last three or four generations repelled the great majority of thinking men from the investigation. That Bertrand himself, had he lived, would have done much to dispel this prejudice and to win recognition for the subject among his scientific contemporaries seems probable; his premature death in 1831, in his thirty-sixth year, was an irremediable loss.

But for our immediate purposes even the revolution which Bertrand essayed in the attitude of science to the subject of artificial somnambulism is of less importance than his views on the supersensible phenomena of the trance. For this free critic of his predecessors' results, amongst so much else which he destroyed, left this part of their observations intact. Partly from his own experiments, but mainly from facts communicated to him by other observers and from authentic records in the past, he found himself constrained to believe

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that Pététin and the rest had been justified in their belief in action at a distance, and in the existence, in certain cases, of a faculty of acquiring information which had not passed through any known sensory channel. As may be inferred from the critical character of his mind, Bertrand had not come to this conclusion lightly. He was, of course, keenly alive to the influence of the imagination in such cases, and devised various experiments in order to exclude such influence. That he seems to have been less alive to the possibility of hyperæsthesia is, of course, to be regretted; but such experiments as the following can hardly be thought to be capable of explanation by that cause. Bertrand heads the chapter from which this extract is taken, "Communication sympathique des symptômes des maladies." He records three experiments on somnambules who had the faculty of describing correctly the diseases from which other persons were suffering.

To test this power he brought to the first somnambule a patient of his own whom she had never seen. The chief affection in this case was asthma. The somnambule, after being placed in *rappor*t with the invalid, shortly presented all the symptoms of a severe asthmatical attack; she then proceeded to describe with great accuracy various minor ailments and pains, and finally, a particular skin affection, the existence of which was almost certainly known to no one but the patient and her physician.

He made two similar observations on another somnambule. The second I give in his own words:—

"Voici une troisième observation faite sur la même somnambule, et qui ne paraîtra pas moins remarquable que les précédentes. Je n'avais pas préparé cette épreuve: le hasard me la fournit. J'étais auprès de la somnambule, que je magnétisais endormie sur son lit, quand je vis entrer un de mes amis accompagné d'un jeune homme blessé depuis peu de temps en duel, et qui avait reçu une balle dans la tête; il était encore malade de sa blessure, et venait pour consulter. On me le dit à voix basse, sans parler du genre de la blessure; et comme la somnambule parut disposée à donner la consultation qu'on lui demandait, je la mis en rapport avec le blessé, et me bornai à lui demander de déclarer ce qu'il avait.<sup>1</sup> Elle parut chercher un instant, puis elle dit en s'adressant le parole à elle-même: "Non, non, ce n'est pas possible; si un homme avait eu une balle dans la tête, il serait mort."—"Eh bien!" lui dis-je, "que voyez-vous donc?"—"Il faut *qu'il* se trompe," me dit-elle; "*il*

<sup>1</sup> Je n'ai pas besoin de dire avec quel soin on doit éviter de faire aux somnambules des questions qui puissent leur indiquer les réponses qu'ils doivent faire.

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me dit que monsieur a une balle dans la tête.<sup>1</sup> Je l'assurai que ce qu'elle disait était vrai, et lui demandai si elle pouvait voir par où la balle était entrée, et quel trajet elle avait parcouru. La somnambule réfléchit encore un instant, puis ouvrit la bouche, et indiqua avec le doigt que la balle était entrée par la bouche, et avait pénétré jusqu'à la partie postérieure du cou; ce qui était encore vrai. Enfin elle poussa l'exactitude jusqu'à indiquer quelques-unes des dents qui manquaient dans la bouche, et que la balle avait brisées.

Cette observation ne me laissa rien à désirer, puisque d'ailleurs j'étais sûr que la somnambule n'avait eu d'avance aucune connaissance de la personne qu'on lui avait amenée, et qu'elle n'avait pas ouvert les yeux depuis l'instant où le blessé était entré dans la chambre. Au reste, quand elle l'aurait vu, la balle étant entrée dans la bouche sans faire aucune lésion aux tégumens extérieurs, il lui aurait été impossible d'acquérir d'un coup-d'œil toutes les connaissances qu'elle montra sur la nature de la blessure.<sup>2</sup>

Bertrand cites a few observations of his own indicating action at a distance; but he admits that what indications he has himself seen of this faculty, though sufficient to justify him in giving due credence to the observations recorded by other persons on whose accuracy he could rely, were not in themselves conclusive. His explanation of the phenomenon is the precise reverse of Puységur's. When the somnambule responds to the passes of an unseen magnetiser, the effect is attributed not to a physical, but to a mental cause—*transmission des pensées*.

He cites, moreover, the testimony of several contemporaries, amongst them two Paris physicians of some note, Georget, who had been converted by what he had seen from materialism to a belief in the existence of the soul, and Rostan, the author of the article on "Animal Magnetism" in the new *Dictionary of Medicine*, a physician of Aix, Despine, and one or two others, all of whom claimed to have witnessed phenomena—reading with the fingers or toes, the back of the head, etc.—which compelled belief in some preternormal faculty of vision. Unfortunately in none of the cases cited are the particulars given sufficient to enable us to judge whether all sources of error were excluded.<sup>3</sup>

It will be seen that the phenomena of somnambulism were exciting considerable attention in the medical circles of Paris at this time. From 1820 onwards, indeed, there had been several exhibitions in the Paris hospitals, designed to illustrate

<sup>1</sup> "Il" = not the patient, but the inner voice which seemed to the somnambule to speak from her stomach.

<sup>2</sup> *Traité*, etc., pp. 232-4.

<sup>3</sup> A. Bertrand, *Du Magnétisme Animal en France*, p. 454.

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action at a distance and insensibility to pain. If the results in the first case were dubious, the demonstrations of anæsthesia were not lacking in cogency. The insensibility of the patients was frequently tested by the application of moxas. The moxa, we learn, produced burns, the exact dimensions of which are given, involving the whole thickness of the skin. The unhappy patients betrayed no sign of consciousness. These experiments are amongst the earliest indications of the recognition of anæsthesia as an accompaniment of the induced trance.<sup>1</sup>

But at this time (1820-1825) not only the medical world, but Paris in general, and indeed the whole country, were busied with the marvels of the magnetic trance. A bi-monthly journal, the *Annales du Magnétisme Animal*, had been started in Paris in 1814, which after a short interruption reappeared as the *Bibliothèque du Magnétisme Animal*. This came to an end in 1819, and was replaced by the *Archives du Magnétisme Animal*, under the editorship of Baron d'Henin de Cuillers. There were, moreover, professional clairvoyantes in plenty, as we learn from casual references in writings of this period, who seem to have found in the practice of clairvoyant diagnosis and treatment of disease a lucrative occupation. The Abbé Faria claimed that he had entranced more than five thousand persons.<sup>2</sup> Nor was the interest in it confined to France. The Academy of Berlin in 1821 proposed a prize for the best essay on the subject; a prize for which Bertrand would have contended, but unluckily his essay arrived too late.<sup>3</sup> In Russia a Commission appointed by the Emperor in 1815 had reported in its favour. In Prussia and Denmark the efficacy of magnetism had been recognised, and its exercise confined by law to members of the medical profession. In fact, throughout Northern Europe, but especially in Germany, the new treatment seems to have been widely practised. It was only the land of the immortal Newton "qui dans la culture des sciences, suivant la marche sévère de l'ex-

<sup>1</sup> It is not a little remarkable that at a time when anæsthetic drugs were wholly unknown the induction of anæsthesia in the trance appears not to have attracted the attention of the early magnetists. They do, indeed—*e.g.* in the Reports of 1784 and the discussions which followed—take note of the numbness in the limbs which occasionally accompanied the trance, but this was generally attributed to the constrained attitude or, as by Deleuze, to the fact that the lower limbs were generally not included in the passes, and thus escaped the vitalising influence of the fluid (*Histoire critique*, vol. i. p. 149). This singular omission is, of course, but another illustration—if another is needed—of the fact that in Hypnotism the observer finds what he looks for.

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand, *Du Magnétisme Animal*, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, p. 8.

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perience et de l'observation, a dédaigné jusqu'à présent de s'occuper de magnétisme."<sup>1</sup>

On the 11th October, 1825, a young doctor, P. Foissac, who had for some time past occupied himself with the study of the somnambulant trance, wrote to the Medical Section of the Royal Academy of Medicine at Paris asking them to appoint a Commission to investigate the subject anew, and offering to lend a somnambule for the purpose of experiment. The Section proceeded in the matter with due circumspection. They appointed a committee of five to consider the question whether it was suitable for the Academy to concern itself with the question or no. On the 13th December, 1825, this committee reported by the mouth of M. Husson, and recommended the Section to undertake the inquiry. The reading of the preliminary report was followed by a heated discussion, which was prolonged over the next three sittings. There is no need to analyse the debate in detail. The arguments of the opponents are by now sufficiently familiar. In the course of the fourscore years which have intervened they have been reproduced, it may be hazarded, with local modifications in the annals of every medical society in the civilised world. It was pointed out that Mesmer was a quack, and Puységur a man without scientific education; from Germany and the Scandinavian countries, where the doctrine was most rife, had notoriously proceeded too many extravagant systems and erroneous beliefs, alike in medicine and philosophy. Some of the speakers had studied the subject for years, and were convinced that all the phenomena, "or at least nine-tenths of them," were due to illusion and fraud; it would be beneath the dignity of the Academy to undertake the inquiry, for the subject was an altogether unprofessional one, and had fallen into the hands of quacks and charlatans, who made a lucrative living out of their alleged clairvoyance; moreover, it was a very difficult subject to investigate, since so many of the phenomena depended on the good faith of the subject; and if all that was said of it were proved true, it would still not be of the smallest use in medicine—let the physicists or somebody else take it up. Last, and most singular argument of all, there were such grave moral dangers arising from the abuse of the magnetic influence that it would be most undesirable for any responsible body of trained investigators to have anything to do with such a disagreeable business.

The supporters of the motion had, as may be imagined,

<sup>1</sup> Foissac, *Rapports et Discussions* (Paris, 1833), p. 41.

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the best of the argument; they had also the majority of the votes, and the recommendation was finally carried by thirty-five to twenty-five. The Commission commenced its inquiry at once, but owing to various causes did not actually present its Report until June, 1831, five and a half years after its appointment.

The Commission reported, in effect, that the alleged phenomena were genuine, and in particular that the peculiar state called somnambulism, though of comparatively rare occurrence, was well authenticated. Time had not permitted them to investigate with precision the therapeutic relations of magnetism, but they had seen enough to satisfy them of its importance as an adjunct to medical science.

But the most interesting and most controvertible of the Commission's findings related to the supernormal aspect of the phenomena. They reported that the characteristic effects of the magnetic state could be produced in the patient without his knowledge, by the mere will of the operator; that certain clairvoyants could distinguish objects placed before them when their eyes were fast closed and normal vision was impossible; that they could occasionally diagnose the diseases of other persons with whom they were placed in *rapport*; and that they could also predict with great exactness more or less distant pathological changes in their own organisms.

Unfortunately the extracts from the detailed experiments given in the Report furnish little support for any of these conclusions, except, indeed, the last. The power of somnambules to predict to the minute the occurrence, even weeks ahead, of epileptic crises and the like, seems fairly well established. But it is doubtfully to be explained, as even Bertrand essays to explain it, as an inference from a quickened perception of organic processes. It is in most cases probably not an inference at all, still less a prevision. What really happens, no doubt, is that the patient subconsciously sets his organism to explode in epileptic crisis, mania, and so on, and himself subconsciously attends to the fulfilment of the prediction. It is thus analogous to the carrying out of an hallucination suggested to him by the operator—as we have seen in recent times at Nancy—with this difference, that the suggestion is given by the patient to himself. But the false interpretation placed on phenomena of this kind undoubtedly contributed much in the early days to the disrepute of Magnetism in scientific circles.

As regards the operation of the magnetiser's will without the knowledge of the patient, several observations are quoted,

of which the best are two cases in which Foissac himself, concealed in another room and at a distance of ten or twelve feet from the subject, with two closed doors intervening in one case and one in the other, succeeded in inducing the sleep in a few minutes.

The experiments on which the proof of vision without eyes were supposed to rest are obviously inconclusive. The subjects' eyes (two persons were found to possess the power of seeing under these conditions) were closed, so that the lashes interlaced, and the eyelids were seen by all present to be pressed together. On one occasion the lids were held down by the fingers of one of the experimenters. Under these conditions the somnambules—for they were apparently in a genuine somnambulatory trance—could describe, though not without some difficulty, objects placed before them. But it was observed that the eyeballs moved, as if following the object, as in the act of normal vision. Moreover, the subject failed to read with the pit of the stomach, or through a closed envelope; and the intervention of a screen or a bandage over the eyes interrupted the performance. There can be no reasonable doubt that the "clairvoyants" in these experiments—who may have been perfectly innocent of intentional deception in the matter—did actually see with their fleshly eyes, and in a perfectly normal though somewhat unusual way. One of the committees of the Society for Psychical Research had the opportunity in 1884 of experimenting with a "clairvoyant" youth, "Dick, the pit lad," whose performances were conducted in much the same way, except that in the later case the eyes were bandaged in a manner which to the untrained spectator seemed completely effectual. Dr. Hodgson subsequently, with his eyes bandaged in the same way, and under like conditions, succeeded in seeing objects held up before him.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, it cannot be said that, apart from their unanimous testimony to the reality and importance of the phenomena in general, this second French Commission added much to our knowledge of the subject, or much, it is to be feared, to their own reputation. Their observations were few and inadequate, and their conclusions were not carefully framed, nor in all cases well established. It is noteworthy that though the elements of a philosophical explanation of the whole problem had been put forward some few years previously by Bertrand, with much literary skill and abundance of apt and cogent illustrations, Bertrand's name

<sup>1</sup> See *Journal of the S. P. R.* for June, 1884.

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is not mentioned in the Report, and his theories are dismissed in a line.

M. Foissac, in publishing the Report,<sup>1</sup> triumphantly pointed out that Magnetism, after being so long a subject of derision, had at last, after a strife of fifty-seven years, been rehabilitated before the first medical society in Europe.

He may be counted happy in that he could not foresee how many rehabilitations, by or in spite of how many learned societies, would be needed before the next fifty-seven years were completed.

<sup>1</sup> *Rapports et discussions de l'Académie Royale de Médecine sur le Magnétisme Animal.* Paris, 1833.

## CHAPTER VI

### SPIRITUALISM IN FRANCE BEFORE 1848

ONE of the earliest detailed accounts which we possess of questioning the spirits through the mouth of a somnambule is contained in an extract from some unpublished Journals of the *Société Exégétique et Philantropique* of Stockholm, which is quoted in the *Annales du Magnétisme Animal* by M. Lausanne, in the course of a history of Animal Magnetism.<sup>1</sup> This society, founded in the birthplace of Swedenborg, apparently for the propagation of his doctrines, had addressed in 1788 to the *Société des amis réunis* at Strasbourg a famous "Lettre sur la seule explication satisfaisante des phénomènes du Magnétisme Animal et du somnambulisme déduite des vrais principes fondés dans les connaissances du Créateur de l'homme et de la Nature, et confirmée par l'expérience." True to the principles of its founder, the Strasbourg Society had retorted by insisting on a naturalistic interpretation. Thereupon M. Halldin, of the Swedish Society, replied by another long exposition of the Swedenborgian view, backed up by extracts from journals of trance experiments for a few days in the month of May, 1787. From these journals it would appear that in the presence of several members of the nobility and other persons the wife of a gardener named Lindquist, a woman of forty years of age, when placed in the trance, was controlled on successive days by two different spirits, her own infant daughter and another young child, a former native of the town. These "spirits," in reply to the questions of the bystanders, gave some account of their own lives on earth, described the state of intermediate or probationary existence, *le chemin de milieu*, through which the spirits of the dead had to pass before finally proceeding to their appointed place, expounded the Christian Scriptures, and even entered upon

<sup>1</sup> 1816, No. XXV.

an abstruse disquisition on the worthlessness in that other world of all man's "natural goodness"—in all this discourse faithfully reproducing the teachings of the Swedish seer. Other somnambules and other "controls" delivered themselves to a like effect. They also prescribed for the diseases of persons present or absent. Asked as to the state of the late King, the spirits replied that he was happy; the late Captain Sparfvenfeldt was reported to be "encore flottant," apparently in the probationary state above described. But the "controls" refused to satisfy a natural curiosity as to the whereabouts of the late Comte de Stenbock, and leave us to the grimmest conjectures.

It is to be noted that the ascription of these somnambule utterances to spirit intelligences was in the circumstances not merely easy but almost inevitable. The entranced person was in a state obviously differing very widely from either normal sleep or normal wakefulness; in the waking state she herself retained no recollection of what happened in the trance; in the trance she habitually spoke of her waking self in the third person, as of someone else; the intelligence which manifested in the trance obviously possessed powers of expression and intellectual resources in some directions far greater than any displayed by the waking subject. Add to this that the trance intelligence habitually reflected the ideas in general and especially the religious orthodoxy of her interlocutors; that on occasion she showed knowledge of their thoughts and intentions which could not apparently have been acquired by normal means; that she was, in particular, extraordinarily skilful in diagnosing, prescribing for, and occasionally foretelling the course of diseases in herself and others—the proof must have seemed to the bystanders complete.

That without impugning the good faith of the "medium" we can now explain these manifestations without the supposition of an extraneous intelligence is no reflection on the common sense of the earlier investigators. Taught by the experience of more than a century in this particular field and with a wider and more intimate knowledge of allied abnormal states, we can now explain the division of memory, the assumption by the somnambule of an alien personality, and the enlargement in certain directions of the psychic powers, as phenomena directly dependent on changes in the physical basis of consciousness, such as accompany and condition the trance. The unshakeable orthodoxy of the medium is seen to be less significant when we find that

she is apt equally to reflect the ideas of the magnetist, whether Catholic, Protestant, Rationalist, or, as in the case just cited, Swedenborgian; and, if some of the more marvellous phenomena of the trance are still obscure, they can at least be seen to fall into line with other mundane facts, which do not obviously call for spirit-intervention. But at Stockholm in the eighteenth century such comparisons and inferences were not possible. Even if the members of the Exegetical and Philanthropic Society had started as doubters, they might have been excused for succumbing to the evidence of their senses, as did the young somnambule whose history is preserved for us by Bertrand. The boy was heard in the trance to exclaim—"Mais il n'y a pas de revenans, ce sont des contes. Cependant je les vois, la preuve est entière."<sup>1</sup> Starting, as they apparently did, with a belief in the spirit communings of their famous fellow-citizen, Emanuel Swedenborg, these Stockholm inquirers could hardly fail to see in these later manifestations corroboration of their faith and an earnest of fuller revelations to come.

It was in Germany, as will appear in the next chapter, that the Spiritualist interpretation found most favour. There were many philosophers in that country who welcomed the somnambule revelations as affording support for mystical beliefs antecedently held on less cogent evidence. In the heated debates which preceded the appointment of the second French Commission there were numerous allusions to the Spiritualists; and Germany and the countries of northern Europe were pointed to as the chief offenders against scientific orthodoxy. But they do not seem to have stood alone; the clairvoyant who saw and conversed in a vision with two great prophets, and when asked to identify them, named Rousseau and Voltaire, must surely have been a Parisian.<sup>2</sup>

In France, however, as we have already seen, not merely by Mesmer and his immediate disciples, but by those who pursued the subject in the next generation, the phenomena of the somnambule trance were studied as part of the natural sciences. However extravagant the theories which, in some cases, those phenomena were suborned to support, they yet did not pass beyond the limits of the material world. For the great body of investigators the interest in Animal Magnetism lay primarily in its use as a healing power, and secondarily as illustrating the workings of a new physical force. If there were any inquirers who saw in the phenomena indications of something transcending the physical universe,

<sup>1</sup> *Traité du Somnambulisme*, p. 437.

<sup>2</sup> Foissac, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

they remained for the most part inarticulate. They published few books, and contributed no articles to the leading periodicals devoted to Animal Magnetism. Echoes of the Spiritualist beliefs are found, however, from time to time in the early literature of the French magnetists. Even so early as 1787 M. Tardy de Montravel indited a series of letters controverting, in the politest language, the view that in the trance the soul of the somnambule became freed from its fleshly bonds, and soared into the world of real existence. *Per contra* in 1793 Keleph Ben-Nathan, in his *Philosophie Divine*, argued that in somnambulism the spirit of man did indeed hold intercourse with other spirits, but of an infernal order; and that the Spiritualist magnetisers were, in fact, practising that sorcery and divination against which the Israelites had been warned in the Jewish Scriptures.

Some years later Deleuze, in the first volume of his *Histoire Critique*, found it necessary to devote a chapter to an examination of the views of the mystics and to argue at length that a belief in the phenomena of Animal Magnetism was not logically or necessarily associated with such doctrines. Later, in the *Bibliothèque du Magnétisme Animal*, Deleuze defines his own position more precisely.<sup>1</sup> A friend had drawn his attention to the Spiritualist views then widely current in Germany, and asserted his own inclination towards them in preference to the naturalistic explanation adopted generally in France, in deference, as he suggests, to the fashionable philosophy of the day. Deleuze, in his reply, admits that the phenomena of clairvoyance and the like go far to establish the spirituality of the soul and its independence of the material organism, and thereby to destroy the strongest argument that can be adduced against the soul's survival. But he urges various considerations for holding the judgment, so far as relates to anything more than this admission, still in suspense. Spirit-intercourse must, he thinks, at present be regarded as not proven by any manifestation of the somnambule trance. The phenomena which seem to point in that direction are susceptible of another interpretation.

In his later years, however, Deleuze appears to have been almost converted to the Spiritualistic hypothesis. One Dr. G. P. Billot had been experimenting for many years with various patients of that hysterical type which at that time, as at the present day, appears to have been so common in France. By means of leading questions he readily induced his patients, in the somnambule trance, to declare that they

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iv. (1818), pp. 1-63.

were possessed by spirits. The spirits in the case of Billot's subjects proclaimed themselves the guardian angels of the somnambules, through whom they communicated, confessed the Catholic verities, and on occasion, in proof of their claims, made the sign of the cross. All these matters and many more Billot reported at great length to Deleuze, in a correspondence which extended over more than four years, from March, 1829, to August, 1833.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the correspondence Deleuze adheres to the position above described. In one of his last letters, however, dated 3rd August, 1833, when he was in his eighty-second year, and within a few months of the complete failure of his mental powers, he writes to his correspondent: "I have unlimited confidence in you, and cannot doubt the truth of your observations. You seem to me destined to effect a change in the ideas generally held on Animal Magnetism. I should like to live long enough to see the happy revolution, and to thank Heaven for having been introduced into the world of angels."

On the strength of this and similar utterances Billot claims Deleuze as a convert to his views. But apart altogether from the effect produced by them on the octogenarian naturalist, Billot's letters are of considerable interest. In the first place, it is clear that the author, though firmly convinced of the truth of his views, was reluctant to publish them—in itself strong proof of the rarity of similar views amongst his countrymen—because of the ridicule and opposition which he foresaw that they would encounter. The correspondence was not, in fact, published until six years later. But it is specially interesting to note that Billot's clairvoyants had on some occasions furnished him with physical phenomena. On the 5th March, 1819, three of the somnambules—one man and two women—were sitting in a row. They were in the "theo-magnetic" state, in which they would see visions, and all of them the same vision. The only other persons present were Dr. Billot himself and a blind woman, who was apparently in the habit of consulting his clairvoyants:—

"Towards the middle of the séance, one of the seeresses exclaimed, 'There is the Dove—it is white as snow—it is flying about the room with something in its beak—it is a piece of paper. Let us pray.' A few moments later she added, 'See, it has let the paper drop at the feet of Madame J——' (the blind woman)."

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches psychologiques . . . ou correspondance sur le magnétisme vital entre un Solitaire et M. Deleuze*, Paris, 1839.

In fact, Dr. Billot saw a paper packet lying at the spot indicated, which, on picking it up, he found to exhale a sweet smell. The contents of the packet consisted of three small pieces of bone glued on to small strips of paper, with the words "St. Maxime," "St. Sabine," and "Many Martyrs" respectively written beneath the fragments. The account is dated September, 1831.<sup>1</sup>

On the 27th October in the following year, 1820, he witnessed a somewhat similar occurrence. The same blind woman had come to consult one of his somnambules. In the trance the somnambule said that she saw a maiden holding out a branch covered with flowers. Billot remarked that there were no plants in flower at that season in the country. Suddenly the blind woman cried out that a spray of flowers had just been placed on her apron. On examination the "apport" proved to be a piece of Cretan thyme. Later the visionary maiden, in answer to the doctor's entreaties, gave him also a piece of the same plant.<sup>2</sup>

These incidents Billot recounted to Deleuze as proofs palpable of spirit-intervention. He cannot, he says, understand—nor is it, indeed, easy of understanding—how the things could have been brought by Animal Magnetism only.

Deleuze in his reply states that he has just received a visit from a distinguished physician, who had had similar experiences. One of this gentleman's somnambules had frequently brought him material objects; but she never professed to have interviews with spirits. Deleuze himself finds it easier to conceive that these "apports" should be conveyed by magnetic power than that spirits should have power to move material objects.

The correspondence is of value as showing that physical phenomena of the kind familiar to modern Spiritualists—the Cretan thyme exactly foreshadows the "apports" of flowers witnessed in Mrs. Guppy's presence—occurred in connection with the trance long before 1848. Two or three similar incidents in connection with German clairvoyants are described in the next chapter.

Whilst, however, it was in Germany, in the early part of the last century, that the idea of intercourse with spirits through the medium of an entranced subject first received its full development, yet France contributed, in the remarkable trance utterances recorded by Alphonse Cahagnet, one of its most striking illustrations. We learn from his writings that Cahagnet was familiar with the teachings of Swedenborg,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. p. 6.

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and it is not unlikely that he may have read the articles in the *Annales* from which the account of the Swedish Spiritualists above quoted is taken. And no doubt to both these sources of inspiration we may add the interest evoked by the German clairvoyants, some reports of whose marvellous revelations must have reached Paris. But it is noteworthy that in the Paris of his day Cahagnet seems to have stood almost alone. He belonged to no school; he persuaded few of his contemporaries to share his views of the somnambulist revelations which he recorded; and but for the advent of Modern Spiritualism from America, he would, it may be hazarded, have found few readers. If in the present chapter, therefore, Cahagnet's work is treated at greater length than its historical importance would seem to justify, it is because these trance utterances are at once amongst the most remarkable and the best-attested documents on which the case for Spiritualism depends.

Alphonse Cahagnet describes himself as a simple *ouvrier*. He was, in fact, as we learn from an authoritative account of him in the *Journal du Magnétisme*,<sup>1</sup> originally a journeyman cabinet-maker, and subsequently took up the trade of restoring old furniture. His attention appears to have been attracted to the phenomena of somnambulism about 1845, and thereafter he employed much of his leisure in studying and recording the utterances of various entranced subjects.

In January, 1848, he published at Paris the first volume of his *Arcanes de la vie future dévoilés*, in which he gave an account of communications received through eight somnambules, which purported to proceed from thirty-six persons of various stations, who had died at different epochs, some of them more than two centuries previously. This first volume contained "revelations" of the usual post-Swedenborgian kind about the constitution of the spirit spheres, the occupations of the deceased, the bliss of the after-life, and visions of angelic beings clothed in white, walking on beautiful lawns, in the light of a fairer day than ours.

We should probably be justified in assuming that these accounts of heaven and of the occupations of the spirits therein, with which a large part of the first volume is taken up, had no more remote origin than the medium's own mind, whose workings were no doubt directed, now by memories of lessons learnt in childhood, now by hints of the Swedenborgian philosophy and of the revelations of German clairvoyants received from Cahagnet himself. This first volume

<sup>1</sup> Vol. xiii. p. 340.

also included personal messages from deceased friends of those persons whom Cahagnet admitted to witness the manifestations. But there is little or nothing to show that these communications did not emanate exclusively from the imagination of the medium, and we are dependent solely upon Cahagnet's good faith and competence for the accuracy of the reports given. Cahagnet appears, however, to have been a man of quite unusual sincerity and teachableness. The criticisms on his earlier work showed him where the evidence was defective; and in the later séances described in his second volume, which was published in January, 1849, he appears to have done his utmost to establish the authenticity of the alleged spirit communications by procuring, wherever possible, the written attestations of the other persons present. The medium in all these later sittings was Adèle Maginot, whom he had known for many years. A natural somnambulist from her childhood, she had, in the first instance, allowed Cahagnet to "magnetise" her, in order that he might put a stop to the spontaneous attacks which were impairing her health. He soon found her an excellent clairvoyant, especially for the diagnosis and cure of diseases. In the later séances, however, which took place in the spring and summer of 1848, Adèle was chiefly consulted by persons who wished for interviews with deceased friends. Cahagnet drew up a statement of the communications made at these sittings, and asked the sitters to sign the statement, indicating how far the particulars given were true or false. These statements, with the signed attestations, are published. In the few cases where the names are not given in full Cahagnet explains that for sufficient reasons the sitters had desired that their names should be withheld from the general public, but that they were at the disposal of any private inquirer who might wish to satisfy himself of the genuineness of the accounts. Of course these reports, which do not profess to be verbatim, do not show what indications the clairvoyant may have received from leading questions or undesigned hints by the sitters.

Cahagnet, indeed, seems to admit a certain amount of editing on his part. His words are:—

"Cet ouvrage est loin d'offrir l'intérêt du roman par son style forcément coupé, accidenté. Aussi conviendrait-il mieux aux amateurs de la science qu'aux lecteurs passionnés des descriptions poétiques de nos romans du jour. *J'ai cherché à rendre le style le plus clair possible en le dépouillant de cet entourage de questions, de scènes étrangères à ce genre de révélations.* Je tiens moins à bien

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écrire qu'à bien persuader. . . . Je suis resté dans les limites de l'austère vérité, du rôle impartial de l'historien, présentant à la philosophie du jour des faits dans toute leur nudité, mais aussi dans toute leur sincérité."<sup>1</sup>

But it is evident from the accounts given that many of the sitters, at any rate, were sceptical, and on their guard against deception. And in some cases it seems clear that no hints received from the sitters could have furnished information. Another possible evidential defect is that though Cahagnet tells us that he has recorded all the somnambule's mistakes as well as all her correct statements,<sup>2</sup> he does not expressly say that he has published the records of every séance. As, however, we have numbered records of forty-six séances in the interval between going to press with the first volume in the autumn of 1847 and the end of August, 1848, twenty-eight of which sittings took place between the 6th of March and the latter date, it may fairly be assumed that the sittings here recorded represent at least a substantial proportion of those which actually took place. Lastly, to complete the enumeration of the more prominent evidential defects, very few dates are given. In this respect also, however, the second volume shows a marked improvement over the first. The ninety-six séances there recorded contain hardly a single date. But of the later séances several are dated, and the rest, from internal evidence, appear to be printed in chronological order. In short, in the whole literature of Spiritualism I know of no records of the kind which reach a higher evidential standard, nor any in which the writer's good faith and intelligence are alike so conspicuous.

The following are a few representative records. In the séance first quoted the sitter, Dejean de la Bastie, Delegate to the Government from the Isle of Bourbon, had come a few days previously and received a personal description of his father, which he acknowledged to be exact with a few trifling exceptions, together with much excellent paternal advice.

No. 141.—M. Dejean de la Bastie, already quoted in Séance 138, desires another apparition. He asks for M. Marie-Joseph-Theodore de Guigné. Adèle sees a man about forty years of age, rather tall, with brown hair. M. Dejean interrupts Adèle by saying that this is not the portrait of the person for whom he asks. We see that this gentleman wishes for perfectly accurate information. At the words "rather tall, with brown hair," he says, "He was tall and not brown-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. p. 126.

haired." Adèle answers that the person whose appearance she is describing must have the same name and belong to his family, that she is conscious that it is so; but he again asks for this gentleman, and a second person appears. The first remains. "The new-comer," she says, "is thirty years of age and over; he is tall and thin, has dark, flaxen hair, a pale face, with rather sweet, dark blue eyes; a long nose, a mouth that is large rather than small, a long chin. I see he wears a sort of great coat, such as is no longer worn. It is not at all becoming; it resembles a dressing-gown, but is not one; it is dark blue or black. This garb proclaims him to be a man in orders—a priest, or something of the kind. He looks stern. He must have had chest complaint. I see that his lungs are distended with blood. He has been ailing a long time. He is very weak. I think that privations have caused this, and made his chest so delicate. I do not see, however, that he has the germs of any fatal disease, and this makes me believe that his death was violent, accidental, unexpected. His hand is large and thin. I see a medal on his breast, the size of the palm of a hand. He wears low-cut shoes, such are not worn now. He will not speak to me, so I conclude that he did not speak French."

The following remarks precede the signature of M. Dejean:—"This person had more of gentleness and kindness than severity in his disposition. He died of a malignant fever, accompanied by delirium lasting several days, and attributed by the doctor to the needs of a vigorous constitution thwarted by absolute continence."

"The details acknowledged to be accurate.

(Signed)

DEJEAN DE LA BASTIE,  
18, Rue Neuve de Luxembourg."<sup>1</sup>

*This 25th August, 1848.*

The introduction in the first instance of a figure which is not recognised by the sitter is a not uncommon feature at these séances. Adèle generally persisted, as in the present case, that the figure belonged to the same family; and not infrequently the sitter was ultimately induced to recognise it. In one case Cahagnet describes,<sup>2</sup> under the title "Quadruple Apparition," a case in which three figures appeared before one was recognised. In this case the sitter appears ultimately to have given a grudging recognition to all four. But the unprejudiced inquirer will probably not share Cahagnet's view, that the introduction of three tardily recognised figures adds strength to the evidence. Cahagnet himself was satisfied that the somnambule actually held converse with spirits, and most of his sitters seem to have shared his conviction. But there were a few who ascribed the results to thought-transference; and

<sup>1</sup> *Arcanes*, vol. ii. pp. 219, 220.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. iii. pp. 101-8.

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the sitting next to be quoted certainly lends support to this view.

M. du Potet, a well-known writer on Animal Magnetism, and editor at that time of the *Journal du Magnétisme* in Paris, came to see Cahagnet's subject, and brought with him the Prince de Kourakine, who is described as Secretary to the Russian Ambassador. The Prince had asked for his sister-in-law, and a striking personal description had been given by Adèle, which was acknowledged by the Prince, in the hearing of M. du Potet and two other witnesses, to be accurate. Unfortunately, the Prince's signed attestation was not procured on the spot; he had promised to come again, but—as Cahagnet delicately put it—"les événements survenus en France l'ont forcé de partir," and the promised testimony was never obtained. After the apparition of the Russian Princess, however, the record continues:—

No. 117.<sup>1</sup>—M. du Potet wishes in his turn to call up M. Dubois, a doctor, a friend of his who had been dead about fifteen months.

Adèle said: "I see a grey-headed man, he has very little hair on the front of his head; his forehead is bare and prominent at the temples, making his head appear square. He may be about sixty years of age. He has two wrinkles on either side of his cheeks, a crease under his chin, making it look double; he is short-necked and stumpy; has small eyes, a thick nose, rather a large mouth, a flat chin, and small thin hands. He does not look to me quite so tall as M. du Potet; if he is not stouter he is more broad-shouldered. He wears a brown frock-coat with side-pockets. I see him draw a snuff-box out of one of them and take a pinch. He has a very funny walk, he does not carry himself well, and has weak legs; he must have suffered from them. He has rather short trousers. Ah! he does not clean his shoes every day, for they are covered with mud. Taking it all together, he is not well dressed. He has asthma, for he breathes with difficulty. I see, too, that he has a swelling in the abdomen, he has something to support it. I have told him that it is M. du Potet who asked for him. He talks to me of magnetism with incredible volubility; he talks of everything at once; he mixes everything up; I cannot understand any of it; it makes him sputter saliva."

M. du Potet asks that the apparition may be asked why he has not appeared to him before, as he had promised. He answers: "Wait till I find out my whereabouts; I have only just arrived, I am studying everything I see. I want to tell you all about it when I appear, and I shall have many things to tell you."

"Which day did you promise me you would do so?" "On a Wednesday." Adèle adds: "This man must be forgetful; I am

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. pp. 118-20.

sure that he was very absent-minded." M. du Potet asks further: "When will you appear to me?" "I cannot fix the time; I shall try to do so in six weeks." "Ask him if he was fond of the Jesuits?" At this name he gave such a leap in the air, stretching out his arms and crying, "The Jesuits," that Adèle draws back quickly, and is so startled that she does not venture to speak to him again.

M. du Potet declares that all these details are very accurate, that he cannot alter a syllable. He says that this man's powers of conversation were inexhaustible; he mixed up all the sciences to which he was devoted, and spoke with such volubility that, as the clairvoyant says, he sputtered in consequence. He took little pains with his appearance; he was so absent-minded that he sometimes forgot to eat. When anyone mentioned the Jesuits to him he jumped as Adèle has described. He was always covered with mud like a spaniel. It is not surprising that the clairvoyant should see him with muddy shoes. He had, in fact, promised M. du Potet that he would appear to him on a Wednesday or a Saturday. M. du Potet has acknowledged the accuracy of this apparition in No. 75 of the *Journal du Magnétisme*.

In effect, in the *Journal* of August 10th of the same year, in reviewing the first volume of Cahagnet's work, du Potet gives handsome testimony to the striking nature of the impersonation, "si bien que je croyais le voir moi-même, tant le tableau en était saisissant. Bientôt cette ombre s'est enfuie en effrayant la somnambule; un seul mot avait causé cette disparition subite, et mon étonnement en fut porté à son comble, car ce même mot le mettait toujours en fureur." But du Potet, for all that, is inclined to attribute the phenomenon to transmission of thought from his own mind,<sup>1</sup> and a few months later,<sup>2</sup> in reviewing Cahagnet's second volume, he takes occasion to give the result of his further inquiries on this séance. Generally, the minute description of the personal appearance and other particulars which were prominent in du Potet's own mind at the time were correct; and other details were correctly given which du Potet might have heard, but had certainly not remembered at the time. He had ascertained, however, from the widow and children that Dr. Dubois took no tobacco; never had a *redingote* of the colour described; had no hernia, and consequently wore no bandage. Moreover, the apparition predicted never came off. Du Potet, however, adds expressly that Dr. Dubois was unknown in life to Cahagnet and his somnambule.

But, in fact, Cahagnet's own records furnish us with the most convincing refutation of his theory that these com-

<sup>1</sup> *Journal du Magnétisme*, vol. vii. p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. viii. p. 24.

munications were authentic messages from the spirits of the dead. For there are two or three accounts which, while they point to the action of telepathy, are extremely difficult to reconcile with the theory of spirit-intercourse. On two occasions, recorded in the second volume, Adèle was asked to search for a long-lost relative of the sitter. On each occasion she found the man *alive*, and conversed with his spirit.

M. Lucas came to inquire after the fate of his brother-in-law, who had disappeared after a quarrel some twelve years previously. Adèle, in the trance, found the man at once, said that he was alive, and that she saw him in a "foreign country," where there were trees like those in America, and that he was busy gathering seeds from small shrubs about three feet high. He would not answer her questions, and she asked to be awoken, as she was afraid of wild beasts.<sup>1</sup> M. Lucas returned a few days afterwards, bringing with him the mother of the missing man.

No. 99.<sup>2</sup>—Adèle, as soon as she was asleep, said: "I see him." "Where do you see him?" "Here." "Give us a description of him again, and also of the place where he is." "He is a fair man, tanned by the heat of the sun; he is very stout, his features are fairly regular; brown eyes, large mouth; he appears gloomy and meditative. He is dressed as a workman, in a sort of short blouse. He is occupied at present, as he was last time, in gathering seed, which resembles peppercorns, but I do not think it is pepper; it is larger. This seed grows on small shrubs about one metre high. There is a little negro with him occupied in the same way." "Try to obtain some answer to-day. Get him to tell you the name of the country where you see him." "He will not answer." "Tell him that his good mother, for whom he had a great affection, is with you, and asks for news of him." "Oh! at the mention of his mother he turned round and said to me, 'My mother! I shall not die without seeing her again. Comfort her, and tell her that I always think of her. I am not dead!'" "Why does he not write to her?" "He has written to her, but the vessel has no doubt been wrecked—at least he supposes this to be so, since he has received no answer. He tells me that he is in Mexico. He has followed the emperor, Don Pedro; he has been imprisoned for five years; he has suffered a great deal, and will use every effort to return to France; they will see him again." "Can he name the place in which he is living?" "No; it is very far inland. These countries have no names." "Is he living with a European?" "No, with a coloured man." "Why does he not write to his mother?" "Because no vessels come to the place where he is. He does not know to whom to turn. Besides, he only knew how to write a very little, and has almost forgotten.

<sup>1</sup> *Arcanes*, vol. ii. pp. 32, 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii. pp. 34-37.

There is no one with him who can render him this service; no one speaks his language; he makes himself understood with great difficulty. Besides that, he has never been of a communicative disposition or a talker. He seems to be rather a surly fellow. It is very difficult to get these few words out of him. One would think he were dumb." "In short, how can one manage to write to him or hear news of him?" "He knows nothing about it. He can only say these three things: I am in Mexico, I am not dead, they will see me again." "Why did he leave his parents in this manner, without saying anything to them, as he was happy at home?" "This man was very reserved; he hardly ever spoke. He loved his mother very much, but he had not the same affection for his father, who was a passionate, surly man, and often treated him brutally. The cup had long since been full. It was not the trifling dispute that he had had with his father the day before his departure that made him decide to go away; it had been his fixed determination for some time past. He told no one of it. He went away on the sly. Having kissed them all the evening before, he made good his escape next day, without another word. Do not be uneasy, madam; you will see him again!" This good woman burst into tears, because she recognised the truth of every detail given her by Adèle. She did not find anything at fault in the description. The disposition, the education, and the departure of her son were as Adèle said; but a greater semblance of probability is given to the clairvoyant's account by the fact that his relations had an idea that he had enlisted in Don Pedro's army, and at one time took some steps to ascertain the truth of it. M. Lucas told me of this detail on a journey which he afterwards made to Paris. No information was, however, obtainable.

Shortly after this incident M. Mirande, the head of the printing-office in which the first volume of the *Arcanes* had been printed, came to Cahagnet and asked for a sitting. He was much impressed with what he saw and heard, and finally begged Adèle to ask for the apparition of his brother, who, he believed, had died in the Russian campaign. Adèle did not see him in the spirit world, and said that he was not dead, that she saw him on earth. She then gave a description of his personal appearance, uniform, and disposition, which, with certain qualifications and corrections, appears to have tallied fairly well with M. Mirande's recollections and surmises. She also gave a plausible account, alleged to be derived from actual conversation with the absent brother, of his whereabouts, and an explanation of his long silence.<sup>1</sup>

We have, unfortunately, no corroboration of the truth of the statements made about these two persons. A third

<sup>1</sup> *Arcanes*, vol. ii. pp. 60-3.

volume of the *Arcanes* was published a year or two later, and it is perhaps fair to assume that, if news had come that either of the missing persons was still alive, and had passed through the experiences described by Adèle, Cahagnet would not have missed the opportunity of making public such a striking testimony to his subject's clairvoyance. It follows, then, that in these two séances all that we are entitled to say is that Adèle was able to divine with, it may be admitted, considerable accuracy the ideas present in the minds of her interlocutors. It seems to have been a good example of telepathy; but we have no kind of proof that it was anything more, and from internal evidence it seems very unlikely that it was anything more. In our total ignorance of all conditions and limitations, it would, perhaps, be unreasonable to regard the implicit assumption that the spirits of the dead are ready to attend at any moment the summons of the living as in itself constituting an additional obstacle to accepting the accounts of Adèle's séances in general as evidence of spirit-intercourse. But it is quite another matter when we have to deal, as in the two cases now in question, with the spirits of men still living. How did Adèle manage to discover the whereabouts of those two persons? And, still more, how did she contrive that they should speak with her, and that at a time when one of them, at least, was wide awake and engaged in earning his living by the work of his hands? And was Adèle's power of communicating with the spirits of the living restricted to persons who had gone away to distant climes in order to escape from their relatives? If Adèle, or any other of Cahagnet's clairvoyants, really had possessed the power of conversing with the living at a distance, I cannot doubt that Cahagnet, in the course of his many years' experiments, would have been able to present us with some evidence of such a power that was not purely hypothetical. Nothing would be so easy to prove. The fact that no such evidence is forthcoming affords a strong presumption that Adèle did not possess the power, and that the conversations here detailed were purely imaginary, the authentic or plausible details which they contained being filched, it may be, telepathically from the minds of those present. The curious similarity of the two accounts also points in the same direction. Both men profess to have written home, but the letters must have miscarried. Neither can write now, because they are far from the sea, in the interior. Both have suffered much; both have been prisoners; both protest that their

relatives will see them before they die ; neither, however, is in a hurry to come back ; and neither is willing to discover the name of his present place of abiding.

To suppose, as the recorder supposes, that these narratives are authentic revelations obtained from actual conversations with the spirits of men living in unnamed and—as Cahagnet explains at length—probably nameless localities in the interior of Mexico or Asiatic Russia, is to strain credulity to the breaking-point. But if these two narratives are not what they seem to be, what are we to say of the other narratives in the book, which are cast in the same dramatic form, and contain similar details harmonising with the expectations or memories of the interlocutors? If those are not authentic messages from the distant living, we require some further warrant for the assumption that these are authentic messages from the spirits of the dead. Considered in conjunction with the visions of heaven and dead play-mates which characterised the earlier trances, these later utterances certainly point to an exclusively mundane origin.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is fair to say that, in his third volume, Cahagnet records another case in which a missing person was found by Adèle and news of him conveyed to his anxious mother, and that in this case the details communicated—which were beyond the mother's knowledge or conjecture—were stated by her subsequently to have proved correct. There is, however, no very striking correspondence in the details which she actually quotes ; and as the only account of the sitting is contained in a letter written by the mother "some months" later, and some months, also, after the unexpected receipt of the confirmatory letter from her absent son, which came a few weeks after the sitting, the record cannot be held to have much value (Vol. iii. pp. 141-9).

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GERMAN SOMNAMBULES

**I**N Germany the history of Animal Magnetism was more complex. As already said, Spiritualist views found many disciples. But not all the German magnetisers gave themselves over to parleying with spirits. From the first there were students of the new facts at least as cautious and sober-minded as in any other European country. With such men as Gmelin, Wienholt, Fischer, Kluge, Kieser, Animal Magnetism was, just as to Deleuze himself, primarily an adjunct to the art of healing; and perhaps most of the German investigators possessed sounder knowledge of the physical sciences in general and of medicine in particular than the earlier French magnetisers could claim. But the phenomena observed were essentially the same. The experiments of M. Tardy de Montravel were repeated, confirmed, and improved upon. Light was observed to stream from the fingers of the operator, from the poles of a magnet, from the heart of a living frog, or the spinal marrow of a recently killed ox. This radiant light would impregnate a glass of water, and would be conducted, reflected, or dispersed by the intervention of various substances. Metals exercised characteristic effects on somnambules at a distance of ten or fifteen paces, inducing severally pricking, warmth, numbness, drowsiness, catalepsy, and so on; the poles of the magnet could be distinguished by the different sensations to which they gave rise. In a word, we find scattered through the writings of the first two decades of the nineteenth century the germs of those curious pseudo-observations, which Reichenbach was a little later to expand into an enormous treatise.

Again we read that to the clairvoyant somnambule her body is transparent, so that the exact condition of every organ can be seen, and the nature of any ailment described. A good clairvoyant, of course, possessed the same power of insight into the bodily processes and ailments of others, and

could foretell the course of diseases, and prescribe the fitting remedies.

Again, in the books of this period we find much of community of sensation between operator and subject; of reading of thought; of the action of the operator's will—even at a distance of some miles—in sending the patient into trance; and finally of clairvoyance, whether at close quarters or at a considerable distance.<sup>1</sup> The latter faculty—though abundant illustrations of it are given—is said by Kieser<sup>2</sup> to be much rarer than in France. But the incident which apparently provoked the comparison—an account in the *Annales du Magnétisme Animal* of a man who on his first essay had made five women simultaneously clairvoyant in one evening—can hardly, perhaps, be taken as representative.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most fully recorded series of observations in thought-transference and clairvoyance is to be found in a case given at great length in the *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus*, by Dr. Van Ghert, Secretary of the Royal Mineralogical Society at Jena.<sup>4</sup> Van Ghert's patient was a young woman of twenty-eight, who appears to have been a neurotic of the same type as Frau Häuffe, and the other somnambules to be discussed later. Several instances are quoted in detail, in which the somnambule gave accurate descriptions, to persons who came from a distance, of their homes, the furniture contained in each room, the personal appearance of the inmates, their mental idiosyncrasies, and even the diseases from which they suffered, and the appropriate remedies. If we may trust Van Ghert, who seems to have been a careful observer and without strong bias towards the marvellous, the descriptions coincided so closely with the

<sup>1</sup> Kluge, *Versuch einer Darstellung des animalischen Magnetismus*, etc. (Berlin, 1815), gives a useful summary of the observations and views of his predecessors on all these points.

<sup>2</sup> *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus*, vol. i. part iii. pp. 126, 127.

<sup>3</sup> The numerous observations which are cited to prove the existence of a faculty of vision, either in the pit of the stomach or some other portion of the body, are as inconclusive as those quoted by the French Animal Magnetists. In most of the cases, indeed, no precautions, or wholly inadequate precautions, seem to have been taken to exclude normal vision through the half-closed eyes, and in the rare instances where vision at the time was apparently impossible, as when the word to be read was wrapped up in vellum paper and sealed before the sitting, there is still open the possibility that the subject might have surreptitiously obtained knowledge of the text beforehand, or that she might have been influenced by transmission of thought from the hypnotist and those around who knew the word. (*Archiv*, vol. iv. part iii. pp. 80-2. See also vol. iii. part ii. p. 131; part iii. pp. 14 and 18; v. part iii. p. 14; vi. part ii. pp. 103, 124, and elsewhere, and the numerous references given in Kluge's book already quoted.)

<sup>4</sup> *Archiv*, vol. ii. part i. pp. 3-186; part ii. pp. 3-51. The account given in the *Archiv* is translated from the original Dutch.

facts that something more than chance must have been at work. But the evidence, since it rests on Van Ghert's testimony alone, and we have no means of knowing how the conversations were reported, or what hints may have been given by the witnesses, is no better, perhaps not so good, as in some of the cases quoted in a later chapter from English observers.

A large selection of instances of apparent thought-transference and clairvoyance, cited for the most part from contemporary publications, will be found in another work of this date, *Der Magnetismus und die allgemeine Weltsprache*, by H. M. Wesermann, Government Assessor and Chief Inspector of Roads at Dusseldorf.<sup>1</sup> The most valuable part of Wesermann's book is a brief record of some experiments of his own in thought-transference at a distance. On four occasions he reports that he succeeded in inducing four separate acquaintances to dream on matters suggested by himself. On the fifth trial he caused the subject of the experiment, and a friend who happened to be in his company at the time, to see a waking vision of a woman's figure.<sup>2</sup> The experiments are of interest as anticipating very closely some experiments on the same lines recorded in recent years in the publications of the Society for Psychological Research.

The writers so far quoted, even when treating of clairvoyance and similar marvellous powers, expressly repudiated a Spiritualist or mystical interpretation of the phenomena, and regarded Animal Magnetism as a branch of physical science. Thus Wesermann supposed that his power of influencing the thoughts of a distant acquaintance depended upon the projection from himself of a stream of magnetic fluid, visible to the clairvoyant eye as a stream of light. Van Ghert's patient never professed to commune with angels. Kluge<sup>3</sup> contends that the pious Jung, in claiming that the denizens of the spiritual world are perceptible to our senses, overshoots the mark, and falls back into sheer materialism. Ghost-seeing, in Kluge's view, whether induced or spontaneous, is pure illusion. So Kieser, in reviewing in the *Archiv*<sup>4</sup> Meier's history of Auguste Müller, to be discussed later, takes occasion to controvert Meier's explanation of the apparition of his somnambule to a friend at a distance.

<sup>1</sup> Creveld, 1822.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-30. The experiments are quoted in *Phantasms of the Living*, vol. i. pp. 101, 102. The fifth and most important experiment is given in full in the *Journal S. P. R.* for March, 1890; and again in my own *Apparitions and Thought-Transference*, p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> *Versuch einer Darstellung*, pp. 300, 301.      <sup>4</sup> Vol. iii. part iii. p. 119.

Meier claimed the incident as a proof that the soul of the ecstatic can leave the body and make itself perceptible to human senses. Kieser sees in it merely proof of an action upon the mind of the seer exercised by the mind of the ecstatic. For the soul, says he, being immaterial, cannot make itself visible except through its proper body. But, while rejecting the crudely Spiritualistic view, Wienholt, Kieser, and Kluge—to mention no others—are agreed that in the higher stages of the trance the soul approaches the threshold of the universal life, and seems partly to free itself from the shackles of space and time.<sup>1</sup> Whilst Nasse goes further, and frankly claims that in somnambulism we have to deal with a fact of the spiritual order; and that any attempt to correlate its laws with those of the physical universe must end in failure.<sup>2</sup> It is clear, indeed, that men who believed in the reality of clairvoyance at a distance (as distinguished from reading the thoughts of those present) must have been hard put to it to find an explanation in physical terms.

But side by side with these sober-minded investigators there were many who saw in the phenomena of the trance proofs of intercourse with a spiritual world, and recorded the utterances of the somnambules as precious revelations from super-human sources. The founder of this school may be said to be J. H. Jung, better known as Jung-Stilling; not, indeed, that Jung could or did claim to be the originator of the scheme of spiritual cosmology which he propounded. Much of it could certainly be found in Swedenborg; much of it, again, is the common property of the mystics of all ages. And no small part of his teaching was simply a re-statement in modern terms of certain Christian beliefs. But Jung's special distinction is that he placed the doctrine of the psychic body on a new and surer basis, first by associating it with the conception—then for the first time beginning to gain general acceptance in the scientific world—of the luminiferous ether; and secondly, by supporting and explaining it by means of illustrations drawn from the observed phenomena of somnambulism. Jung, who was born in 1740, began life in humble circumstances. In early manhood, however, he obtained a medical degree, and practised for many years as a doctor, ultimately becoming Professor of Political Economy at the Universities of Marburg and Heidelberg. His book, *Theorie*

<sup>1</sup> Wienholt, *Lectures in Somnambulism* (? 1804). I know this work only in an English translation. Kieser, "*System des Tellurismus oder thierischen Magnetismus*." Kluge, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-306.

<sup>2</sup> *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus*, vol. i. part iii. pp. 3-22.

*der Geister-Kunde*, appears to have been published in the last years of his life. It is hardly, even in form, a scientific treatise, being avowedly a piece of Christian apologetics. About three-fourths of the book consist of a collection of ghost stories, anecdotes of prophecy, and second sight, recorded without any attempt at verification or critical treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Jung gives a convenient summary of his theory, in the shape of fifty-five propositions, from which I quote the following :—

9. Animal Magnetism undeniably proves that we have an inward man, a soul, which is constituted of the divine spark, the immortal spirit possessing reason and will, and of a luminous body (*Lichtskülle*), which is inseparable from it.

10. Light, electric, magnetic, galvanic matter, and ether appear to be all one and the same body under different modifications. This light-substance or ether is the element which connects body and soul, and the spiritual (*Sinnenwelt*) and material world together.

11. When the inward man, the human soul, forsakes the inward sphere, where the senses operate (*die innere Merkestätte der Sinner verlässt*) and merely continues the vital functions, the body falls into an entranced state, or a profound sleep, during which the soul acts more freely, powerfully, and actively. All its faculties are elevated.

12. The more the soul is divested of the body, the more extensive, free, and powerful is its inward sphere of operation. It has, therefore, no need whatever of the body in order to live and exist. The latter is rather an hindrance to it. . . .

13. The whole of these propositions are sure and certain inferences, which I have drawn from experiments in Animal Magnetism. These most important experiments undeniably show that the soul does not require the organs of sense in order to be able to see, hear, smell, taste, and feel in a much more perfect state. . . .

30. The boundless ether that fills the space of our solar system is the element of spirits in which they live and move. The atmosphere

<sup>1</sup> The value of this evidence may be estimated from a single example. Jung is anxious to prove his contention that the soul of a man can leave the body while the man is still alive, and show itself in a distant place. The narrative which he selects for this purpose was told him by a friend (unnamed) on whose veracity he could rely; the friend heard it from a respectable (*redliche*) individual (unnamed); the source of this respectable individual's information is not mentioned; but he was not, apparently, personally concerned in the episode, and it cannot be inferred from Jung's account that he was even acquainted with the chief actors (unnamed). The only date mentioned in connection with the case is "about 60 or 70 years ago," and this does not relate to the date of the incident itself, which had taken place an indefinite number of years previously. I do not quote the story in full, since, perhaps because of the length of its pedigree, perhaps because of the soundness of the narrator's theological views, it forms a prominent item in nearly every collection of ghost stories since published (*Th. der Geister Kunde*, new edition, p. 60. Stuttgart, 1827).

(*Dunstkreis*) that surrounds our earth, down to its centre, and particularly the night, is the abode of fallen angels, and of such human souls as die in an unconverted state.<sup>1</sup>

It remains to add that Jung taught that the trance was a diseased condition; and that the attempt to communicate with spirits or foretell the future by such means was highly dangerous and sinful (Propositions 23, 24); and warns his readers against yielding implicit trust to the somnambule's utterances. But Jung's successors paid little heed to these warnings, and in the course of the next thirty years there were recorded at prodigious length the sayings and doings of many "highly remarkable somnambules." One of the first of these to attract attention—an attention which the nature of her performances scarcely seems to have merited—was a certain Fraülein Auguste Müller, of Carlsruhe, whose history, as preserved by Dr. Meier, may be taken as fairly representative.<sup>2</sup> The young woman in the trance was able to diagnose and prescribe for the ailments of herself and other persons in the usual fashion. She said in the trance that she could discern not only the bodies of men, but also their thoughts and characters; but no proofs are offered of this power. She claimed to converse with the spirit of her dead mother. She also said that she could visit her brother in Vienna, and make her presence known to him; but she rejected Dr. Meier's suggestion that she should speak aloud, for fear that she should frighten him. It is recorded that with her eyes closed she could read theatre tickets and songs out of a music-book. But no details are given. The nearest approach to a test is as follows: Meier asked her one evening whether she could tell him anything noteworthy which had recently happened in his own family, and the clairvoyant in reply was able to tell him of the death of his father-in-law at a town fifteen miles off. Meier had received the news of this event on the morning of that day, but was confident—a confidence which he does not enable us to share—that the somnambule knew nothing about it. One other case may be cited. A friend of Auguste, one Catharine, happened to be suffering from toothache, and told the somnambule that she would probably be unable to pay her usual visit on the following day. Auguste replied, "I will visit you, then, to-night." That night Catharine is reported to have seen Auguste enter her room clothed

<sup>1</sup> From the translation by Samuel Jackson, *Theory of Pneumatology*. London, 1834.

<sup>2</sup> *Höchst merkwürdige Geschichte der magnetisch hellsehenden Auguste Müller*. Stuttgart, 1818.

in a night-dress. The form, which hovered above the floor, came up to Catharine and lay beside her in bed. In the morning Catharine awoke to find her toothache gone, and was much astonished to learn that Auguste had never left her own bed all the night through. The incident is regarded by Meier as a manifest proof of the existence of a psychic body. Kieser, as already mentioned, reviewing the case in the *Archiv*, adduces it as a striking instance of action at a distance, conditioned by the *rapport* between the young women. The reader may possibly prefer a still simpler hypothesis.

In another case, which is recorded by Dr. C. Römer, we advance a little further into the realms of the unknown.<sup>1</sup>

The somnambule in this case was Römer's own daughter, a girl of fifteen, who in November, 1813, was seized with convulsive attacks, followed by catalepsy. Ultimately she became somnambular, prescribed for her own ailments and those of her father and other persons, rejecting all other medical treatment than her own. Römer frequently asserts that she displayed in the trance knowledge which she could not possibly have acquired from normal sources. But he offers little evidence for the statement; and most of the utterances which he records were from their nature incapable of verification. One curious feature of this trance—a feature which we shall see developed to a much greater extent in a later somnambule—was the tendency to arithmetical symbolism. Römer reproduces a whole page of numerical calculations, the meaning of which is left obscure, but which seem to have profoundly impressed the onlookers as having presumably some mystic significance.<sup>2</sup> In another direction Fraülein Römer advanced beyond Auguste Müller. Like her, she conversed freely with her dead relations. But, further, she was conducted, sometimes by a deceased relative, but more frequently by the spirit of a still living companion, one Louise, to the moon. But, alas! her description of her first voyage reveals a conception of the solar system scarcely more adequate than that of the Blessed Damosel, watching, "from the gold bar of Heaven,"

". . . the tides of day and night  
With flame and darkness ridge  
The void, to where this Earth  
Spins like a fretful midge."

<sup>1</sup> *Ausführliche historische Darstellung einer höchst merkwürdigen Somnambule*, etc., etc. von C. Römer, PH.D., etc. Stuttgart, 1821.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

It was night when she left the earth—5.30 on a January afternoon—and continued night, apparently, as she voyaged to the moon, for she describes how that luminary, at one point, showed forty times larger, but there is no mention of the sun. However, she enjoyed a unique astronomical experience. She watched the sun rise over the lunar mountains, basked in his rays for a whole lunar day, witnessed his setting, and returned to the earth in time for supper. Miss Römer was probably not aware that in the ordinary course of nature about a fortnight would elapse between the rising and the setting of the sun on our satellite.

After this, no description of birds, flowers, waterfalls, mountains, lovely valleys, and even the inhabitants of the moon, can seem anything but tame. In truth, her account of lunar scenery bears some resemblance to a pre-Raphaelite painter's conception of the plains of heaven. At her first visit to the moon she learns that her two little sisters had already gone to "Juno": the spirits of the dead apparently come first to the moon, and then progress to higher spheres.<sup>1</sup> The knowledge of this fact lends a painful interest to Miss Römer's first interview with her deceased grandparents, whom she meets in the moon, and, with the terrible candour of the clairvoyant, asks why they have not already gone higher. Satisfactory explanations are given; and, indeed, the somnambule allows that her relatives shine more than they did upon the earth.<sup>2</sup>

It would be scarcely profitable to carry our study of these revelations further. It should be noted, however, that Römer apparently accepts them, if not as indubitably authentic, at least as having serious claims upon our consideration. He records them with scrupulous care and at great length, and he mentions that the descriptions of the inhabitants of other worlds given by his daughter accord precisely with the descriptions given by Ennemoser's subject and by another more recent clairvoyant.<sup>3</sup>

Justinus Kerner, a well-known poet of that generation and a physician of some distinction, had his attention early called to the trance and its value in therapeutics. In 1826 he published the history of two "remarkable" somnambules, whom he had treated magnetically. Towards the end of the same year there came to him at Weinsberg, to be treated by him, one Frau Frederica Hauffe, better known from her birth-place as the "Seeress of Prevorst." A full history of her

<sup>1</sup> Page 54.

<sup>2</sup> Page 85.

<sup>3</sup> Page 213, note.

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remarkable trances was published by Kerner in 1829, shortly after the death of the Seeress.<sup>1</sup>

From her childhood she had been delicate; had suffered from convulsive attacks, had fallen into spontaneous trance, and seen visions. She had already been magnetised, with more or less success, by different persons on several occasions. When she came to Weinsberg, Kerner, by his own account, was somewhat incredulous, and disposed to treat her by ordinary medicine rather than by magnetism. After a few weeks, however, finding drugs of no use, he magnetised her, and thereafter followed implicitly the treatment prescribed by her in the trance. From that time, until her death in August, 1829, she appears to have spent the greater part of her existence in somnambulism—the trance, or secondary condition, lasting on one occasion for about a year.

The phenomena claimed to be observed in her case were such as we are already familiar with. She reacted in various ways to the presence or contact of stones, metals, plants, and drugs. She would become cataleptic if left seated on a sandstone bench; glass or crystal, on the other hand, awakened her from the magnetic state. She wielded the divining rod with great success. She could distinguish magnetised water by its appearance, and could even tell how many passes had been made over it. Further, in the magnetic state the lower part of her body would involuntarily rise out of the water in her bath—a procedure which reminded Kerner of the mediæval test for witches. She could see the internal mechanism of the human body, and could trace and accurately describe all the ramifications of the nervous system. In the case of persons who had lost a limb she could see the psychic form of the limb still attached to the body.

But signs and wonders of this kind, which are more or less common to all somnambules of the period, need not detain us further. The Seeress is conspicuous, above all her fellows in the history of somnambulism in Germany, for three things: the numerous proofs which she purported to afford of abnormal powers of vision, whether of the distant or of the future, and of seeing and conversing with ghosts; the physical disturbances which were observed in her presence; and her extraordinary revelations on things spiritual.

<sup>1</sup> *Die Seherin von Prevorst, Eröffnungen über das innere Leben des Menschen und über das Hereinragen einer Geisterwelt in die Unsere.* Stuttgart und Tübingen. A second edition, to which reference is made in this account, was published in 1832, and two others, in 1838 and 1846 respectively. An English translation, greatly abridged, by Mrs. Crowe, was published in London in 1845.

As regards the first, Kerner gives several instances of clairvoyant and prophetic dreams and visions ; but though he shows a better notion of evidence than many of his contemporaries, none of the records are of much account. Dates and other essential details are frequently lacking, and in the only cases which appear to be definite and conclusive we are dependent, so far as can be gathered from Kerner's narrative, on members of the Seeress' family for all particulars of the alleged fulfilment.

But the Seeress' supernormal faculties found their chief field of activity in seeing and holding conversations with phantasmal figures, the spirits of deceased men and women, who came to her mostly for help, guidance, and prayer. In this manner she held communication, on occasion, with the spirits of deceased citizens of Weinsberg, and received from them much information on their affairs and family history.

Thus, a certain poor family in Weinsberg were disturbed by a ghost. This came to Kerner's knowledge, and he brought the woman of the house to see Frau Hauffe. Thereafter the ghost seems to have attached itself to the Seeress. He—the ghost—told her that he had lived in the house where he had first appeared, and that he had in his lifetime defrauded two orphans ; later he said that he had lived about 1700 ; that he had died at the age of seventy-nine ; and later still, that his name was Belon. Search in the town records showed that there had been a burgomaster of that name, who had actually lived in the house named ; he had died in 1740, aged seventy-nine, and had been a guardian of orphans.<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion the Seeress was much disturbed by noises from an unquiet ghost, who ultimately revealed himself as the spirit of a bankrupt solicitor, recently deceased, who had owed much money in the town. In connection with the communication the Seeress was enabled, as a test, to describe the whereabouts of a certain document, which was ultimately discovered in the position described by her in the office of the High Bailiff.<sup>2</sup> The incident is narrated at considerable length by Kerner, who regards it as a striking proof of spirit-identity. It does not appear, however, that either in this case or in that of the Burgomaster Belon any information was actually furnished by Madame Hauffe which could not have been obtained from local gossip, or at most by carefully conducted inquiries.

These ghostly figures which purported constantly to appear to the Seeress herself, both by night and by day, were

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. pp. 136-71.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. pp. 93-110.

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occasionally visible to others. Thus Kerner himself on one occasion saw a cloudy figure :—

“On the 8th December, at seven in the evening, I happened to be in Frau H.’s outer room, from which one could see into her bedroom. I saw there a cloudlike figure (a grey pillar of cloud as though with a head), without any definite outlines. I seized a light and hurried silently into the room with it. There I found her staring fixedly at the spot where I had seen the cloudy form. It had disappeared, however, from my view.”<sup>1</sup>

Kerner states that this is the only occasion on which he himself saw a ghost ; but elsewhere he tells us that one evening, when they were sitting in a lighted room at the supper-table, a form like a white cloud floated past the window. This form was seen by all.<sup>2</sup> There were women servants and other persons who slept in the same room as the Seeress, or in one adjoining, who at various times professed to have seen figures similar to those seen by Frau Hauffe.

More noteworthy, however, than these apparitions—seen for the most part by servants and peasant women, whose nervous equilibrium had, no doubt, been already upset by hearing of Frau Hauffe’s marvellous powers—were the noises and physical phenomena which took place generally whilst the Seeress was staying in Kerner’s house. Kerner himself and his wife on several occasions heard knocks on the walls and windows of the bedroom, and other sounds, when they retired for the night.<sup>3</sup> All the household on one occasion heard somebody trying to force the house door.<sup>4</sup> Frau Hauffe’s sister heard the noise of chains at the window.<sup>5</sup> These noises, especially the knocks and raps (*Klöpfeln und Klatschen*), were so puzzling that Frau Kerner on one occasion spent part of the night in Frau Hauffe’s room in order, if possible, to ascertain their origin. The raps began about 10 p.m., proceeding apparently from the bedstead, the table, and the walls. Kerner tells us that his wife satisfied herself that they were not caused by either the Seeress or her sister, who was present in the room.<sup>6</sup>

The physical phenomena mostly occurred when the Seeress was alone or accompanied only by her sister. Thus gravel was on several occasions thrown in at the open window. Kerner himself did not see the gravel thrown, but he saw it lying on the floor, and found that it resembled the gravel

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. ii. 257 ; see also page 33.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i. p. 133 ; ii. p. 155, 166, 229, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. ii. p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. ii. p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. ii. p. 183.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. ii. p. 141.

in the garden just outside the house. One evening some of this gravel was thrown at the maid when she was standing near the house.<sup>1</sup> Again, a stool was thrown across the room,<sup>2</sup> and a knitting-needle flew through the air and settled in a glass of water;<sup>3</sup> but both these phenomena had the Seeress herself for their only witness.

There were cases, however, in which other inmates of the house were privileged to witness the physical phenomena, or at least to be present in the room when things were moved. The following is a brief summary of the evidence given by Kerner under this head.

On one occasion, the Seeress having announced that a ghost would visit her on a certain night, a trustworthy person was deputed by Kerner to share the bed of Frau Hauffe's sister, who slept in the same room as Frau Hauffe, and watch for the coming of the ghost. The trustworthy person fell asleep at 11 p.m., and was wakened at midnight by the sister getting out of bed to give Frau Hauffe her supper. Hardly had the sister got back into bed, when strange and alarming noises were heard all about the room. Presently the Seeress, who meanwhile lay quite still, began to talk to the ghost, and at last said, "Open it yourself." Then the trustworthy person beheld, "with awe such as she had never felt before," a music-book which lay on the bed gradually open itself as though by an unseen hand, the while Frau Hauffe remained still motionless.<sup>4</sup> On another occasion, when Kerner himself was present in the room with the sister, small pieces of cinder were thrown, not this time through the window, but from a corner of the room. Kerner could discover no natural cause for the phenomenon. He gives no details, however, and does not mention whether the Seeress was herself present, but leaves us to infer that she was.<sup>5</sup> An account of two other physical phenomena witnessed by Kerner or a member of his family may be quoted in full.

"An hour later, as Frau H. lay dressed on her bed in her boots, which were fastened firmly on her feet with clasps, she saw this ghost again go clanking through the room as though wearing spurs. Then she turned round at once without looking at him closely (besides it was in the dusk), lay on her other side and fell asleep, as it seemed to her. At that moment I [Kerner] entered the room, where her sister also was. Frau H. lay quite still as I looked at her, but her boots at this moment parted violently from her feet, which remained motionless, as though pulled off by an invisible hand, sped

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 165-7.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. ii. p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. ii. p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. ii. p. 169.

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through the air towards the sister, who was just looking out of the window, and turned round at that moment and laid themselves quietly on the ground close beside her."<sup>1</sup>

Three days later another remarkable phenomenon is thus recorded :—

"Whilst Frau H., her sister, and my daughter were alone in the room (Frau H. was lying in bed), suddenly the lamp shade, which stood on the table at a distance from everyone, flew to the other side of the room, as though thrown by an invisible hand. A moment before this happened Frau H. had seen the ghost with the spurs come in at the door, but she immediately became cataleptic (*fiel in Erstarrung*) and did not see what happened to the lamp shade."<sup>2</sup>

The only other physical disturbances recorded by Kerner for which there is any independent evidence are as follows: Kerner and his wife, at midnight (and therefore presumably in the dark), heard a noise in their room, and found that a table which stood by the bed had been thrown into the middle of the room: the Seeress was at the time staying in the house.<sup>3</sup> A trustworthy person, who shared the sister's bed one night, saw the nightlight extinguished without visible cause, and thereafter saw the candlestick glowing of itself.<sup>4</sup> A maid-servant and another person, hearing a great noise in the room where Frau Hauße lay alone in bed, entered the room, when a stool was flung at them as by an invisible hand from another quarter of the room from that in which the Seeress lay asleep.<sup>5</sup>

The attentive reader will not fail to observe that none of the evidence for these marvels, except Kerner's own, is at first hand, and that the presence of Frau Hauße's sister was apparently indispensable to the production of physical phenomena before witnesses. Indeed, this dependence on the support of her family forms, as has been already noted in the case of the alleged instances of clairvoyance and prophecy, a marked feature in Frau Hauße's manifestations of supernormal power.

It will be convenient if we consider, the case of the Seeress of Prevorst, both in its evidential aspects and as regards the mystical teachings of the ecstatic, side by side with another case of the kind, recorded a few years later by Heinrich Werner, Doctor of Philosophy.<sup>6</sup> It is fair to assume, es-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. ii. pp. 211-2.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. ii. p. 222.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. ii. p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. ii. p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> *Die Schutzgeister, oder merkwürdige Blicke zweier Seherinnen in die Geisterwelt*, etc., etc. Stuttgart und Tübingen, 1839.

pecially as the later book was also published at Stuttgart, that Werner's somnambules as well as himself were probably acquainted with the doings and teachings of the Seeress of Prevorst. There is indeed a striking similarity in both respects between the two books. "R. D.," Werner's leading clairvoyant, was a girl of eighteen, of whose medical history and manifold ailments he gives a minute account. Werner is careful to explain that, so far was he from attempting to induce a state of magnetic clairvoyance, both he and his patient were much surprised when she spontaneously fell into that state.<sup>1</sup> However, the trance once established appears to have recurred, or was re-induced, at almost daily intervals.

The physical phenomena attending R. D. were not so numerous or striking as those just considered. Here are two instances: The clairvoyant had just been engaged in conversation with a wicked monk, of most terrible appearance, and a Jesuit to boot, who by his own confession had murdered his five children and buried them one by one in a cloister. Even Albert, R.'s guardian spirit, could not always keep this fearsome being at a distance. Except for this spiritual companion, Werner was alone with the clairvoyant. He heard, as if proceeding from a small table near him, a clatter (*Klirren*) like a cup rattling in a saucer, but could find nothing to account for the sound. Presently it occurred again, but louder, and was repeated several times. Werner was completely puzzled. R. D. explained that the wicked monk had made the noise, and was much delighted with the effect produced.<sup>2</sup>

In the other case the spirit was more ambitious. Werner returned at noon one day to his lodgings, which consisted of five rooms, leading into one another, the suite terminating at either end—an arrangement common in Germany—in a door giving on to the staircase; these doors stood opposite to each other. The one on the left was fastened on the day in question. Werner entered by that on the right. On his entrance Werner, "together with the lady whom he found"<sup>3</sup> in one of the rooms (no further account of this lady is given), heard the sound of a heavy fall in the front room, to which the door on the left gave immediate entrance. They both rushed through the suite of connecting rooms, and found that in this front room two flower-pots, which had stood on the ledge of the middle window, had been violently flung to the floor and broken in pieces, the sherds, earth, and plants being scattered right across the room. Moreover, one of the curtains

<sup>1</sup> Introduction, pp. xii., xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Pages 188, 189.

<sup>3</sup> *die Dame* possibly means the landlady of the lodgings.

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of the middle window had been twisted round a birdcage which hung from the ceiling. The window was open, but the jalousies were closed; the day intensely hot, and no wind stirring; and there was not even a cat in the room. From his house Werner went into Stuttgart in the afternoon, and returned, at six p.m., straight to the bedside of his patient, without telling anyone of the, to him inexplicable, incidents of the morning. Nevertheless, the clairvoyant showed herself acquainted with the whole affair, and was even able to furnish the explanation, to wit, that the aforesaid wicked monk had thrown about the flower-pots after a desperate struggle with the angel-pure Albert, who tried to thrust him out of the house.<sup>1</sup>

Of the occasional instances of terrestrial clairvoyance the following is the case which Werner himself regards as the most striking. The clairvoyant had just been prescribing eau-de-cologne for the headaches from which Frau Werner was suffering, when she suddenly broke off, anxious and trembling, and cried—

“‘For God’s sake! oh, Albert, help, save! My Emilie is falling out on to the street; oh, hasten, and save—(a short, anxious pause)—God be thanked, help has already come! My faithful Guide and Friend, thou hast prepared help, before I knew of the danger, or could ask for it.’ ‘What has shaken and disturbed you so?’ ‘Oh, my little sister at U.’ (Her whole body trembled violently). ‘What is wrong with her?’ ‘She was in the upper story of the house just when they were drawing up wood from the street with a windlass. She wanted to catch the rope with the weight dangling at it, and as there is no parapet up there, the swaying would have dragged her out, if my father had not caught hold of her at that moment and pulled her in.’”

A few days later, in response to an inquiry from Werner as to whether anything remarkable had happened on the day of the trance, a letter (of which the date and signature are not given) was received, confirming all these facts, and stating that the father had been disturbed in his office, at some distance from the house, by an inexplicable feeling of disquiet, which had finally led him to his house, and then to the upper room, just in the nick of time to save his child.

Albert, it is hardly necessary to say, took the whole credit of the performance; and it was, indeed, his intervention on this occasion which finally convinced Werner of that admirable spirit’s independent existence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pages 190-2.

<sup>2</sup> Pages 89-91. See also p. 451. For other instances of alleged clairvoyance, see pp. 70, 73, 99, 123, 125, etc.

Finally, let us briefly consider the doctrinal utterances of the somnambules, and the inferences founded on those utterances as to the constitution of man and the nature of the spirit world.

The central point of these teachings is that man consists of body, soul, and spirit, the two latter surviving death and forming the spiritual man. But the soul itself is clothed, for the time at least, after leaving the body by an ethereal body (*Nervengeist*) which partakes rather of the nature of body than of soul, and ultimately with progressive spirits, according to some somnambules, decays and leaves the soul free. It is apparently this *Nervengeist* which carries on the vital processes when the soul leaves the body in the magnetic trance, and which after death withdraws with the soul and leaves the body to perish. It is the *Nervengeist* which attracts to itself grosser particles and becomes visible even to the fleshly eye in the case of low and undeveloped spirits.

The conception implicitly held by all mystical writers at this time of the relation between body, *Nervengeist*, soul, and spirit is apparently that they differed from each other only as in the gradation of coarser and more attenuated substances. Indeed, Werner expresses this conception in so many words. There is, he says, but one absolutely immaterial Being—that is God. Below God there is an infinite chain from seraph to grain of sand, from highest self-consciousness to most absolute unconsciousness, each link in the chain having more of earth intermixed with its spiritual nature than that which went before. The soul of man occupies some intermediate position in this universal procession. Would it not, he asks, be a piece of extreme folly and self-conceit to suppose that the spiritual part of man, as soon as it was separated from the body, could be as absolutely immaterial as God Himself?<sup>1</sup>

But apart from this general scheme of man's constitution, which was more or less common to all the mystics of the time, and has been adopted and generously amplified by Spiritualists and Theosophists since, the Seeress of Prevorst is responsible for other revelations of a very curious kind. She described, with the utmost minuteness, certain systems of circles—designated respectively Sun-Circles and Life-Circles—which had relation apparently to spiritual conditions and the passage of time. Kerner gives most amazing diagrams of these circles. The grand sun-circle has two concentric inner circles and innumerable radii, and the inner-

<sup>1</sup> Page 432.

most concentric circle is itself ornamented with twelve subsidiary systems of triple concentric circles, having their centres at equidistant points on the circumference of the primary circle (itself the innermost circle of a larger system). Then the Seeress had a life-circle of her own, and seven private sun-circles of a somewhat less intricate nature, with an intercalary circle in the seventh. All these circles are ornamented, in addition to the radii, with eccentric straight lines like the spokes of some bicycles; and the interpretation of all this bewildering maze of lines—

"With centric and eccentric scribbled o'er,  
Cycle and epicycle, orb in orb"—

is furnished partly by cyphers, partly by words of the primitive universal language written in the primitive ideographs. With the somnambule's dissertations on the meaning of these interlacing circles and the mystic relation of the numbers attached to human life, all of which Kerner records with the most amazing patience, we need not here concern ourselves further. Görres, Eschenmayer, and other members of the circle of mystics, which continued for some years to expand and illustrate the revelations of the Seeress,<sup>1</sup> found in this part of her teaching analogies with the philosophical ideas of Pythagoras, of Plato, and of more recent mystics. But they do not seem to have exercised much effect on the utterances of later somnambules. The conception of a primitive universal language, however, deserves some further consideration. The characters of this language, as preserved for us in Kerner's plates, bear to the uninstructed eye some resemblance to Hebrew; but they are in many instances quite as complicated as an Egyptian hieroglyph. It was to Hebrew, however, that the Seeress herself, following the example of Dr. Dee's familiars, compared the language; it was, according to her, the primitive universal tongue and resembled the language actually spoken in the time of Jacob. She frequently spoke the tongue in the trance, maintaining that it was the common language of the inner life. Kerner asserts that she was quite consistent in her use of the words of this primitive tongue, and that those who heard her often gained by degrees some familiarity with its meaning. A few words are quoted and their likeness to Hebrew pointed out. Werner's somnambule, R. D., also made use of this language, and confirmed Frau Hauffe's account of it; and Werner

<sup>1</sup> In the *Blätter aus Prevorst*, of which several volumes were published from 1831 onwards.

himself gives us a dissertation upon it which recalls faint echoes of the age-long contention of the Schoolmen on the relation of words to things.<sup>1</sup>

With primitive man, as yet not wholly estranged from God by sin, thought, according to Werner, answered exactly to the realities of the external world, and speech was the organic correlate of thought. This was because man shared the nature of God, with whom thought, its object and its expression are all one. The name of a thing in that primitive Nature-speech was not, as now, a mere label, fortuitous and inadequate; it expressed by some one symbol—which was, indeed, not a symbol, but rather a reflection—the form, properties, value, and existence of the thing named. With the coming of sin, the primitive Nature-speech was lost and forgotten; traces of it remain in Hebrew, and in the babbling of children; but the nations of the earth have now to be content with innumerable collocations of accidental vocables, which with ever-growing elaboration and refinement yet continually fail to be an adequate mirror of even the external aspect of this complex world. But the compendious and all-sufficient vocabulary of the world's childhood is yet preserved in the inner spirit of man: and in rare states of exaltation he can recover something of what he has lost. The priestess who chanted the Greek oracles expressed herself in that forgotten tongue, and from pure somnambules in the highest stage of ecstasy we can catch its apocalyptic accents.

Werner, had he known it, might have found further support for his argument in the curious outbreak of speaking with unknown tongues in Edward Irving's church in London, which had taken place in the interval between the publication of Kerner's book and his own, and in the account of the primæval language given by Dr. Dee.<sup>2</sup>

It is by the German Magnetists of the first half of the nineteenth century, whose works we have just been considering, that the foundations of the movement of Modern Spiritualism were laid. It is not merely that we find here in miniature all the characteristics of the later belief; it would be easy to demonstrate that it was through the writings of Jung-Stilling, Kerner, and their contemporaries that a path was prepared in this country, and probably also in America, for the coming of the new gospel. It was from this source, after Swedenborg,

<sup>1</sup> Pages 353-61.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter i. above. See also the account given by Flournoy (*Des Indes à la planète Mars*) of the Martian language constructed by his clairvoyant. Flournoy's results are quoted below, Book IV. chap. vii.

that the Howitts, Shorter, Mrs. De Morgan, and others of the early English Spiritualists derived most of their philosophy ; and it was largely owing to the intermixture of physical phenomena with the revelations of the Seeress of Prevorst that the grosser manifestations of the same kind found afterwards so ready a reception.

Again, all the chief problems of Spiritualism are posed in the records of this time ; on the one hand, we find in the observations of men like Wesermann and Van Ghert characteristic examples of apparent thought-transference and clairvoyance ; on the other, we find in Frau Hauffe and her kind indications of systematic trickery, often of a puerile character, whose only object appears to have been the satisfaction of a diseased vanity, conjoined with trances and ecstasies apparently genuine, and outpourings, also probably not less genuine, of religious feeling.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ENGLISH MESMERISTS

AS we have already seen, the phenomena of Animal Magnetism attracted little attention in this country, alone of European nations, for the first twenty-five years, at any rate, of the last century. Not, indeed, but that some echoes of the marvellous doings of Mesmer and his disciples had reached England. One Dr. Bell, Professor of Animal Magnetism and member of the Philosophical Harmonic Society of Paris, founded in 1782, had, in 1785, after attending a course of lectures by Bergasse and Duval Despremenil and passing a sufficient examination, received from that society under the hands of its president and council a certificate setting forth his competence to teach and practise the science. Equipped thus "by patent from the first noblemen in France," he returned to his native land, and proceeded to give lectures and practical demonstrations in many of the chief towns of the United Kingdom. His book,<sup>1</sup> dedicated to the pupils of his different classes, contains a fair exposition of Mesmer's teachings, such as we have already found in the writings of the earliest French Magnetists. Beginning with a dissertation on general ideas of motion, it proceeds to a consideration of magnetism at large, and as affecting the human body in particular. He gives a full description of the large oaken tub, eight feet across, which he himself used as a *baquet*, and incidentally mentions various points of difference between this apparatus and that used by "our society in Paris." In his treatment he is careful to begin by placing the patient with his back to the north; and he makes liberal use of artificial magnets and of magnetised water. Further, he gives instructions for magnetising, not the sick only, but a shilling, or a guinea, rivers, rooms, trees, and

<sup>1</sup> *The General and Particular Principles of Animal Electricity and Magnetism, etc.*, by Monsieur le Docteur Bell, 1792. Entered in Stationers' Hall.

other inanimate objects, referring in this connection to the results which he had witnessed "at the late Marquisses de Puységur's and Tissard's seats." It is interesting to note that he claims to have observed somnambulism as early as 1784; and that amongst the phenomena of the trance he describes how some of his patients can see in the dark, can tell what is going on in another room, and can diagnose and prescribe for their own diseases and those of others. There is one curious touch, which marks off Dr. Bell from generous enthusiasts, such as were Puységur and many of the early French Magnetisers. He recommends his disciples to have as little to do as possible with scrofula, cutaneous eruptions, and consumption; such diseases were very dangerous to treat. In the first two cases the magnetiser may contract the disease, in the last he may impart too much of his own vital force to the sufferer.

Bell was followed in 1788 by a pupil of D'Eslon, one de Mainauduc, who remained in this country for some years, teaching and holding private demonstrations. In the last decade of the eighteenth century many other professors of the art of Mesmerism sprang up in London and the provinces, and appear to have found the profession profitable—Holloway, Miss Prescott, Louthembourg, and others. The last-named lecturer's demonstrations at Hammersmith in 1790 were so crowded that three thousand persons are reported to have attended on one evening.<sup>1</sup> The craze, however, seems to have died out in a few years without leaving any serious traces even on popular belief, and without apparently producing any effect on scientific opinion.

In 1798 Perkins' *Metallic Tractors* came upon the scene; and after that date all interest in Mesmerism seems to have completely disappeared. At any rate, we hear little more of it in this country for a full generation. In 1828 Richard Chenevix, F.R.S., an Irish gentleman who had resided for some years on the Continent, and had there frequent opportunities of witnessing the magnetic treatment, came to this country and gave demonstrations before a large number of persons in London, Dublin, and elsewhere. Amongst those who witnessed his experiments were Faraday, Sir B. Brodie, Dr. Henry Holland, Dr. Prout, and many other medical men.<sup>2</sup>

The interest excited, however, appears to have been short-

<sup>1</sup> *Animal Magnetism*, etc., by George Winter, M.D. Bristol, 1801.

<sup>2</sup> See his articles on "Mesmerism, improperly denominated Animal Magnetism," published in the *London Medical and Physical Journal* of 1829.

lived, and five years later J. C. Colquhoun complains in *Isis Revelata*<sup>1</sup> that, "of late our medical men seem liable to the reproach of having almost entirely neglected the most important labours of their professional brethren upon the Continent," *i.e.* in connection with Mesmerism.

In 1837 "Baron" du Potet, who had assisted seventeen years previously at some experiments in action at a distance at the Hôtel Dieu in Paris, came to London to practise Mesmerism. He obtained an introduction to Elliotson, whose interest in the subject had already been awakened by Chenevix. Elliotson allowed du Potet in the first instance to mesmerise several patients at University College Hospital. Shortly afterwards, however, he undertook the mesmeric treatment of the patients himself, and succeeded in evoking the somnambulic state and many singular phenomena in connection with it, notably in two sisters named Okey. The matter caused some stir. Many men of science and other persons of distinction, including even royal personages, came to the hospital to see the marvels. So great was the crowd that Elliotson applied to the Council for permission to hold demonstrations in one of the theatres of the college. Permission was refused, and he was finally requested, in the interests of the hospital, to discontinue the practice of Mesmerism within its walls. He replied by resigning, in the autumn of 1838, his professorship and severing his connection with the hospital.

The objection of the hospital authorities to the use of Mesmerism was not altogether ill-founded. Elliotson had not, indeed, confined himself to using the mesmeric sleep as an auxiliary in therapeutics. He claimed to demonstrate many other phenomena of a dubious kind, especially the extraordinary influence of metals and other substances in conveying and enhancing the virtues of the mesmeric effluence. Gold, silver, platinum, water, and the moisture of the skin were found to transmit it; copper, zinc, tin, pewter, etc., unless wet, were non-conductors. Of the conductors, nickel and gold were said to be the best; but the mesmeric influence as transmitted by nickel was of an extremely violent and even dangerous character. Some of the most striking effects were produced by gold: thus, if a sovereign, mesmerised by being retained in the operator's hand, were placed in the hand of one of the Okeys, it would cause cramp, either local or general, trance, or coma, the

<sup>1</sup> *Isis Revelata: an Inquiry into the Origin, Progress, and Present State of Animal Magnetism.* Edinburgh, 1833.

effect being, it was alleged, strictly proportioned to the strength of the original dose of mesmeric fluid communicated to the metal. Analogous effects were observed if a sovereign was placed successively in the hands of several hospital patients and thence transferred to the hand of the sensitive, the effect produced in the latter varying in strength with the state of the patients' vitality. If mesmerised sovereigns were placed in a pewter vessel, the influence would be gradually transmitted to the sensitive's hand. In stooping to pick up a mesmerised sovereign from the floor, the Okeys would suddenly become cataleptic, as their hands approached the metal, and remain fixed in a stooping position. Dr. Herbert Mayo records<sup>1</sup> a still more striking experiment. It sufficed for the Mesmerist to gaze intently at a stone mantelpiece, and to place a sovereign on the spot where his gaze had fallen, for the metal to become imbued with the mesmeric virtue and to produce the characteristic reactions with a sensitive subject.

Water and other substances could also be mesmerised; the sensitives had prevision of the course of their own diseases; and transposition of sensation, to the pit of the stomach or the general surface of the skin, was also occasionally observed. Mr. Thomas Wakley, editor of the *Lancet*, had at first opened his columns to the recital of these "beautiful phenomena," as Elliotson was wont to call them. But in the month of August, 1838, he determined to test them for himself. On the 16th and 17th of that month Elliotson brought the two Okeys to Wakley's house, and there, in the presence of several medical men, a series of experiments were made. On the first day the violent contortions and muscular cramp, which were the characteristic results of contact with mesmerised nickel, were produced when the nickel—unknown to Elliotson and most of the company—was safe in the waistcoat pocket of one of the spectators. It was shown in a further series of experiments that unmesmerised water could produce sleep, whilst water which had been carefully mesmerised had no effect; and that whilst three or four mesmerised sovereigns could be handled with impunity, well-marked catalepsy was produced when Jane Okey stooped to pick up a sovereign which had merely been warmed in hot water, without human contact at all.<sup>2</sup>

Some little triumph in a successful demonstration of this kind is no doubt permissible. The experiments so far as they went were conclusive enough. But Mr. Wakley's jubi-

<sup>1</sup> *Lancet*, 1st Sept., 1838.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1st Sept., 1838.

lation appears to us at once ill-natured and excessive. It was ill-natured, for he had not "exposed" the Okeys, and his insinuations against their honesty were apparently without justification. So far as can be discovered, neither he nor anyone else showed any valid reason for doubting the good faith of these two girls. It was excessive, because his experiments were not, as he supposed, conclusive against the claims of Mesmerism; they were conclusive merely against certain fanciful and extravagant theories of Dr. Elliotson. However, Mr. Wakley's views as to the value of his demonstrations appear to have found acceptance with the profession generally. His article is commonly referred to by contemporary writers as the exposure at once of the Okeys and of the pretensions of the Mesmerists; and the columns of the *Lancet* and other medical journals were closed for some time to come against the partisans of the new science.

In all the circumstances it is perhaps scarcely a matter for wonder that Elliotson in the course of the next few years seems to have made but few converts. The interest in the subject, indeed, appears again to have been in some danger of flickering out, when in 1841 another Frenchman, La Fontaine, came to this country on a lecturing tour. He met with striking success, especially in the provinces; and it is to his demonstrations that many of the writers on Mesmerism of that time, including Braid himself, owed their first impulse to investigate. The next few years saw the appearance of many lecturers on the subject in this country, and of a very considerable literature.<sup>1</sup>

In the year 1843 there appeared for the first time two periodicals devoted to the subject: the *Zoist*, under the

<sup>1</sup> Exclusive of the books already mentioned, the chief works consulted in drawing up this account of the English Mesmerists have been—

Rev. Chauncey Hare Townshend, *Facts in Mesmerism*. London (second edition), 1844. The first edition appeared in 1839.

James Braid, M.R.C.S.E., *Neurohypnology* (London, 1843); *The Power of the Mind over the Body* (1846); *Magic, Witchcraft, Animal Magnetism, etc.* (1852).

W. Newnham, M.R.S.L., *Human Magnetism*. 1845.

Spencer T. Hall, *Mesmeric Experiences*. 1845.

Harriet Martineau, *Letters on Mesmerism*. 1845.

Reichenbach's *Researches*, translated by Gregory. 1850. (A preliminary sketch of Reichenbach's results had been published by Gregory in 1846.)

W. Gregory, M.D., Professor of Chemistry in the University of Edinburgh, *Letters on Animal Magnetism*. 1851.

J. W. Haddock, M.D., *Somnolism and Psychism*. Second edition. 1851.

James Esdaile, M.D., *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance*. 1852.

Edwin Lee, M.D., *Animal Magnetism*. 1866.

Ashburner, *Philosophy of Animal Magnetism*. 1867.

Sir John Forbes, *Illustrations of Modern Mesmerism*. 1845.

And the *Zoist* and *Phreno-Magnet*, *passim*.

direction of Drs. Elliotson and Engledue, which continued until 1856; and the *Phreno-Magnet*, edited by Spencer T. Hall, which lasted for one year only. Of the *Phreno-Magnet*, which represented the popular side of the movement, without serious pretensions to science of any kind, something will be said later. In the first instance it will be convenient to consider the views held by the medical Mesmerists—Elliotson, Esdaile, Haddock, etc.—and of other writers, such as Gregory and Townshend, who may fairly be classed with them. Apart from the purely medical aspect of the question—the efficacy of Mesmerism as a therapeutic agent and in relieving pain, to which the pages of the *Zoist* are mainly devoted—the Mesmerists of that date lay stress upon three main classes of phenomena—(1) certain physical effects regarded as proving the actual transmission of a fluid or physical force from the operator or from inanimate substances to the subject; (2) Phreno-Mesmerism; (3) community of sensation and clairvoyance.

(1) As already indicated, all the writers on Mesmerism at this period, with the solitary exception of Braid, had inherited from the Animal Magnetists the conception of a physical effluence passing from operator to subject as the agent in producing the mesmeric sleep. This effluence was, indeed, no longer conceived of as identical with the hypothetical magnetic fluid, though analogies between the phenomena of Mesmerism on the one hand and those of electricity and magnetism on the other were generally recognised. The mesmeric fluid was by most identified with the hypothetical nervous or vital fluid. The act of mesmerising was commonly supposed to involve a flow from the active organism, or that of superior vitality, to the passive or less highly vitalised. The weight on the eyelids felt by the patient, the pricking, the slight feeling of cold, and other subjective sensations were adduced as evidence of this physical effluence; and the mesmeric coma itself was by some regarded as the result of a determination of nervous fluid to the brain.<sup>1</sup> The fluid, being identical, or at least closely associated with the nervous force, was, like it, under the control of the will. The fluid formed an aura, or nerve atmosphere, round the human body. It was further capable of impregnating inanimate substances, and by them being communicated in turn to the sensitive. Elliotson himself claimed to have formulated no theory as to the nature of the mesmeric agency. But his belief in mesmerised metals and the other phenomena ex-

<sup>1</sup> Esdaile, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

hibited by the Okeys certainly points to some conception such as that above indicated as being provisionally, at all events, accepted by him. And other writers of the time, Esdaile, Townshend, Gregory, Haddock, Newnham, and the rest, had no such reserve. They were satisfied that there was a physical effluence of some kind. Esdaile, in particular, made frequent use of mesmerised water as a medicine or an anæsthetic, both for internal and external application. Again, a patient could be thrown into mesmeric catalepsy by clasping the arms of a chair on which the operator had breathed, or by merely walking across a portion of the floor which the operator had impregnated with his mesmeric virtue by the same method.<sup>1</sup> Other experiments showed that the force could, in certain cases, be reflected from a mirror. But action at a distance, unknown to the patient—since the effects produced could not in such a case be attributed to the imagination—was commonly regarded as a crucial proof of physical transmission of force. All the writers cited give numerous instances, some of which will be quoted in the next chapter, of patients in another room or another house being entranced without their knowledge that the experiment was being made. Esdaile claims to have succeeded, at the first attempt, in catalepsy, in open court, three natives who were wholly ignorant of his intentions. One of these patients, moreover, was actively conversing with the judge and Moulavies whilst the experiment was being made.<sup>2</sup>

Further, various substances were supposed to act on the sensitive by their intrinsic virtues. The north pole of the magnet attracted, the south pole repelled. Diamonds and opals produced agreeable sensations; the emerald was unpleasing, and the sapphire positively painful.<sup>3</sup> But with the publication in 1845 of Reichenbach's researches, and their introduction in the following year to this country by Professor Gregory, the few scattered observations on manifestations of the kind last referred to received independent and apparently overwhelming confirmation. Baron von Reichenbach himself was a man of scientific attainments; a chemist and metallurgist of some repute. His subjects were very numerous, and he estimated that one-third of the people whom he tried were sensitive in some degree. In the second part of his work he gives a list of nearly sixty persons with whom he had obtained results. The list included, besides many ladies of title, a baron, a chevalier, a councillor, professors of physical science,

<sup>1</sup> Esdaile, *op. cit.*, pp. 126, 127; Newnham, *op. cit.*, p. 320; and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 67-9.

<sup>3</sup> Townshend, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

several physicians, two curators of museums, and many other persons of good position and education. The majority of these persons were experimented with in the normal state, though some of the best subjects were spontaneous somnambules and cataleptics. Reichenbach claimed to show that all these persons were, in a greater or less degree, susceptible of receiving various sensations from magnets, crystals, and practically all other substances in the universe in their degree—the planets and fixed stars themselves not excepted. For the effluence assumed to produce these sensations he proposed the name *odyle*, or *odic force*. The sensations were broadly of two kinds—vague feelings of temperature, which were either pleasant or unpleasant, and quite definite perceptions of light and colour. The latter required a higher degree of sensitiveness in the percipient. Magnets, crystals, and the human body excited sensations of the vague kind in the highest degree, and all other bodies in their electro-chemical order; potassium and the metals generally exciting warmth and a disagreeable feeling, oxygen and the electro-negative bodies coolness and a pleasurable sensation. But the effects of the odylic light were even more striking. The human fingers radiated light; so did the poles of the magnet—each pole in a fairly strong magnet being capped with flames, reddish yellow from the south pole, and bluish green from the north. A similar polarity was observed in the luminous emanations from crystals. Each elementary substance had its distinctive light, the metals being most conspicuous. Copper, iron, bismuth, nickel, mercury, osmium, rhodium, tellurium, etc., had a red glow, each differing, however, from the other; in lead, cobalt, palladium, etc., the flame was blue; silver, gold, cadmium, diamond, shone white, etc., etc. A sensitive could even see the glow of the odylic matter over the bodies of the sick in hospitals; and a column of faintly luminous vapour would hover over a newly made grave.<sup>1</sup> This odylic radiance was capable of illuminating other objects. It produced no effect on a thermometer, but it could be concentrated by a lens, reflected from a mirror, and was liable to be absorbed by the glass of the percipient's spectacles. To those who could see it the luminous appearance was so distinct, and so lasting, that one or two artists who

<sup>1</sup> A similar phenomenon was attested, and a similar explanation offered, by the alchemists. Thus Maxwell (*De Medicina Magnetica*, Book I. p. 9), "Ex dictis causa manifesta videtur cur circa sepulcra violentâ morte interentorum spectra observentur: nam spiritu vitali humidoque radicali nondum plane dissoluto anima hæret, et exhalationibus hoc spiritu humidoque impregnatis formam humanam tribuit."

happened to be amongst the Baron's sensitives drew what they saw. The English translation is enriched by reproductions of such drawings, showing magnets, a human hand, a flower, a lady's face, and other objects illuminated by their own odyllic radiance.

The obvious good faith and apparent care with which Reichenbach's experiments had been performed; their elaborate and varied nature; the large number of his witnesses; their unimpeachable respectability and extraordinary unanimity; his imposing lists of chemical substances arranged in odylodynamic order; his diagrams showing the diurnal variations of the odyllic force in the human body, and all the display of scientific machinery in his work were calculated to produce a profound impression on the English Mesmerists. Elliotson, Gregory, Haddock, and others at once experimented on Reichenbach's lines, and found that their somnambules also could experience the required sensations, in due gradation of strength, from various electro-negative and electro-positive bodies; and could see flames of the appropriate colour proceeding from the human body, the poles of a magnet, or anything else that was presented to them.

Against a theory so abundantly supported by experiment, argument and demonstration were alike used in vain. Bertrand had already, more than twenty years before, indicated the true explanation of the similar phenomena observed in his own day. Braid now, working on independent lines, arrived at a like conclusion. In his *Power of the Mind over the Body* he contends that the whole of the phenomena are explicable as due to the subjects' imagination, acting on slight hints unconsciously furnished by the experimenters. He is by no means desirous, indeed, of belittling the work of Reichenbach or his English translator. "Better-devised experiments," he says, "or a more laborious and painstaking effort . . . I have never met with in any department of science."<sup>1</sup> But he points out that the observers were not sufficiently on their guard against two sources of error: the extraordinary acuteness of the organs of the special senses and the enhanced receptivity of the mind in the somnambulant condition. He describes a number of experiments made by himself on private persons, some wide awake, some when hypnotised, in which all the characteristic results described by the Mesmerists appeared, when no magnet or other odyllic substance was acting, and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

failed to appear when such agents were present, in each case in accordance with the suggestion given to the sensitive. Thus, to quote a few experiments, without actually touching the skin he drew the handle of a pair of scissors slowly down the hand of a lady patient, who was wide awake at the time and watching the process with interest. She felt a chilly aura, spasmodic twitching of the muscles, and other symptoms. He then requested her to place her other hand on the table and to turn her head away. She did so, and in a short time similar sensations were experienced in the other hand without the application of the scissors. This lady's husband, also wide awake, at Braid's request extended one hand and turned his head. The aura, pricking, and spasmodic twitching were observed. Braid then remarked, in an audible whisper, to the wife, that she would soon see the muscles contract and the hand gradually clench itself. The predicted result duly followed. In neither of these cases had anything whatever been applied to the hand; Braid had been an inactive spectator, and the results were due wholly to the imagination of the patients. In other cases a cataleptic condition of the hand and arm was produced by similar suggestive processes, without the intervention of any physical agent. In the same way Braid found that his subjects could see no flames from the most powerful magnet until warned what to look for; and would then see flames and coruscations from a wooden box or the bare surface of the wall. Nay, Braid's portmanteau-key and pendent ring, by means of appropriate suggestion, would medicine to a sweeter sleep than all the drowsy syrups of the East; and would prove in turn as potent to dispel it as the archangel's trump.

How little the persons whose views he criticised were affected by Braid's arguments and demonstrations may be inferred from two facts. In the Preface contributed by Gregory to his full translation of Reichenbach's *Researches* (1850) he deals at some length with objectors and objections, devoting many pages to arguing against imposture as an explanation of the results; but Braid's name is not mentioned, and the theory of imagination guided by unconscious suggestion is not included amongst the hypotheses which he essays to refute. And again, in the thirteen volumes of the *Zoist*, from 1843 to 1856, during which period the whole of Braid's books were published, some of them passing through two or three editions, I can find his name mentioned but two or three times, and then only to give Elliottson the

opportunity of exalting "the old-established modes of mesmerising" at the expense of "the coarse method practised by Mr. Braid."<sup>1</sup>

(2) Elliotson had been from an early period an enthusiastic phrenologist. He had in 1824 founded the Phrenological Society of London, and was in 1843 the President of that society and on the Council of the Phrenological Association. The *Zoist* itself had as a sub-title, "A Journal of Cerebral Physiology and Mesmerism." Mesmerism, indeed, gave powerful aid to the science of phrenology; for it was soon found that if in the somnambule state the patient's head was touched by the finger of the Mesmerist, each of the organs mapped out by Gall and Spurzheim could be made to yield a prompt and characteristic reaction. It is not a little curious to note that some of the medical journals of the day in their comments on the movement lamented that a comparatively respectable study should be contaminated by its alliance with the absurdities of Mesmerism. Naturally, in the hands of the Mesmerists, abundant proof was soon forthcoming of the truth of phrenology. Perhaps almost too abundant, for an American Phreno-Mesmerist—as will be seen later—took occasion to discover one hundred and fifty new organs and to demonstrate them past dispute on the heads of his somnambules. With Elliotson, it should be pointed out, phrenology connoted a rather crude materialism; all mental phenomena, according to him, were "produced" by the brain, much as bile is produced by the liver; and he frankly used this weapon to combat the belief "in a certain thing called Soul and immaterial" and "the useless belief of the immortality of this Soul."<sup>2</sup>

It was natural that this particular development should not find favour with all the supporters of Mesmerism. Townshend discreetly evades all mention of the subject. Newnham devotes a chapter to "the pretensions of Phreno-magnetism,"

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. iii. p. 345. In vol. ix. p. 316 a pamphlet of Braid's is cited with other books at the head of a review, but the reviewer does not mention Braid's name in the course of his article. I have come across one or two other incidental references (see especially vol. xi. pp. 391, 395), but Braid's name does not appear in the index of the *Zoist* at all. This is, indeed, not conclusive as to its absence from the text. The Mesmerists paid scant attention to such minor matters as indices and dates. It is a trifling point, but none the less "significant of much," that whilst each of Braid's books has a good index, none of the books here quoted by Colquhoun, Newnham, Reichenbach, Esdaile, Townshend, Haddock, Gregory, etc., have any index at all; and the index to the *Zoist* is meagre and extremely inaccurate, whilst the proof-reading was so careless that the French quoted is often quite unintelligible.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii. pp. 423, 424.

and whilst apparently admitting some of the phenomena, suggests that they may be due to thought-transference between the operator and subject. But Braid, sceptical of the "higher phenomena" of Mesmerism generally, expressed himself in his earlier writings as "quite certain as to the reality" of these particular manifestations. In his *Neurypnology* he records, in brief, twenty-five out of forty-five cases in his own practice in which he had produced demonstrations of phreno-hypnotism; and expresses himself as satisfied that in most of these forty-five cases the patients knew nothing of phrenology, and that the manifestations were evoked "simply by contact or friction over certain sympathetic points of the head and face, without previous knowledge of phrenology, trickery, or whispering, or leading questions." A single illustration may be quoted:—

A gentleman who had been present at a previous demonstration "was so much astonished and gratified with what he had seen that he begged I would try one of his daughters. I hypnotised the eldest, and all the manifestations came out quite as decidedly as in her cousin. Under 'adhesiveness' and 'friendship' she clasped me, and on stimulating the organ of 'combativeness' on the opposite side of the head, with the arm of that side she struck two gentlemen (whom she imagined were about to attack me) in such a manner as nearly laid one on the floor, whilst with the other arm she held me in the most friendly manner. Under 'benevolence' she seemed quite overwhelmed with compassion; 'acquisitiveness,' stole greedily all she could lay her hands on, which was retained whilst I excited many other manifestations; but the moment my fingers touched 'conscientiousness,' she threw all she had stolen on the floor, as if horror-stricken, and burst into a flood of tears. On being asked, 'Why do you cry?' she said, with the utmost agony, 'I have done what was wrong, I have done what was wrong.' I now excited 'imitation' and 'ideality,' and had her laughing and dancing in an instant. On exciting 'form' and 'ideality,' she seemed alarmed, and when asked what she saw, she answered, 'The D—l.' 'What colour is he?' 'Black.' On pressing the eyebrow and repeating the question, the answer was 'red,' and the whole body instantly became rigid, and the face the most complete picture of horror which could be imagined. 'Destructiveness,' which is largely developed, being touched, she struck her father such a blow on the chest as nearly laid him on the floor. Had I not endeavoured to restrain her, he must have sustained serious injury. Having now excited 'veneration,' 'hope,' 'ideality,' and 'language,' we had the most striking example of extreme ecstasy, and on being aroused she was quite conscious of all that had happened, excepting that she had heard music, and had been dancing. Her 'philo-progenitiveness' was admirable."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Neurypnology*, pp. 135, 136.

Braid from the first rejected the phrenological explanation of the phenomena. He believed the results were due to stimulation of the nerves of the scalp, either as calling into play muscles associated with the expression of certain emotions, or, quantitatively, as producing different emotional reactions according to the varying sensibility of the part of the integument affected. But if we can place any confidence in Braid's description of the results attained, and can share his conviction that the subjects were ignorant of the position of the phrenological organs and of the results to be expected, the real interest of the matter for us is that no adequate explanation on physiological lines has yet been offered. Modern physiology would probably find it easier to reject Braid's facts than to accept his tentative explanations.<sup>1</sup>

(3) Finally, the chief writers on Mesmerism of this period, again with the exception of Braid, believed in "community of sensation," that is, the ability of certain somnambules to share in the sensations, especially those of touch, taste, and pain, experienced by a person in *rapport* with them; and also in clairvoyance. Clairvoyance, as used by the writers of this time, covered two different classes of phenomena: (1) perception of objects near at hand, but placed in a position (*e.g.* behind the patient's back, or in a closed box) where normal vision would be impossible; and (2) travelling clairvoyance, or the vision of scenes at a considerable distance alleged to be unknown to the percipient and often to any person present.

Elliotson himself, whilst accepting apparently the phenomena of community of sensation at an early stage in his investigations, remained until 1841 doubtful as to the reality of the alleged "seeing with the eyes closed," and was not satisfied of the reality of travelling clairvoyance until 1844; even as late as 1845 he had never met with an instance of the faculty in a case of his own.<sup>2</sup> Esdaile also, though he has no doubt of the reality of the phenomena, even in 1852 had himself witnessed but a single case of clairvoyance.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Neurypnology* was published in 1843. In reviewing some years later the whole subject of Hypnotism (*Magic, Witchcraft, etc.*, third edition, 1852), Braid makes, so far as I can discover, no explicit mention of phrenology—an omission the more significant since he had devoted much space in his earlier work to records of experiments in this direction. From a passage on page 71, however, it may perhaps be inferred that, in looking back on the matter, he was not quite satisfied with the conditions under which the results were attained. Possibly more than he supposed was due to previous training of a subconscious kind, and much also to inadvertent suggestion on his own part and that of the spectators.

<sup>2</sup> See *Zoist*, vol. ii. p. 477, and vol. iii. p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance*, p. 96. London, 1852.

But numerous instances of the alleged faculty, as exercised both at close quarters and at a considerable distance, were published by Townshend, Gregory, Haddock, and others in their books and in the columns of the *Zoist* itself. An attempt will be made in the two succeeding chapters to estimate the significance of the phenomena reported under this head. For the present purpose it is sufficient to note that belief in the mesmeric trance was at this time associated, in the writings of nearly all its leading adherents, with belief in community of sensation and clairvoyance; and few were found to imitate Elliotson's wise reserve in the matter, and speak only of what they had seen and tested for themselves.

It will be seen that Mesmerism came before the British public unfairly handicapped. Even the bare fact of the trance itself—which, as Bertrand had already shown, manifested close affinities to various spontaneous states, some of them by no means rare—could hardly win its way to recognition, weighted as it was with a mass of dubious and incredible phenomena, and forced to subserve ill-considered and grandiose theories, which were hardly less extravagant when they avowedly confined themselves to the physical world than when they frankly leapt the barrier and proclaimed themselves transcendental. Many of the phenomena on which these speculations were based were obviously capable, as Wakley and Braid had shown, of being explained as due to imposture or imagination. The effects were unquestionably in most cases subjective, and it made little difference as regards the proof of a new physical agency whether the feelings which the subject claimed to experience were really felt or deliberately simulated. Most of the medical journals of the day seem to have adopted the less charitable view, as on the whole the easier interpretation of what they witnessed. I cannot find any justification for this assumption of fraud, even in such a case as the Okeys. But when applied, as it was commonly applied, to demonstrations of painless surgery, the assumption becomes preposterous. Indeed, one cannot help suspecting a certain confusion of thought somewhere. The Okeys imagined they felt peculiar sensations from mesmerised metals, or else they pretended to feel—what did it matter, since in either case there was nothing to feel! But the argument was not of universal validity. To the man whose leg was cut off during the trance it obviously mattered a great deal whether he imagined he felt no pain or only pretended to feel none. Nor was the distinction without interest of a more general kind,

for if the patient in such a case imagines he feels no pain, there is no pain to feel; and in the days before the introduction of anæsthetics that was no light matter.

The opposition of the medical profession to the employment of Mesmerism in order to give relief from the pain of surgical operations is one of the most singular episodes in the history of science. James Esdaile, a Scotch surgeon practising in Calcutta, who had had his attention drawn in 1845 to the subject, and had found that the natives of India were remarkably susceptible to mesmeric influence, performed many extensive and severe operations on patients during the trance. His proceedings naturally excited attention in India, and the medical profession, whilst laughing at Esdaile for his folly, freely insinuated that the alleged insensibility was simulated. The *Calcutta Medical Journal*, for instance, described his patients as "a set of hardened and determined impostors." In January, 1846, Esdaile reported to the Calcutta Medical Board the results of seventy-five operations—the removal of monstrous tumours, amputations of limbs, etc.—performed without pain, and offered to demonstrate the reality of the influence. Finding his application ignored, he appealed later in the same year direct to the Government. A small committee of investigation was appointed, which, as the result of observations on ten cases, reported that "by the mesmeric method sleep could be so deepened as to permit of the performance of severe surgical operations without pain, according to the declarations of the patients." Further than this the committee declined to go, but they expressed strong doubts as to the expediency of extending the mesmeric treatment generally. The Governor-General, however, on the receipt of the report, placed Esdaile in charge of a small hospital, that he might have full opportunity for pursuing his researches, and shortly afterwards appointed him Presidency Surgeon. But the general introduction of chloroform and other anæsthetics a year or two later caused popular interest in Mesmerism to cease. The feeling of the profession on the subject is aptly illustrated by an utterance of Dr. Duncan Stewart, one of the official visitors to Esdaile's Mesmeric Hospital, "It is time to throw away mummery and work above board, now that we have got ether."<sup>1</sup>

In this country the determined antagonism of the medical profession found similar expression. The Okeys, and, in fact, mesmeric subjects generally, were habitually referred to by

<sup>1</sup> See Esdaile's *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance* and other works, and the *Zoist*, *passim*.

medical men as impostors; the *Lancet* expressed the opinion that Mesmerism would always flourish "wherever there are clever girls, philosophic Bohemians, weak women, weaker men."<sup>1</sup> One Madame Plantin, whose breast had been removed in Paris by M. Cloquet, in the mesmeric trance, died a few days after the operation. There were English surgeons who did not scruple to say that the strenuous efforts which she made to conceal her anguish during the operation had hastened her death.<sup>2</sup> The first considerable operation performed in England in the mesmeric trance took place in 1842 at Wellow, in Nottinghamshire, the patient being one James Wombell, whose leg was amputated above the knee. Mr. Topham, a London barrister, was the Mesmerist, and the operation was performed by Mr. Squire Ward, M.R.C.S. An account of the case was read before the London Medical and Chirurgical Society at their meeting on November 22nd, 1842. The paper was received with much disfavour, many of the medical men present expressing their opinion that the alleged insensibility was simulated, and that Wombell had been trained to bear pain without betraying any signs of it. In the interval before the next meeting the authors published the paper on their own account,<sup>3</sup> and the Society gladly took advantage of this breach of etiquette to expunge all notice of the discreditable transaction from their minutes. But this was not enough for the opponents of Mesmerism. It was freely stated by medical men in the public Press and elsewhere, whenever the subject of Mesmerism was under discussion, that James Wombell had subsequently confessed to a wicked deception; that he had in fact felt the whole pain of the operation, but to gain his private ends had successfully concealed his feelings at the time. Elliotson took the trouble in 1843 to get a statement signed by the man himself and witnessed by the clergyman of the parish, giving the lie to the slander.<sup>4</sup> Eight years later it was revived. At a meeting of the same Society on December 10th, 1850, Dr. Marshall Hall "begged leave to communicate a fact of some interest to the Society. . . . He understood that this man (Wombell) had since confessed that he had acted the part of an impostor." Mr. Topham wrote to ask Dr. Hall for his authority. Dr. Hall replied, "The fact . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Lancet*, Sept. 15th, 1838.

<sup>2</sup> *Zoist*, vol. i. p. 209. For other illustrations of the incredulity with which the facts of hypnotic anaesthesia were first received by medical men, see Moll, *Hypnotism* (English trans., London, 1890), p. 329.

<sup>3</sup> *Account of a case of successful amputation of the thigh during the mesmeric state.* London, 1843.

<sup>4</sup> *Zoist*, vol. i. p. 210.

was communicated to me by a gentleman whom I have known for the third part of a century, and whom I regard as among the most honourable and truthful of men." Dr. Hall refused to give up the name of his informant "without reserve," and he concluded his letter by calling upon Mr. Topham to take note—

"That I shall never cease to raise my voice against everything derogatory to my profession, whether originating unhappily within its ranks, or coming intrusively from without. That I am of opinion that, in these days of multifarious folly and quackery, every member of my profession is called upon in honour to do the same.

"That you will be pleased to consider this as a final communication."

Dr. Hall, however, wrote to his informant, asking him upon what evidence he had made the statement, and published in the *Lancet*, together with a copy of the above-cited letter to Mr. Topham, the following extract from his still unnamed correspondent's reply:—

"The confession of the man was distinctly and deliberately stated to me by a person in whom I have full confidence. It was in Nottinghamshire that I was told the fact, last August, and I fully believe it."

Dr. Marshall Hall had perhaps heard in his youth that a statement could be established in the mouths of two or three witnesses, and may have thought that he was fulfilling the Scripture by multiplying the links in his chain of anonymous tradition. The evidence, in fact, seems to have been good enough for the Medical and Chirurgical Society, for at a later meeting the president refused to hear Dr. Ashburner and Dr. Cohen when they rose to refute the slander; and the *Lancet* and other papers, in reporting the incident, expressed approval of the chairman's firmness and impartiality.<sup>1</sup>

Such, then, was at this time the attitude of the medical Press and the articulate members of the profession to Mesmerism. Some doctors even went further, and whilst denying the reality of Mesmerism, did not scruple to state that Mesmerists habitually used their influence for the basest purposes.<sup>2</sup>

But it must be admitted that the attitude of Elliotson, the champion of the English Mesmerists, and those of his chief

<sup>1</sup> *Lancet*, Dec. 28th, 1850, and March 1st, 1851. See also *Zoist*, vol. ix. pp. 88-106, where a full account of the incident is given.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the "Harveian Oration" for 1848, by Dr. Francis Hawkins; and Elliotson's comments, *Zoist*, vol. vi. pp. 399-405. Similar charges are frequently made in the medical literature of the time.

associates, was not conciliatory. The following epithets (omitting the names, which are given in full in the original) are taken at random from the index of the *Zoist*: "Dr. —, his laughable folly; Dr. —, his ignorance and folly; absurdity, nonsense, remarkable folly, folly and falsehood, discreditable conduct, untruth, egregious folly, sad conduct, false reports, stupid obstinacy, slobbering childishness," etc., etc. Nor were these hard words reserved for the opponents of Mesmerism. Elliotson and his colleagues on the *Zoist* resented so deeply Newnham's criticisms on the theory of Phreno-Mesmerism that they could not trust themselves to review his book, and that task is assigned to another.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, whilst Elliotson and Engledue found themselves by no means in complete sympathy with Townshend, Sandby, and other clergymen, the columns of the *Zoist* are apparently freely open to their contributions. Of the attitude of the *Zoist* to Braid we have already spoken.

There was yet another section of Mesmerists at this time, represented by Spencer T. Hall, whose relations with the *Zoist* were far from cordial. Hall was not, apparently, a man of any scientific training. His attention was first drawn to Mesmerism by attending a lecture given by La Fontaine in Sheffield, in 1841 or 1842. Thereafter he devoted himself enthusiastically to the new science, and in 1843—the year which saw also the appearance of the *Zoist*—he started a monthly journal, the *Phreno-Magnet*, which, however, ran for one year only. In 1844 Spencer Hall was invited by her physician to mesmerise Harriet Martineau. He did so with conspicuous success, as told by Miss Martineau in her *Letters on Mesmerism*.

In the *Phreno-Magnet* we come in contact with the popular side of the movement. The men whose writings we have hitherto considered were possessed of some scientific attainments, or at least of scholarship and literary faculty. The pages of the *Zoist*, in particular, were mainly concerned with the therapeutic aspect of Mesmerism, and the other phenomena observed, however misinterpreted, were still valued primarily for their scientific interest. But the writers in the *Phreno-Magnet* were of a different class; their interests and activities were less restrained. Few of the persons who contributed to its pages were medical men, or, indeed, possessed special qualifications of any kind for the study.<sup>2</sup> In the pages of

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. iii. p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that James Braid wrote in December, 1842, just before the appearance of the first number, to express his interest and sympathy. (*Phreno-Magnet*, p. 25.)

the *Phreno-Magnet*, as in the other writings of the period, are found numerous instances of community of sensation and travelling clairvoyance, but the records are not sufficiently detailed or exact to be of much value as evidence. Spencer Hall describes himself as a lecturer on Phrenopathy; and a large space in his organ is taken up month by month with chronicles of lectures delivered by the editor and others in various towns in the United Kingdom. In a retrospect published in December, 1843, Hall estimated that during the past year no fewer than three hundred persons had lectured and experimented in public in Great Britain, Ireland, and America, and this propagandist movement was concerned primarily, not with Mesmerism as a healing art, but with the science of Phreno-Mesmerism, or Phrenopathy. The phenomena on which the new "science" of Phreno-Mesmerism was founded had been before the world since 1841 or 1842. The honour of the first discovery was disputed, in America by Dr. Buchanan, Dr. Collyer, and the Rev. Laroy Sunderland; and by H. G. Atkinson, better known as the "Mentor" of Harriet Martineau, and others, in this country. Dr. Collyer had, indeed, by this time (1843) already ceased to believe, on philosophical and anatomical grounds, in the science which he claimed to have founded;<sup>1</sup> and Laroy Sunderland could at least assume a certain quantitative credit in the matter, for he had added no fewer than one hundred and fifty new organs to those previously mapped out by orthodox phrenologists. Some correspondents of the *Phreno-Magnet* bettered this record, and related that they had already tested and proved the existence of nearly two hundred organs.<sup>2</sup> Amongst these new faculties of the human mind which were thus given a local habitation we find acquativeness (*sic*), human nature, insanity, discontentment, opposiveness, love of pets; organs for shooting with crossbow, skating, aerostation, slinging, spearing, pulling, sculling, and many other manly sports; also two organs relating to a deity and a future state respectively.

Dr. Collyer, who had been a pupil of Elliotson's at University College Hospital, by no means relinquished with his belief in mesmero-phrenology his interest in Mesmerism, or, as he called it, Animal Magnetism. From the pamphlet already referred to we find that he laboured in the United States to make it known as a solemn truth, which must revolutionise the false philosophy of the past, and open to

<sup>1</sup> *Psychography, or the Embodiment of Thought*, by R. H. Collyer, M.D. Philadelphia, 1843.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 52, etc.

man the secret of immortality. His title-page is adorned with a diagram representing two persons looking into a bowl of molasses, with dotted lines radiating from their foreheads to a point on the surface of the fluid. The experiment illustrated by this diagram is thus described: The subject was requested by Dr. Collyer to look into the bowl, the doctor doing the same. "When," he writes, "the angle of incidence from my brain was equal to the angle of reflection from her brain, she distinctly saw *the image* of my thought at the point of coincidence."

As already indicated, there was little sympathy between the medical Mesmerists and the supporters of the *Phreno-Magnet*. The first number of the *Zoist*, under the heading of "The Lecture Mania," contains some severe reflections on the ill-judged proceedings of a certain Mr. Brooks, who had been giving popular lectures followed by demonstrations of Phreno-Mesmerism on persons taken at hazard from the audience. Spencer Hall is characterised in the same article as "a gentleman influenced by good motives," but without scientific education. The writer of the article feared that the extravagance and want of judgment shown by the popular advocates of Mesmerism would prejudice the whole subject. The fear may have been justified, though to us now it seems to matter little whether the advocates of Phreno-Mesmerism taught that the mind expressed itself by means of twenty or two hundred organs, or whether the mesmeric effluence was demonstrated by radiation from a crystal or reflection from a bowl of treacle. Weighted, however, though it was with such dubious theories and disputable facts, it can hardly be doubted that in the ordinary progress of events the trance and the suggestion-phenomena generally would ultimately have won recognition, and that the accessory marvels would gradually have dropped out of sight as the part played by the imagination in their production became more clearly demonstrable. Indeed, in April, 1852, Gregory was able to congratulate the readers of the *Zoist*<sup>1</sup> on the fact that Sir D. Brewster and others, instead of ascribing the trance, anæsthesia, and other phenomena to imposture, had now publicly admitted their reality, and explained them as due to suggestion acting on the impressible organism of the sensitive. That having reached this point, the further advancement of the study should have been retarded for more than a generation was due to two special causes, the full effect of which could not at that time have been foreseen.

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. x. p. 1, etc.

The discovery in the years 1846-7 of the anæsthetic properties of ether and chloroform, and their rapidly growing use in medical practice, deprived the mesmeric trance of its most obvious utility. What effect that discovery had in checking the interest which had been aroused in Calcutta in Esdaile's mesmeric clinique we have already seen. If the effect was less marked in this country, it was only because the practice of operating in the trance was much less common, and had excited less attention. But another circumstance which did more to discredit Mesmerism throughout the civilised world was the gradual spread of the belief in Spiritualism, and the absorption by that movement of many of those who had been pronounced advocates of Mesmerism. Elliotson and his chief associates, indeed, for many years resisted the new doctrines, and in the later volumes of the *Zoist*<sup>1</sup> we find several articles dealing with the absurdities of the spirit-rappers. But from the outset many of the leading advocates of Mesmerism—Townshend, Sandby, Gregory,<sup>2</sup> J. W. Jackson, H. G. Atkinson—were disposed to see in table-turning and other physical manifestations the operation of the mesmeric or neuro-vital fluid; whilst others, sooner, as Ashburner, or later, as Elliotson himself, became converted to Spiritualism. In Elliotson's case the process of conversion did not stop at this point. Before his death he renounced his former materialism and embraced Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Again, of the American authors whose names figure so largely in the *Phreno-Magnet*, we find several who were afterwards prominent as Spiritualists.

So that from causes largely accidental and external to itself Mesmerism for a time lost whatever hold it had succeeded in gaining on the attention of sober-minded persons, and passed out of sight, until the labours of Liébeault, and later those of Bernheim at Nancy, of Charcot at the Salpêtrière, and of Heidenhain at Breslau, once more brought the subject into prominence.

<sup>1</sup> Especially vols. xi. and xii.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory appears to have been all but converted to the spiritualistic doctrine. In an interesting letter from him dated October, 1857, and published in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1865, pp. 451-3, occurs the phrase, "The higher phenomena appear to me to render the spiritual hypothesis almost certain." His widow, Mrs. Makdougall Gregory, for many years, until her death in the early eighties, held regular spiritualist seances, and her house was a place of meeting for the converts of the new faith.

<sup>3</sup> See obituary notice of Elliotson in the *Morning Post*, Aug. 3rd, 1868.

## CHAPTER IX

### COMMUNITY OF SENSATION

THE effect which the writings of the Mesmerists of this period is likely to produce on a first reading is no doubt a profound distrust of human testimony altogether. The marvellous behaviour of magnets, crystals, and mesmerised sovereigns, and the Protean manifestations of clairvoyance, seem hardly more credible than old tales of lambs which grew on trees, and men whose feet expanded to serve as umbrellas. But a closer examination tends to show that the beliefs of Reichenbach and the rest were yet, perhaps, not so entirely unreasonable as their opponents believed. The phenomena were, as few now doubt, entirely subjective. But if the believers were wrong in seeing in them the manifestations of a new physical force, their critics were almost equally wrong in attributing them wholly to fraud. Fraud, no doubt, there was; but it was an accident, and not the essence of the problem. It was an unjustifiable assumption when employed without any attempt at proof in a case like the Okeys; it became preposterous when applied to persons like many of Reichenbach's sensitives—men and women of position, who were not at all likely to lend themselves to imposture merely to humour the folly of a friend and colleague; in the case of the patient who showed no pain under the surgeon's knife the charge was merely ludicrous.

But, in fact, this wholesale imputation of imposture, unjust to the subjects of it, was equally unjust to the Mesmerists themselves. Puységur was no doubt not a man of science; Deleuze, it might be urged, was only a botanist; Chenevix, Elliotson, Reichenbach, Gregory, and the rest may have been visionaries and fanatics. But the fact remains that many of them had done good work in medicine, chemistry, metallurgy, or some other department of physical science; and apart from a certain intemperance which marked, in some cases,

the advocacy of their views—a defect which the example of their critics did little to remedy—there was nothing to be urged against the men themselves. Braid, it has been seen, generously acknowledged the care and ingenuity with which Reichenbach's experiments had been conducted; and it is Braid who has pointed out the two causes to which misinterpretation of the results attained was mainly due, the extraordinary suggestibility, to wit, of the hypnotic subject and the temporary exaltation of the senses in this state. Some years later, no doubt, other writers, no longer satisfied with an assumption which was fully as mischievous, and hardly more reasonable, than the theory of the Mesmerists, came to the same general conclusions as Braid. But by that time extraneous circumstances had already obscured the interest in the subject; and this change of view remained unfruitful.

But it may be doubted whether even suggestion and hyperæsthesia will explain everything. Braid's own recorded results in Phreno-Mesmerism, as already pointed out, can with difficulty be brought under such an explanation. He has shown that precautions were taken to exclude suggestion by normal means; and his tentative explanation on physiological lines was clearly inadequate. If we accept merely Braid's record of his own experiments, and leave out of account the enormous volume of similar observations tendered by less cautious observers, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the curious results described may have been in some cases due to a mental suggestion supplied by the expectation of the operator; and if we scrutinise the rest of the "magnetic" or mesmeric manifestations we shall find other evidence for the operation of mental suggestion. That evidence is by no means conclusive. The experimenters were for the most part prepossessed with the idea of a physical effluence; and they were not so far ahead of the medical knowledge of their day as to be fully alive to the possibilities of hyperæsthesia. But there are experiments recorded in which the precautions described—avowedly taken in order to preclude deception or suggestion of a normal kind—would appear to have been sufficient to exclude such suggestion even when acting on a hyperæsthetic subject. When, indeed, a sovereign "mesmerised" by merely looking at it was picked out from a number of other sovereigns, it may very fairly be said that the operator, who remained in the room and watched the experiment, probably gave sufficient indication by gesture or change of breathing to guide the sensitive; similar feats are performed

in our day by professional "thought-readers." Again, "mesmerised" water may have been identified, as Braid suggests, even after the lapse of some minutes, by the smell alone. But there are experiments in which we have to assume some grave error in observation or record to make such explanations fit the results. Elliotson, for instance, tells us that a mesmerised sovereign would send the Okeys into the trance; and that whilst contact of the coin with iron would neutralise the influence, contact with other metals had no effect.

"Nothing," he writes, "could be more interesting than to see a charged sovereign or shilling lying in their hand, a screen being held between it and their head; and as soon as the hand began to close and the eyes to fix, to observe these effects instantly arrested and subside when a short iron rod was brought into contact with the metal, and augment again when it was withdrawn. I have often substituted a rod of silver or some other metal—for I had rods made of various metals precisely similar in form and size—when it was impossible the girl could know which was being used; and in the case of a leaden rod I myself should not have known by the eye at the moment, but to prevent confusion had put each into a separate pocket. The silver, copper, and lead had no neutralising power, and therefore never arrested or diminished the effect."<sup>1</sup>

A common experiment at this time to illustrate the power of "mesmeric attraction" was to mesmerise a particular object and let the patient, unawares, come in contact with it. Esdaile's *first* experiment of the kind was made at the hospital in Calcutta on a patient who could scarcely be supposed to have heard beforehand of the result anticipated, nor were the conditions of the experiment—an impromptu one—such as to afford much opportunity for any hint of what was expected reaching his mind by normal channels. Several gentlemen were present.

"Desiring them to observe, I seated myself in an armchair in the waiting-room, placed my hands on each of the knobs at the end of the arms, and then breathed on them. I now joined the company, and desired them to get the man I should send for to seat himself in the chair I had just vacated. The man was brought and manoeuvred into the chair, where he was questioned about the operation he had undergone, etc., and was then desired to return to the ward.

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. iv. p. 109. In Townshend's *Facts in Mesmerism*, pp. 152, 153, a case is recorded in which the sensitive identified various gems held to her forehead concealed in the hand of the experimenter. She alleged that she experienced peculiar sensations from each gem.

"He had naturally placed his hands on the knobs of the arms, and now attempted to rise, but stuck fast; and those present will not soon forget his look of amazement, first at one arm, and then at the other, and his bewildered look of inquiry towards me when he found himself in such a *fix*.

"His arms were found to be rigid and insensible to the shoulders, and the fingers were so firmly clutched upon the knobs of the chair that they could not be opened. He was relieved by upward passes along the arms; but for some time his fingers were in a painful state of spasms, which I had some difficulty in dissipating. I now left the room, and made passes along and breathed upon the floor near the door by which he had to return to his ward—the door being closed, of course. Returning to the party, I desired him to go away now, and he did; but he no sooner planted his foot outside the door than he became rooted to the spot, and was violently convulsed, calling upon me to come to him, that he was dying, etc." <sup>1</sup>

Another experiment much relied upon as proving the reality of the mesmeric effluence was the production of sleep at a distance. In the following case, quoted from Townshend's *Facts in Mesmerism*, two previous trials on the same patient had been completely successful. In this instance, it will be noted, we have a double coincidence.

"The third trial that I made to mesmerise this patient from a distance was still more remarkable and decisive.

"One evening, when sitting with my family, the idea occurred to me, 'Could I mesmerise Anna M—there as I then was, while she was in her own house?' to which I knew she was just then confined by slight indisposition. Acting on this thought, I begged all the party present to note the hour (it was exactly nine o'clock), and to bear me witness that then and there I attempted a mesmeric experiment.

"This time I endeavoured to bring before my imagination very vividly the person of my sleepwaker, and even aided the concentration of my thoughts by the usual mesmeric gestures; I also at the end of an hour said, 'I will now awake Anna,' and used appropriate gestures. We now awaited with more curiosity than confidence the result of this process.

"The following morning Anna made her appearance, just as we were at breakfast, exclaiming, 'Oh, sir! did you magnetise me last night? About nine o'clock I fell asleep, and mother and sisters say they could not wake me with all their shaking of me, and they were quite frightened; but after an hour I woke of myself; and I think from all this that my sleep must have been magnetic. It also did me a great deal of good, for I felt quite recovered from my cold

<sup>1</sup> *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance*, pp. 126, 127.

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after it. After a natural sleep I never feel so much refreshed. When I sleep for an hour in magnetism, it is as if I had rested a whole night.' These were the words of Anna M——, noted down at the time as accurately as possible."<sup>1</sup>

In one case out of many cited by Haddock the effect appears to have been produced without the intention of the operator.

"On another occasion I was wishful to induce the mesmeric sleep on a lady for the relief of a rheumatic affection from which she was suffering. Finding the continual stare very fatiguing to my eyes, and also expecting to be called away by patients, it occurred to me that if I directed her to look steadfastly at something it might answer the same purpose, and allow me to leave her without interrupting the mesmeric action. I therefore arose and took a small magnet and suspended it by a wire from a hook in the ceiling. Emma was in the kitchen, situated *under* the room where I was operating, and knew nothing of my movements. In a few minutes the smell of burning arrested my attention, and I desired my daughter to go downstairs and ascertain the cause. She called me quickly to come down, saying that Emma was on fire. I ran down, and found her with her eyes closed, and *mesmerised*, and on her knees before the kitchen fire, engaged in sweeping the hearth, and her apron on fire from contact with a burning coal that had fallen from the grate; but of the fire she was unconscious, or at least she took no notice of it, and her attention was wholly directed to a point in the kitchen ceiling under where I had been sitting in the room above. Having asked her what she was doing or looking at, she replied, '*I want that magnet.*' I pretended not to understand her, and said, 'What magnet?' The reply was, 'That magnet hanging up there,' pointing accurately to its situation."<sup>2</sup>

The phenomena of "Community of Sensation" are also susceptible of explanation as being due to thought-transference. In its commonest form, indeed—the appreciation by the hypnotic of sensations of taste or smell experienced by the person with whom she was in *rappor*t—it is difficult to exclude the possibility that indications may have reached the hyperæsthetic organs of sense by normal channels. Most of the edible substances in common use, in fact, give out a

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> Haddock, *Somnolism and Psycheism*, p. 92. Similar experiments have been performed with success during the last two decades by various French observers, of which the most noteworthy are those conducted by Professor Janet and Dr. Gibert at Havre. See *Revue Philosophique*, Feb., 1886; *Revue de l'Hypnotisme*, Feb., 1888; and *Proceedings S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 133, etc., vol. v. pp. 43-5; and elsewhere.

sensible odour; and unless experiments of this kind are carried on at a considerable distance and with closed doors intervening, or care is taken to select substances as odourless as common salt (and I can find no record in the writings of this period of experiments conducted under such conditions), it seems probable that the results may be attributable generally to hyperæsthesia. The following case, however, recorded by Townshend, cannot be thus explained, and even though the Mesmeriser held the subject's hand, can hardly be accounted for by muscle-reading. Some successful trials of the usual kind with tastes and odours had first been made with the same subject.

"It now occurred to me to try the experiment which B—— had suggested with respect to the cognisance of form. With every precaution, I took up from a table, on which were many other articles, a small square box, and passed my finger over the edges. I, at the same time, asked the patient, 'Can you tell me what sort of a thing I am touching?' Upon this Miss T—— made motions with her fingers, as if she had the object under her own hand, and replied, 'It is something with edges like a box.' I next took into my hand a chessman, some parts of which were carved in points, and felt alternately the carved and uncarved portions of the piece. Between these she discriminated correctly, saying, 'Now it feels rough; now smooth'; and always before speaking she went through the same motions of touching with myself.

"One of the patient's sisters, without giving notice of her intention, went out of the room and fetched an egg, which she concealed carefully in her hand and gave me from behind. The patient now said, 'I feel something smooth and round.' Being urged to tell what it was, she said, 'I think it is a ball.' Stretching out my hand behind me, I whispered to one of the party to hurt me in some way; I was pricked with a pin, when my patient started and shook her hand as if she felt the injury. On being asked what she felt, she answered, 'As if they pricked my hand.'

"At another time, when I inquired if she suffered in any way, she replied, 'No, only my feet are very cold.' My own feet being exceedingly cold at the moment, I suspected that her feeling was sympathetic. I conjectured rightly, for, awaking soon after, she assured me that her feet were perfectly warm."<sup>1</sup>

Again, the following observation in the transference of pain seems free from objection, and the distance between agent and patient was, it will be seen, considerable. Dr. Engledue writes in the *Zoist* :—<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Townshend, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 70.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. pp. 269, 270.

"In a drawing-room containing forty persons this experiment was performed, and I select and relate it here because it was not pre-arranged. After the patient had been entranced a gentleman requested to speak to me at the other end of the room. He engaged me in conversation, and whilst I was standing with my hands behind me, one of his companions suddenly pushed the point of a penknife into my thumb. Immediately the patient cried out, and rubbed the exact spot on her own hand which had been injured in mine. Another gentleman requested me to accompany him into the library, which adjoined the drawing-room. He closed the doors, and then said, 'I wish to tickle your ear with the end of a pen.' I requested him not to do so for a few minutes, for I have almost always noticed that if experiments are performed in too rapid succession the expected result does not take place; nay, more, I have frequently noticed that if experiments are too much crowded together, several minutes may elapse and the experiment be considered a failure, but after all the expected result may come out. My right ear was tickled for one minute. We then entered the drawing-room, and found the patient rubbing her left ear upon her shoulder and shuddering in the same manner that I had, and as every person does when the same stimulus is applied. . . .

" . . . When my hair was combed in another room, my patient expressed great dissatisfaction, and complained that somebody was teasing her and pulling her hair.

"When I used a toothpick, she picked her teeth with a pin; and generally she did this on the same side and inserted the pin between the same two teeth that I did. This, however, was not invariable."

Sometimes the same phenomenon was observed in the higher senses, as in the following case, recorded by Mr. Jago, of Bodmin, and communicated to the *Zoist*<sup>1</sup> by Dr. Elliotson. Mr. Jago, it will be noted, suggests community of sensation as the explanation of the facts observed; he supposes the sensitive to be "seeing with his eyes."

"A person present was asked to put something in a cup, and, without saying what it was, to bring it to me in such a way that I might look in it, but that it would be impossible for Miss D—— to see what it contained. The cup was brought on a level with my eye. Having looked over the edge of it and seen what was in it, I desired that it might be taken away again; then turning to Miss D—— and placing my finger on the organ of language, I asked her, 'What's in that cup?' She instantly and without any doubtful tone of voice said, 'Cotton.' It was a little ball of cotton.

"Anxious to test this to the utmost, I asked a person to go out of the room and put something in a cup and bring it to me that I only

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. iii, pp. 223, 224.

might see what was in it, as before. This was done, and the cup again placed upon the table, which was at the opposite end of the room. Turning to Miss D——, I asked her, 'What's in it now?' 'Wafers.' This was perfectly true. 'How many are there?' 'Two.' 'What colours are they?' '*Green* and red.' The last answer is most extraordinary. By candlelight I thought the wafers were *white* and red. My question was repeated, 'Are you sure that one is *green*?' 'Yes.' 'Are you quite sure of this?—think.' 'Yes,' she replied rather sharply. Believing that this answer was incorrect, I desired to see the wafers again; one of them was a delicately pale green.

"Astonished at these results, I requested that the cup should be placed on the table with something in it, as before, but that neither myself nor Miss D—— should be told or be allowed to see what it contained. This was done. I then asked, 'What's in that cup now?' She paused as if thinking, and in about a minute said, 'I don't know.' 'Do you not really know?—think again.' 'No; I do not know.' I now directed a person to bring the cup to me as before, that I alone might see its contents. This was done, and in such a manner that it was impossible for Miss D—— to look; in fact, during the whole of this experiment her head was leaning a little forwards and her eyes were quite closed. Care was taken to *hold the cup above the level of her forehead* each time that it was brought near me, so that had her eyes been wide open she could not have seen what was in it.

"After I had looked at what had been put in the cup, I asked her, 'Do you know now what it is?' 'Yes; it is a thimble.' This was correct.

"Supposing her by some inscrutable means to be *seeing with my eyes*, I thought she might be able to describe any object which was known to me. I therefore began to question her about that of which I was certain she could have no previous knowledge. 'Do you know my dressing-case?' 'Yes.' 'How many bottles are there in it?' 'Two.' 'What colours are they?' 'A white and a *green*.' 'Are you sure that one of them is *green*?' 'Yes.' I had considered that bottle to be *blue*, and therefore supposed she had given me an incorrect reply; nor did I until the following morning convince myself that it was green. It is that particular shade of green which many find it difficult to distinguish from blue. Her answer was right, and though the question was repeated three or four times, she persisted in giving me the same reply. 'How many drawers are there in the case?' 'One.' 'How many locks are there?' 'Two.' 'What sort of case is it?' 'Bound with brass.' Had it been before her she could not have given a more correct description."

It is clear that in the latter part of this record the metaphor of seeing with the Mesmeriser's eyes no longer holds good. If the information given by the subject was not normally

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acquired—and illustrations of this faculty are so numerous that it is difficult to doubt that in some cases, at any rate, the information came through supersensory channels—we have to deal with a sympathy not of sensation but of thought. Some of the writers of this period, indeed, frankly recognise the existence of such a faculty of thought-transference, as Bertrand had before them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For two instances of the kind see Townshend, *op. cit.*, pp. 324, 325.

## CHAPTER X

### CLAIRVOYANCE IN ENGLAND

THE manifestations of what is known as "clairvoyance" present us with a more difficult problem than the phenomena of action at a distance and community of sensation discussed in the last chapter. As regards the so-called clairvoyance of objects at close quarters, or "seeing with the eyes closed," there seems little reason to doubt that the results vouched for by so many observers were due, as a rule, either to normal vision under somewhat unusual conditions, to deliberate fraud, or possibly in rare cases to hyper-æsthesia of the sense of touch. In one case, indeed, it seems to me clear that the whole of the manifestations were due to fraud of a tolerably obvious kind. There was in those days a certain Major Buckley—a retired officer of the Indian Army. Major Buckley seems to have been an amiable old gentleman, with a fondness for taking parties of young ladies to the opera. His young friends repaid his hospitalities by manifestations of a very surprising kind. Their specialty was reading mottoes in nuts bought at the confectioner's—hazel-nuts or walnuts, the natural contents of which had been replaced by small sweetmeats and a piece of paper bearing a motto, the hole in the nut being filled in apparently with chocolate. Major Buckley himself seems to have been convinced of the genuineness of these performances; and so were some of the persons who witnessed them. Elliotson, though obviously suspicious, allowed accounts of the experiments to appear in the *Zoist*. A detailed report by Ashburner of a series of experiments at which he and Lord Adare assisted allows us to see how the feat was probably accomplished. The young women who were the seers had no doubt brought with them some nuts which had been previously opened and resealed, and contrived during the proceedings to substitute their own prepared nuts for those brought by the investigators. At any rate, it would appear

that opportunity was again and again in the first series of experiments afforded for such substitution; and that when the nuts were marked, so as to prevent substitution, the experiments proved inconclusive.<sup>1</sup>

However, Major Buckley's experiments were not typical. They do not seem to have been accepted generally by those interested in the subject, nor—which is certainly curious—does this particular form of clairvoyance appear to have found any imitators outside Buckley's circle. But there were many subjects both in France and England at this time who claimed, or on whose behalf the claim was made, that they could see near objects when their eyes were closed and firmly bandaged, or when placed in absolute darkness. A well-known case was that of Mdlle. Pigeaire, whose claims were examined by the Academy of Medicine in Paris, in 1837, with negative results. At Plymouth, in 1846, the clairvoyant powers of a boy of fifteen, Thomas Laycock, were investigated by a committee of twelve responsible persons, who after plastering and bandaging his eyes, expressed themselves, by a large majority, as satisfied that his alleged power of supersensuous vision was genuine.<sup>2</sup> Townshend minutely describes similar performances on the part of a subject of his own, a French boy named E. A., and adduces the testimony of several independent observers. In all these cases—and they are but samples—many of the results, *as described*, seem hardly susceptible of explanation by the exercise of the normal senses. Townshend's subject, for instance, is described as seeing objects in absolute darkness, or when held at the back of his head, or behind a screen. Most commonly, however, the object to be seen was held in front of his eyes, which were assumed to be securely bandaged, and the interposition of a screen, a variation in the angle at which the object was held, or the addition of a further covering to the subject's head, interfered with success. It is quite clear, therefore, that in most cases the process of seeing with the eyes shut had some relation to the normal organs of vision; and it is not difficult to suppose that the few apparent exceptions referred to were due to malobservation or the neglect of essential precautions. As regards the singular freedom of vision possessed by youths whose eyes were in appearance securely bandaged, the experience of the S. P. R., as already stated, has shown that, with some persons, at any rate, a very small chink at the side of the

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. vi. pp. 98-110 see also pp. 380-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Zoist*, vol. iv. p. 82.

nose suffices for the purpose of vision; and that there is practically no means of blindfolding the eyes, without injuring the patient, which would preclude the possibility of vision by this means.<sup>1</sup>

The most notable success in this kind of clairvoyance was attained by a young Frenchman, Alexis Didier, who was brought to this country and exhibited by one Marcillet, whom Elliotson and others vouched for as a gentleman of high character and undoubted integrity. Alexis was, apparently, in the first instance thrown into a deep trance; his eyes were then bandaged, generally as follows: a pad of leather would be placed over each eye, and then a handkerchief would be tied diagonally across; over all a third handkerchief would be tied horizontally, and the interstices would be filled up with cotton wool. In these circumstances he would play *écarté* with great skill and rapidity; would know not only his own cards, but frequently those in his adversary's hand as well; would play correctly with his own cards face downwards on the table; would frequently, by request, pick out any named card when the whole pack was face downward. Further, he would—though generally with his eyes unbandaged and merely closed—decipher words written in sealed envelopes, describe the contents of closed packets, and read words and sentences several pages deep in any book which might be presented to him.

That the art by which these marvellous results were achieved was not that of the ordinary conjurer seems tolerably clear. Indeed, in 1847 Robert Houdin himself, having, at the instance of the Marquis de Mirville, paid two visits to Alexis, at which he played *écarté* in the usual fashion, presented a book in which Alexis read half a line some pages in advance, and received other proofs of the clairvoyant's powers, testified "qu'il est tout à fait impossible que le hasard ou l'adresse puisse jamais produire des effets aussi merveilleux."<sup>2</sup> As against conjuring of the familiar kind, Houdin's testimony is no doubt conclusive. As against the view here suggested, that the "clairvoyance" of cards and sentences in closed books, and so on, was probably to be explained as due to preternormal acuteness of vision, or of touch and vision, conditioned by the hypnotic trance, it is perhaps not so conclusive. No doubt Houdin, as a trained observer, if his attention had been specially directed to this possibility,

<sup>1</sup> See above, chap. v. p. 74, and references there given.

<sup>2</sup> *Des Esprits*, J. S. E. de Mirville. Paris, 1854. 3rd edition. Vol. i. pp. 18-32.

would have been better qualified than most persons to pronounce judgment upon it. But this acuteness of vision here supposed is a distinct thing from the rapid and comprehensive glance, the result of long training, which is, as we know from Houdin himself, a part of the conjurer's equipment, and might well pass for incredible even with an expert observer whose experience had lain in other directions.

As to the actual means by which the results were achieved, the accounts we possess are not sufficiently detailed to enable us to determine. The exact position of Marcillet is rarely mentioned; the proportion of failures to successes is hardly ever recorded, nor the nature of the failures. The table is described, if described at all, merely as "a card table," presumably, therefore, with only a slender strip of polished surface. In one case, indeed, we learn that the cards were highly glazed,<sup>1</sup> but we do not know if this was usually the case, or whether Alexis had other opportunities of seeing the cards by reflection from a polished surface. Nevertheless, from the descriptions of the performances given by many observers in the *Zoist* itself and in the periodical literature of the time, we can gather some indications of the probable *modus operandi*.<sup>2</sup> In any case, the bandaging could not have been accepted as satisfactory. But a writer in the *Morning Chronicle* tells us that he had himself been bandaged by a friend in the same way, and had managed to read distinctly. It was noticed, moreover, by several persons that Alexis contorted his face both during and after the process of bandaging; that he frequently touched or fidgeted with the bandages; that he held the objects to be looked at at curious angles, and changed their position, as if trying to get a better view. Envelopes and closed packages would be carried, for instance, to the stomach or the top of the head. Further, the card-playing appears to have been the only form of experiment which was pretty uniformly successful. Even

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. ii. p. 496.

<sup>2</sup> See especially *Zoist*, vol. ii. pp. 393-409, 477-529; the detailed and, on the whole, impartial account by Dr. Forbes, F.R.S., in the *Lancet*, August 3rd, 1844; a letter in the *Morning Chronicle*, June 28th, 1844, signed "No Go"; the *Times*, June 25th, 1844; *Medical Times*, July 27th, 1844, and subsequent dates; various articles in the *Critic* for 1844 and 1845, etc. For an account of some later sésances, given at Brighton in 1849, see *Animal Magnetism*, by Edwin Lee, M.D. (London, 1866), and *Zoist*, vol. vii. pp. 92 *et seqq.* Dr. Forbes (afterwards Sir John Forbes) published his account of two sittings with Alexis, also accounts of experiments with Adolphe Didier and other so-called clairvoyants, in a small volume, *Illustrations of Modern Mesmerism* (London, 1845), which should be read by all interested in the subject.

here there were many failures, but the failures seem to have predominated over the successes in other cases. Again, Alexis appears to have selected the passages which he was to read from amongst a large number presented to him. The contents of sealed envelopes could not be read in the hands of a sceptic; the seal must be broken, and the contents shown to a sympathetic witness. Marcillet was present in the room throughout the performance, and some of the numerous bystanders, if not actually confederates, were friendly and indiscreet.<sup>1</sup> Of all the feats, that of reading the words several pages deep in a book was the most strongly suggestive of trickery. This appears not to have been attempted, as a rule, until Alexis had already read some words on the open page, the book in his hand, with the text covered by a piece of paper or a handkerchief placed there by himself. Alexis would then separate a number of pages from ten to one hundred and fifty, holding them vertically before him, and offer to read some words on a particular part of the page several pages further on. It is not stated in any account which I have seen whether Alexis or the audience chose the particular spot on the page, but it is certain that Alexis could not indicate with even approximate correctness the number of pages deep. In one case the desired words were found eighty and one hundred and fifty pages further on respectively.

If this were all that Alexis had to show, we should perhaps be entitled to wonder at the simplicity of the numerous witnesses—lawyers, medical men, members of Parliament, and others—cited in the *Zoist*, who vouched for his performances. But there are two considerations which give us pause. In the first place, though it would have been difficult to prove this even at the time, and, of course, no certain proof is now possible, there are indications that his trance was genuine.<sup>2</sup> And if genuine, it is permissible to suppose, though the knowledge which he displayed had apparently been acquired by the exercise of the known senses, that he himself was innocent of deception in the matter. In the second place, at every séance, together with this display of conscious or unconscious jugglery, there occurred instances of "travelling clairvoyance" and thought-reading, which, if not genuine, involved deception of a more hazardous and complicated nature. Of course, fraud is the first explanation in a case of

<sup>1</sup> See Sir J. Forbes' observations on this point (*op. cit.*).

<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Sir J. Forbes (*op. cit.*, p. 51) writes that it was not proved, nor even probable, that the mesmeric state was genuine.

this kind. Alexis was a professional—he received on some occasions as much as five guineas a séance; and there is no strong improbability in the assumption that the respectable M. Marcillet was a confederate. And perhaps the most probable, though not necessarily the correct, explanation of his card-playing performances, is that of deliberate fraud. When, therefore, Alexis correctly described a medal enclosed in a casket covered with paper and sealed, we suspect that he may have succeeded in opening the casket unobserved, or that the lady who had brought it may have imprudently revealed its contents to those about her.<sup>1</sup> Or take the following incident, the account of which is compiled from notes made by the then Lord Adare (father of the present Earl of Dunraven) of a sitting with Alexis, which took place on July 2nd, 1844, at the house of M. Dupuis, in Welbeck Street. A corresponding, but rather fuller and more dramatic account of the incident is given by the Rev. G. Sandby, in a letter to the *Medical Times*, dated July 8th:—

“Colonel Llewellyn, who was, I believe, rather sceptical, produced a morocco case, something like a surgical instrument case. Alexis took it, placed it to his stomach, and said, ‘The object is a hard substance, not white, enclosed in something more white than itself; it is a bone taken from a greater body; a human bone—yours. It has been separated, and cut so as to leave a flat side.’ Alexis opened the case, took out a piece of bone wrapped in silver paper, and said, ‘The ball struck here; it was an extraordinary ball in effect; you received three separate injuries at the same moment; the bone was broken in three pieces; you were wounded early in the day whilst engaged in charging the enemy.’ He also described the dress of the soldiers, and was right in all these particulars. This excited the astonishment of all the bystanders, especially the gallant Colonel. This account is drawn up, not only from my own notes, but from Colonel Llewellyn’s statement made after the séance, and from a written account given me by a lady who was sitting close by.”<sup>2</sup>

On the hypothesis that the information given was normally obtained, we must suppose that Colonel Llewellyn was a garrulous old gentleman, who had betrayed his secret to someone in the room at the time; or that Marcillet or Alexis had by some means acquired beforehand knowledge of his history, and of his intention to attend the séance. Neither supposition can, of course, be dismissed as altogether improbable.

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. ii. p. 516.

<sup>2</sup> *Zoist*, vol. ii. pp. 510, 511.

Or, to turn to examples of the so-called "travelling clairvoyance," when we read that on one occasion Alexis gave to Lord Frederick Fitz-Clarence a minute description of his visit to St. Cyr from Paris two days before the séance, it is natural to remember, even though Lord Frederick himself thought "nothing could be much more extraordinary," that his lordship was probably a well-known figure in Paris, and his journeyings matters of common report.<sup>1</sup> When we hear how the clairvoyant, sitting in London, described, at the request of Dr. Costello, an operation for lithotripsy which the doctor had performed at Clifton two or three days before, we can but regret that the date of Dr. Costello's visit had apparently been arranged with Marcillet beforehand.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the Rev. Chauncey Hare Townshend relates that he paid a surprise visit to Marcillet in passing through Paris in October, 1851; that Alexis gave, in the trance, a surprisingly minute and accurate description of Townshend's house at Lausanne, its garden and surroundings, and even the subjects of the pictures hanging in the *salon*; passing on to give an equally circumstantial inventory of the narrator's house in Norfolk Street, London; of the maidservants there, the horses in the stables, and other details.<sup>3</sup>

The obvious remark on a case of this kind is that Townshend was a well-known writer on Mesmerism; that it was practically certain that he would at some time or another come to see Alexis; and that it would possibly be worth while for Alexis and his agents to "get up" as many facts as possible in connection with him, in order to afford a convincing proof of supernormal faculty. That the description of the maidservants in the house in London, and the grey horse in the stable with sores on its flanks, applied accurately to the time of the séance would only prove, on this hypothesis, that Alexis' Intelligence Department was up to date. It is true that this explanation becomes more and more difficult as it has to be applied to a wider and wider circle. But though successful clairvoyant descriptions of the kind appear to have been given at every séance, the reports which we possess are mostly at second-hand, or insufficiently detailed, and the names of persons concerned are frequently not given. Occasionally, as in the case of the séance at the house of the Rev. Thos. Robertson, on the 9th July, 1844, we have a full account, drawn up shortly after the event by one of the principal witnesses, which

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. vi. pp. 417-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Medical Times*, July 27, 1844.

<sup>3</sup> *Zoist*, vol. ix. pp. 405, 406.

reveals an amount of correspondence which certainly cannot be attributed to chance.<sup>1</sup> But a séance with Alexis, as in the case cited, appears to have been a kind of levée attended by some thirty or forty persons, so that he had considerable chances of utilising any information which he might have surreptitiously acquired; and the supposition that his display of apparent clairvoyance was, in fact, to be so explained, though it certainly implies the possession of highly trained confederates and singular good fortune in the chance of sitters, is not perhaps to be summarily dismissed. It is interesting to remark that Alexis himself expressly disclaimed any assistance from spirits in the matter.<sup>2</sup>

The hypothesis of a Private Inquiry agency—not unreasonable in the case of a professional clairvoyant, who received comparatively large sums for his performances—is more difficult to apply to the numerous other cases recorded in the literature of this period. There are, for instance, several striking reports in the *Zoist* of the clairvoyance of a young woman named Ellen Dawson, a patient of a London surgeon named Hands, who discovered the faculty in her by accident, and apparently allowed a few privileged persons to witness it in operation. But something could no doubt have been gleaned by a cunning and unscrupulous person from the gossip of servants, and in nearly every case a wide margin must be allowed for misdescription on the part of the narrator of the marvels.<sup>3</sup>

The following account, however, by the late Professor de Morgan is worthy of consideration, partly because of the intellectual distinction of the recorder, partly because there is no obvious source from which the information could have been derived:—

“I have seen a good deal of Mesmerism, and have tried it myself on — for the removal of ailments. . . . But this is not the point. I had frequently heard of the thing they call clairvoyance, and had been assured of the occurrence of it in my own house, but always considered it as a thing of which I had no evidence

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. ii. pp. 520, 521.

<sup>2</sup> Carpenter, who attended some séances with Alexis, noticed “how, whilst he was ‘thinking aloud’ (according to his friends) but ‘fishing’ or ‘pumping’ (according to unbelievers), he was helped by the information he gleaned from the unconscious promptings of his questioners.” (*Mesmerism and Spiritualism*, etc., (1877), p. 77.)

<sup>3</sup> One of the best accounts of Ellen Dawson’s clairvoyance is given in the *Zoist*, vol. iii. pp. 239-40. But unfortunately Miss Boyle, who tells the story, had taken her maid with her, and most of the facts given could conceivably have been derived from this source.

direct or personal, and which I could not admit till such evidence came.

"One evening I dined at a house about a mile from my own—a house in which my wife had never been *at that time*. I left it at half-past ten, and was in my own house at a quarter to eleven. At my entrance my wife said to me, '*We have been after you,*' and told me that a little girl whom she mesmerised for epileptic fits (and who left her cured), and of whose clairvoyance she had told me other instances, had been desired in the mesmeric state to follow me to — Street, to —'s house. The thing took place at a few minutes after ten. On hearing the name of the street, the girl's mother said—

"She will never find her way there. She has never been so far away from Camden Town.'

"The girl in a moment got there. 'Knock at the door,' said my wife. 'I cannot,' said the girl; 'we must go in at the gate.' (The house, a most unusual thing in London, stands *in* a garden; this my wife knew nothing of.) Having made the girl go in and knock at the door, or simulate, or whatever the people do, the girl said she heard voices upstairs, and being told to go up, exclaimed, 'What a comical house! there are three doors,' describing them thus.<sup>1</sup> (This was true, and is not usual in any but large houses.) On being told to go into the room from whence voices came, she said, 'Now I see Mr. de Morgan, but he has a nice coat on, and not the long coat he wears here; and he is talking to an old gentleman, and there is another old gentleman, and there are ladies.' This was a true description of the party, except that the other gentleman was not *old*. 'And now,' she said, 'there is a lady come to them, and is beginning to talk to Mr. de Morgan and the old gentleman, and Mr. de Morgan is pointing at you and the old gentleman is looking at me.' About the time indicated I happened to be talking with my host on the subject of Mesmerism, and having mentioned what my wife was doing, or said she was doing with the little girl, he said, 'Oh, my wife must hear this,' and called her, and she came up and joined us in the manner described. The girl then proceeded to describe the room: stated that there were two pianos in it. There was one, and an ornamental sideboard, not much unlike a pianoforte to the daughter of a poor charwoman. That there were two kinds of curtains, white and red, and curiously looped up (all true to the letter), and that there were wine and water and biscuits on the table. Now my wife, knowing that we had dined at half-past six, and thinking it impossible that anything but coffee could be on the table, said, 'You must mean coffee.' The girl persisted, 'Wine, water, and biscuits.' My wife, still persuaded that it must be coffee, tried in every way to lead her witness, and make her say

<sup>1</sup> A little diagram is given of these doors (she counted three, but indicated more) in the letter.—S. E. de M.

*coffee.* But still the girl persisted, 'Wine, water, and biscuits,' which was literally true, it not being what people talk of under the name of a glass of wine and a biscuit, which means sandwiches, cake, etc., but strictly wine, water, and biscuits.

"Now all this taking place at twenty minutes after ten was told to me at a quarter to eleven. When I heard that I was to have such an account given I only said, 'Tell me all of it, and I will not say one word'; and I assure you that during the narration I took the most especial care not to utter *one syllable*. For instance, when the wine and water and biscuits came up, my wife, perfectly satisfied that it must have been coffee, told me how the girl persisted, and enlarged upon it as a failure, giving parallel instances of cases in which the clairvoyants had been right in all things but one. All this I heard without any interruption. Now that the things happened to me as I have described at twenty minutes after ten, and were described to me as above at a quarter to eleven, I could make oath. The curtains I ascertained next day, for I had not noticed them. When my wife came to see the room she instantly recognised a door, which she had forgotten in her narration.

"All this is no secret. You may tell whom you like, and give my name. What do you make of it? Will the never-failing doctrine of *coincidence* explain it? . . .

"I have seen other things since, and heard many more; but this is my chief personal knowledge of the subject."

The letter is unfortunately not dated, but the events recorded are obviously of no very distant date. Mrs. de Morgan, the editor of the memoir, gives the year as 1849, and adds the following note:—

"I heard [*i.e.* from the entranced girl] all about the house and furniture, etc., *before* the girl told me what was going on. Mr. de Morgan has represented it to Mr. Heald as occurring *after*, and it is quite possible that I told him in this order. But I never heard of this letter until after his death.—S. E. de M."<sup>1</sup>

Cases such as that above recorded—and there are many similar accounts in the *Zoist* and elsewhere—can of course be explained, on the assumption that the record is correct, by the hypothesis that thoughts actually present to the mind of the sitter are telepathically conveyed to the subject. But there are many narratives which, taken at their face value, would force us to go beyond this explanation. It is not of course always possible to assure ourselves that the facts were written down at the time, and when this was not the case

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir of Augustus de Morgan*, by his wife, S. E. de Morgan, 1882, pp. 206-8.

large allowance must no doubt be made for imaginative embellishments and suppression of erroneous details. The following narrative, however, by Professor Gregory, written in December, 1851, and relating to events which took place seven months previously, appears to have been based on contemporary records. Professor Gregory describes a visit paid by him to a friend in a town about thirty miles from Edinburgh. He there met a lady who had been twice mesmerised by his friend and exhibited considerable clairvoyant powers. At Gregory's request, this lady—who was personally unknown to him—began by giving him a minute description of his own house in Edinburgh, and then of his brother's house, near the same city, and his brother's occupation at the moment. The details given proved on inquiry to be correct. Gregory then continues:—

“I now asked her to go to Greenock, forty or fifty miles from where we were (Edinburgh was nearly thirty miles distant), and to visit my son, who resides there with a friend. She soon found him, and described him accurately, being much interested in the boy, whom she had never seen nor heard of. She saw him, she said, playing in a field outside of a small garden in which stood the cottage, at some distance from the town, on a rising ground. He was playing with a dog. I knew there was a dog, but had no idea of what kind, so I asked her. She said it was a large, but young Newfoundland, black, with one or two white spots. It was very fond of the boy and played with him. ‘Oh,’ she cried suddenly, ‘it has jumped up and knocked off his cap.’ She saw in the garden a gentleman reading a book and looking on. He was not old, but had white hair, while his eyebrows and whiskers were black. She took him for a clergyman, but said he was not of the Established Church, nor Episcopalian, but a Presbyterian dissenter. (He is, in fact, a clergyman of the highly respectable Cameronian body, who, as is well known, are Presbyterians, and adhere to the covenant.) Being asked to enter the cottage, she did so, and described the sitting-room. In the kitchen she saw a young maidservant preparing dinner, for which meal a leg of mutton was roasting at the fire, but not quite ready. She also saw another elderly female. On looking again for the boy, she saw him playing with the dog in front of the door, while the gentleman stood in the porch and looked on. Then she saw the boy run *upstairs* to the kitchen, which she observed with surprise was on the upper floor of the cottage (which it is), and receive something to eat from the servant, she thought a potato.

“I immediately wrote all these details down and sent them to the gentleman, whose answer assured me that all, down to the minutest, were exact, save that the boy did not get a potato but a small biscuit from the cook. The dog was what she described; it did knock off the boy's cap at the time and in the place mentioned;

he himself was in the garden with a book looking on; there was a leg of mutton roasting and not quite ready; there was an elderly female in the kitchen at that time, although not of the household. Every one of which facts was entirely unknown to me, and could not, therefore, have been perceived by thought-reading, although, had they been so, as I have already stated, this would not have been a less wonderful, but only a different phenomenon.

"I shall send you another case for your next number. The above case I regard as a very satisfactory one, inasmuch as I did not know beforehand that I was to try any experiments at all, and had never seen the lady before.

"I remain, etc., etc.,

"Dec. 1851."

"WILLIAM GREGORY.<sup>1</sup>

Many clairvoyants at this period were applied to, with success, to trace lost and stolen property. Several cases of the kind are recorded by Dr. Haddock of his subject, Emma, a young woman in his employment as a domestic servant. One case attracted considerable attention at the time. A sum of £650 sent by post to Messrs. Arrowsmith, of Bolton, had disappeared. Arrowsmith's cashier, Mr. Lomax, believed that he had paid in the sum to the bank, but the bank denied all knowledge of it, and a search which was made at Lomax's instance proved unsuccessful. In this dilemma Messrs. Arrowsmith and Lomax called on Dr. Haddock to consult his clairvoyant. On being given the envelope in which the money had been enclosed, she is reported to have described accurately the appearance of the missing papers—two banknotes and a bill of exchange—and the pocket-book in which Mr. Lomax had placed them on receipt. She further described how they were handed in at the bank counter, and finally said that she saw them in an envelope with other papers, in an inner room at the bank. In consequence of her statements Mr. Arrowsmith went to the bank and insisted on a further search; and the missing notes and bill were ultimately found amongst some old circulars, etc., on the mantelpiece in the manager's private room.<sup>2</sup> Of course, in this instance the clairvoyant may have merely reflected Mr. Lomax's own surmises as to the disposal of the money: and this explanation is no doubt still possible in the cases where a thief was indicated and stolen property recovered through the agency of clairvoyance. For despite the assurance to the contrary given by the persons who

<sup>1</sup> *Zoist*, vol. ix. pp. 423, 424.

<sup>2</sup> *Bolton Chronicle*, Sept. 8th, 1849. The account is reprinted in Haddock's *Somnolism and Psychicism*, pp. 117-24.

consulted the clairvoyant, it is permissible to suppose that a latent suspicion in their minds may have inspired the sensitive's utterances. But the accurate and detailed description of the missing property itself, of the manner of the robbery, and of the personal appearance of the thief, alleged to have been given in two or three cases, is very remarkable.<sup>1</sup>

The instances given in this and the preceding chapter may be taken as favourable samples of the evidence for thought-transference and clairvoyance afforded by the writings of the English Mesmerists. Whilst, no doubt, insufficient in themselves to prove the existence of such faculties, it will perhaps be admitted that, in the light of more recent evidence to the same effect, it is difficult summarily to reject these records as the result of malobservation or inaccurate reporting.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Somnolism and Pychêism*, pp. 115-17. *Zoist*, vol. vii. 95-101, and vol. xiii. 56. In the last case the body of a drowned woman is alleged to have been traced by the clairvoyant.

<sup>2</sup> A striking instance of inaccurate reporting is furnished by Miss Martineau. In her *Letters on Mesmerism* she relates that a vague report had come on Sunday, October 13th, 1844, to the house at Tynemouth where she was then lodging, that the boat in which a cousin of her clairvoyant subject, Jane, was sailing had been wrecked. On the Tuesday evening no authentic news as to the fate of the sailors had, according to Miss Martineau, reached the house up till 8 p.m. At that hour a séance was held, and the entranced Jane gave the joyful news that all on board were saved, except one boy, and that the boat which rescued them was a foreign one. At the very hour, Miss Martineau adds, when this intelligence was being delivered in her sitting-room, the sailor's mother, who had come in after the commencement of the séance, and without the knowledge of Miss Martineau and her circle, was telling the same story in the kitchen, two floors below. In his *Illustrations of Modern Mesmerism* Forbes shows, on the evidence of a local doctor and of one of the witnesses at the séance, that the good news was actually known in the house three hours before the sitting. Miss Martineau's deafness may have accounted for the misunderstanding. In her *Autobiography* (edition of 1877, vol. ii. p. 198) Miss Martineau, referring to Forbes' action in the matter, states that she holds a legal declaration which "establishes the main fact on which the somnambule's story of shipwreck was attempted to be overthrown." But she gives no particulars, nor attempts to refute Dr. Forbes' exposure in detail.

## CHAPTER XI

### ANDREW JACKSON DAVIS AND THE *UNIVERCÆLUM*

OF the mesmeric propaganda in America we have already caught a glimpse through the pages of the *Phreno-Magnet*.<sup>1</sup> Collyer, with his bowl of treacle, and Sunderland, with his hundred and fifty phrenological organs, seem to have fairly represented the movement. Though here and there we hear of medical men employing the mesmeric trance for therapeutic purposes, or for operations, there was in the decade 1840-50 no school of medical hypnotism as in France, Germany, and England; nor any organ at all comparable to the *Zoist* and the various Continental periodicals to which we have had occasion to refer. The phenomena of the somnambular trance seem indeed to have become generally known in America at about the same time as in England, *i.e.* from 1838 onwards; but in the former country there was no convert of conspicuous ability and recognised standing in the scientific world to form a school, or win even such measure of recognition as fell to the share of Elliotson and his circle in England. The propaganda rested therefore mainly in the hands of popular lecturers and preachers; and the medical men who concerned themselves in the matter were not specially qualified either to investigate such a subject for themselves, or to impose their views on others. All the writers of the time believed, or had believed, in phrenology; though Collyer, as we have seen, had within a year or two recanted his views, and Sunderland was soon to repent him of his intemperance in cerebral geography. And, again with the exception of Sunderland, all seem to have believed in the transmission of a physical effluence from operator to subject as the cause of the trance and the more dubious phenomena associated

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 129, 130.

with it. Indeed, a large portion of the various treatises published at this time is devoted to vindicating the prior claim of their respective authors to the discovery of the true system of phrenology, and to inventing new names for the hypothetical effluence. Amongst these writers were several whom we shall meet with later in the history of Spiritualism. Thus the Rev. J. Bovee Dods, author of *Six Lectures on the Philosophy of Mesmerism*,<sup>1</sup> afterwards published his views on the séance manifestations, attributing the whole of them to the operation of "vital electricity."<sup>2</sup> Dr. J. S. Grimes, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the Castleton Medical College, by whom the subject of Mesmerism was afterwards introduced to the notice of A. J. Davis and his neighbours, explained the phenomena of the trance as due to the influence of a subtle fluid, for which he proposed the name *Etherium*, his conception of which is not distinguishable in some aspects from the modern conception of the ether. But Grimes' theory had some features peculiar to itself. He supposed that the motions in the *Etherium* which produced the trance, whether initiated by another organism or an inanimate object, always returned on themselves, like the galvanic current, in a closed circuit. Further, in his theory the trance and all that belonged to it were symptomatic of disease, resulting from disturbed equilibrium in the ethereal currents. He also assigned a large part in the production of the phenomena to the "credence" faculty. The action of drugs at a distance and clairvoyance were ascribed to the direct influence—through the *Etherium*—of external objects on the imperfectly insulated nervous system of the sensitive. Grimes had invented a special system of phrenology, and a new name for the science of Mesmerism, to wit, *Etheropathy*.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. J. Rodes Buchanan, still living (in 1899)<sup>4</sup> to instruct and encourage a new generation of Spiritualists, had issued about 1843 a "Neurological" map, giving an entirely new distribution of the phrenological organs. But it was not until 1854 that he published a complete exposition of his system of Neurology, or Anthropology.<sup>5</sup> Beside the re-classification of the phrenological organs, his chief contribution to science was the theory of *Nervaura*, a subtle emanation given off from

<sup>1</sup> New York, 1847.

<sup>2</sup> See chap. vi., book ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Etherology and the Phreno-Philosophy of Mesmerism and Magic Eloquence*, etc. Boston and London, 1850. Second edition; the first had been published some years previously.

<sup>4</sup> He died in 1900.

<sup>5</sup> *Outlines of Lectures on the Neurological System of Anthropology, as discovered, demonstrated, and taught in 1841 and 1842*. Cincinnati, 1854.

the nervous system, which differed not only for each individual, but for each organ. *Nervaura*, as Buchanan explained it, stood in the scale of materiality midway between electricity and caloric on the one hand and will and consciousness on the other, being indeed the mediating link between the two sets of entities. Like other mundane forces, it could be transmitted from one organism to another through an iron bar; but it was so far akin to the purely spiritual energies that by means of the *Nervaura* radiating from the anterior and superior cerebral centres "an individual operates upon a nation and transmits his influence through succeeding centuries."<sup>1</sup>

Buchanan also started in the early fifties a *Journal of Man*, which was originally, as we learn from Brittan, to have taken the place of the *Shekinah*,<sup>2</sup> but seems ultimately to have been devoted mainly to the exposition of the science of Neurology. Records of the Spiritualist movement, however, and the séance phenomena found hospitality in its columns, as is testified by the frequent references to it in other periodicals.

The one figure at this time which, by reason of superior common sense, stands out from the group of believers in phrenology and nerve-fluids was the Rev. Laroy Sunderland. Born in 1804, Sunderland became at the age of nineteen a revivalist preacher, and had the gratification of seeing his congregation profoundly affected by his first sermon: some prostrate and groaning on the floor, some smiting their breasts in an agony of grief, others crying aloud and clapping their hands in ecstatic joy.<sup>3</sup> He soon became an ardent Abolitionist,<sup>4</sup> and in 1835 started a paper called the *Watchman*, which ran until 1842. In 1839, however, he first had his attention called to the mesmeric trance; he made experiments for himself, succeeded in obtaining the usual phenomena, even to the extent of inducing anæsthesia for surgical operations,<sup>5</sup> and finally, in June, 1842, founded a periodical called the *Magnet*, in which he propounded a novel theory of the subject. We have already seen something of Sunderland's contributions to the science of Phreno-Mesmerism. It is fair to say, however, that he soon saw that he had been mistaken in attaching any weight to the phrenological demonstrations

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> See *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iii. p. 489.

<sup>3</sup> *The Trance and Correlative Phenomena*, by Laroy Sunderland (Chicago, 1868), p. 12. (The copy now before me was Sunderland's own.) The account which follows of Sunderland's life and work is taken, unless otherwise stated, from this book, or from the columns of the *Spiritual World* and *Spiritual Philosopher*.

<sup>4</sup> See his *Anti-Slavery Manual*. New York, 1837.

<sup>5</sup> *The Trance*, pp. 137, 159, etc.

on the heads of entranced persons. The whole subject of Phreno-Mesmerism is completely ignored in his paper the *Spiritual Philosopher* (1850-1), and in his work on *The Trance* (1868) he briefly owns his mistake.<sup>1</sup> So, in his theories of the trance he was misled at first by various physical analogies. He discoursed on the magnetic nature of living bodies and the polarity of the cerebral organs, and was disposed to explain somnambulism as a result of nervous induction.<sup>2</sup> But notwithstanding these earlier extravagances, Sunderland appears to have been one of the soundest and most cautious investigators of his time. He shares, indeed, with Braid the honour of having recognised in his later writings—and, it would seem, independently—that all the phenomena of the trance could be explained without fluid or aura or effluence of any kind, as being simply results of the subject's own mental reaction to suggestions supplied by the voice or gestures of the operator, or, in some cases, by the patient himself. When the suggestion came from without, it was an essential condition that a relation should have been previously established between operator and subject; but that relation he conceives as consisting in the subject's own anticipation or apprehension of certain results. This process Sunderland called *Pathetism*. In his work on *The Trance* he thus formulates the principle of Pathetism: "When a relation is once established between an operator (or any given substance, real or imaginary, as the agent) and his patient, corresponding changes may be induced in the nervous system of the latter (awake or entranced) by suggestions addressed to either of the external senses."<sup>3</sup> Throughout he seems to have been clear that the assumption of an effort of the will on the part of the operator being a necessary condition was, generally speaking, as gratuitous as the assumption of a fluid; and showed that, in many cases, the results followed, not on the will of the operator, but on the expectation of the patient. He allowed, however, that in rare instances, when a relation between operator and subject had been previously established, effects could be produced by mere volition on the part of the former. Agreeably to these views, he rejected as unproven and superfluous the magnetic and electric analogies commonly employed amongst his contemporaries to explain the vital phenomena; and frankly

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> See his early articles in the *Magnet*, quoted in the *Phreno-Magnet*, pp. 3, 166, 295.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 19; see also *Pathetism*, by the same author. Boston, 1847.

intimated that Reichenbach's vaunted demonstrations were probably to be attributed to imagination alone.<sup>1</sup>

But the man in these early years who was destined to play the most important part in the future history of Spiritualism was Andrew Jackson Davis. The prophet of the New Dispensation was born in 1826, in a small rural township in the State of New York, and in 1838 moved with his parents to the town of Poughkeepsie, in the same State, from which place he takes his name as the "Poughkeepsie Seer." His father was part weaver and part shoemaker, and eked out his profits from those two trades by hiring himself out in the summer as a farm-labourer. Both parents appear to have been honest and respectable; but his father, according to the son's account, was shiftless and for many years given to drink. The young Andrew Jackson was apparently an undersized, delicate boy, with very little education, and in childhood of no conspicuous ability. In 1841 he was apprenticed to a shoemaker named Armstrong, and worked at that trade for about two years. In the autumn of 1843 considerable interest was aroused in Poughkeepsie by a series of lectures on Animal Magnetism delivered by Professor Grimes; and a tailor named Levingston succeeded in December of that year in entrancing young Davis. Thereafter, until August, 1845, Davis was constantly magnetised by Levingston, and practised under his guidance as a professional clairvoyant, giving tests, and especially prescribing for diseases. In March, 1844, according to the account given by himself, he wandered away into the country for a considerable distance under the guidance of his inward monitor, and fell into a spontaneous trance, during which Galen and Swedenborg appeared to him in a churchyard and instructed him concerning his mission to mankind.<sup>2</sup> In the following year, in the course of a professional tour, he made the acquaintance of Dr. Lyon, a physician then practising at Bridgeport, Conn., and of the Rev. William Fishbough. Later in the same year he appointed these two gentlemen to act as his magnetiser and his scribe respectively, and to assist him in the inditing of certain lectures on philosophy to be delivered in the clairvoyant trance.<sup>3</sup> The three accordingly took lodgings in New York, where Davis continued to practise as a medical clairvoyant,

<sup>1</sup> In an article in the *Spirit World* (vol. ii. p. 134) Sunderland gives a clear exposition of his views on Reichenbach's work.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 225-45.

<sup>3</sup> Davis had already published in the same year (1845), apparently before his falling in with Lyon and Fishbough, some *Lectures on Clairmativeness*. See footnote below, p. 167. This publication is not mentioned in the *Autobiography*.

passing into the trance on the average twice daily. The lectures were actually commenced in November, 1845, extended over a period of fifteen months, and were published in the summer of 1847 in the shape of a large octavo volume of nearly eight hundred closely printed pages, under the title of *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and A Voice to Mankind*. The method of production was as follows: Davis, having been thrown into the trance state by Dr. Lyon, proceeded to dictate his discourse a few words at a time. Each utterance was repeated by Dr. Lyon, and only then written down by Fishbough. The scribe, in his introduction to the book, dated July, 1847, assures us that the whole book was written down exactly as dictated, the only alterations made, according to his explicit statement, being a few corrections in grammar and occasional removal of verbal redundancies or slight emendations to make the sense less obscure. It is obvious, however, that the peculiar process of dictation employed, by which the trance utterance was filtered through the minds of two educated persons before reaching the public, gave opportunity, not merely for correction of crudities of expression, but to some extent for the guidance of the argument. There seems no sufficient reason, however, to doubt the good faith of those concerned; and there were many witnesses, including some persons of note, who attended the lectures from time to time and countersigned the reports, so that it seems probable that the book as we have it is substantially in the form in which it was dictated by Davis.

Amongst those who had frequently attended the circle while the *Revelations* were being dictated, and who had taken a warm interest in the young seer, was the Rev. George Bush, of New York, Professor of Hebrew in the University and a well-known Swedenborgian. It was very largely to Bush's advertisement of the work that the favourable reception which the book met with on its first appearance was due. Bush vouched for the good faith of the author and his circle, and for the fact that the clairvoyant on more than one occasion had digressed from the main current of his discourse to answer impromptu questions put to him as tests; and he further gave a most enthusiastic account of the nature of the book itself. Thus he writes: "Taken as a whole, the work is a profound and elaborate discussion of the philosophy of the universe, and for grandeur of conception, soundness of principle, clearness of illustration, order of arrangement, and encyclopædic range of subjects, I know no work of any single mind that will bear

away from it the palm." And, again: "The manner in the scientific department is always calm, dignified, and conciliatory, as if far more disposed to excuse than to censure the errors which it aims to correct; whilst the style is easy, flowing, chaste, appropriate, with a certain indescribable simplicity which operates like a charm on the reader."

The work was published in December of the same year (1847), in England, by John Chapman, who thought it necessary himself to write a Preface explanatory of the nature of the book, in which he quotes Bush's eulogy, and adds his own testimony, in a manner hardly less impressive, to the moral value and scientific insight of the book.<sup>1</sup> He found the philosophy of the *Revelations* was allied to the teachings of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel; whilst the scientific conceptions therein advocated were confirmed by the views enunciated by Goethe, Oken, and the evolutionists generally, and by recent discoveries in astronomy. The aim of the work was exalted, and the style and thought alike impressive and dignified.

It is with a certain diffidence that one approaches the task of appraising a work of this character; it is no light matter to essay in the compass of a few pages to offer an adequate summary of the great Harmonial Philosophy, of which this book contains the germ, a philosophy for which its author has not found complete expression in some thirty volumes. But some account, at any rate of the contents of this book, must nevertheless be attempted. The book, as indicated in the triple division of the title, is divided into three parts; and it is on the second part, "Nature's Divine Revelations," that the indiscretion of the seer's admirers has caused attention to be chiefly concentrated. Bush speaks of it as "one of the most finished specimens of philosophical argument in the English language." It opens as follows:—

"In the beginning the Univercœlum was one boundless, undefinable, and unimaginable ocean of Liquid Fire! The most vigorous and ambitious imagination is not capable of forming an adequate conception of the height and depth and length and breadth thereof. There was one vast expanse of liquid substance. It was without bounds—inconceivable—and with qualities and essences incomprehensible. This was the original condition of Matter. It was without forms, for it was but *one* Form. It had not motions, but it was an eternity of Motion. It was without parts, for it was a Whole. Particles did not exist, but the Whole was as *one*

<sup>1</sup> *Brief outlines and Review of "The Principles of Nature,"* etc. London, John Chapman, 1847.

Particle. There were not suns, but it was one Eternal Sun. It had no beginning, and it was without end. It had not length, for it was a Vortex of one Eternity. It had not circles, for it was one Infinite Circle. It had not disconnected power, but it was the very essence of all Power. Its inconceivable magnitude and constitution were such as not to develop forces, but Omnipotent Power.

"Matter and Power were existing as a Whole, inseparable. The *Matter* contained the substance to produce all suns, all worlds, and systems of worlds, throughout the immensity of Space. It contained the qualities to produce all things that are existing upon each of those worlds. The *Power* contained Wisdom and Goodness, Justice, Mercy, and Truth. It contained the original and essential Principle that is displayed throughout immensity of Space, controlling worlds and systems of worlds, and producing Motion, Life, Sensation, and Intelligence, to be impartially disseminated upon their surfaces as Ultimates."<sup>1</sup>

From these opening sentences the entranced clairvoyant traces the evolution of the universe—or, as he terms it, *Univer-cælum*—by a gradual process of differentiation into vast systems of suns, moving in concentric circles of inconceivable magnitude round the Great Eternal Centre, "pregnated with the immutable eternal essence of divine Positive Power." Thereafter, descending upon details, he gives a description of the particular solar system of which we are members, and of the gradual progression and development through the geological cycles of our own planet, ending up with a sketch of the first appearance and early history of the human race, and of its future in the spirit world.

His scientific competence for the stupendous task he essays may be judged from the following extracts. Here is an account of the first appearance of living organisms on the nascent planet:—

"Chemistry will unfold the fact that *light*, when confined in a certain condition and condensed, will produce *water*, and that water thus formed, subjected to the vertical influence of light, will produce, by its internal motion and further condensation, a gelatinous substance of the composition of the spirifer, the motion of which indicates animal life. This again being decomposed and subjected to evaporation, the precipitated particles which still remain will produce putrified matter similar to earth, which will produce the plant known as the *fucoides*. It is on the result of this experiment (the truth of which, as above represented, can be universally ascertained) that rests the probability, though not the absolute certainty,

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* (thirty-fourth American edition, Boston, 1876), pp. 121, 122.

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of the truth of the description which I am about to give concerning the first form possessing life."<sup>1</sup>

Or take, again, this remarkable extract from a description of the marine fauna of the Old Red Sandstone period:—

"The radiata and articulata, in their progression, now begin to assume the form of the scorpion [*sic*] and insect, between which the fuci determined upon by geologists sustains an intermediate position. The seas at this time were inhabited by annelidans and scorpion fishes, the ultimate of which represents nearly the shark and sturgeon. The annelidans were a species of sea-worm, still to be found upon many coasts and coves, where stones and other bodies of concealment exist. Of this class there are two kinds—the white and red, the first of which is hermaphrodite, sustaining an intermediate position between the lower type and the higher, in which the serpula becomes visible."<sup>2</sup>

Or, again, this description of the Oolite:—

"No stratification has attracted so much attention among geologists as this. For it represents a formation as resulting from the decomposition of previously existing plants, animals, and mollusca, together with the deposition of solutions of existing substances upon the land and in the water; and the whole renders this stratification altogether mysterious and incomprehensible. It is known that lime in various proportions enters into this formation; but the cause has not as yet been discovered which could possibly unite the substances of the previous formations with the living substances of the earth, and render the whole an aggregated stratification. And by passing the substances of the various *oolite* beds through chemical processes, alumina and other substances will be discovered; not as naturally inherent ingredients, but as a condensation of the dissolved particles of previous formations."<sup>3</sup>

Again, he describes the ichthyosaurus as inhaling through "an adipose branchæ" an atmosphere which consisted of "carbon, nearly counterbalanced by oxygen";<sup>4</sup> he accounts for the occurrence of fossil shells high up on mountain sides as due to a general rise in the level of the ocean, "caused by the expansion of previously condensed particles composing the water";<sup>5</sup> amber he explains as formed out of sea-water "by a strange and peculiar chemical process."<sup>6</sup>

But his admirers claim that he anticipated Adams and Leverrier in the discovery of the planet Neptune; and it is certainly curious that in a lecture committed to MS. in

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup> Page 263.

<sup>2</sup> Page 242.

<sup>5</sup> Pages 243, 244.

<sup>3</sup> Page 270.

<sup>6</sup> Page 312.

March, 1846, he does give a fairly detailed description of an eighth planet.<sup>1</sup>

This is the first part of his account: "Its density is four-fifths of water. Its diameter it is unnecessary to determine. Its period of revolution can be inferred analogically from the period in which Uranus traverses its elliptic and almost inconceivable orbit. The atmosphere of the eighth planet is exceedingly rare, containing little oxygen, but being mostly composed of fluorine and nitrogen."<sup>2</sup> The first of these statements happens to be approximately correct, so far as modern science has succeeded in determining the matter; but as the figures quoted apply with equal accuracy to the density of Uranus, Neptune's nearest neighbour, the coincidence is not, perhaps, very remarkable. The last statement, it need hardly be said, is preposterous.

But if there are any who still think that Davis' description of an eighth planet is something more than a lucky shot, they will have to explain how it comes about that in his account of the planetoids he goes not a whit beyond the popular knowledge of his day. Four planetoids—Ceres, Pallas, Juno, and Vesta—were then commonly known.<sup>3</sup> Astronomers now reckon many hundreds. But Davis enumerates four only, and the account which he gives even of these is in some respects glaringly incorrect.

This second part of the book includes also a detailed description of the various planets of our system and their inhabitants, vegetable, bestial, and human. Towards the end he gives an account of the relations of man with the world of spirits, and a description of the six spirit spheres and their societies, and concludes with the following prophecy: "It is a truth that spirits commune with one another while one is in the body and the other in the higher spheres—and this, too, when the person in the body is unconscious of the influx, and hence cannot be convinced of the fact; and this truth will ere long present itself in the form of a living demonstration, and the world will hail with delight the ushering in of that era when the interiors of men will be opened, and the spiritual communion will be established such as is now being enjoyed by the inhabitants of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The calculations of Leverrier were not verified by the actual discovery of the planet Neptune until September, 1846. <sup>2</sup> Page 167.

<sup>3</sup> A fifth, Astrea, had actually been discovered in the previous year (1845), but probably news of the discovery had not penetrated to Poughkeepsie.

<sup>4</sup> Pages 675, 676.

The first part of the book, "Principles of Nature," contains an involved, wordy, and often unintelligible or self-contradictory exposition of a system of mystical philosophy, of which space will not permit even a brief analysis. But the leading notes are that the universe is one great whole; that "the Whole is a vast Machine operating unceasingly by an inherent principle of perpetual action"; that there is thus an eternal progression from lower to higher; that this progression moves on spiral lines; that matter and spirit differ as finer from coarser; that, the Universe being *one*, truth may best be attained deductively by mastering general principles; that it is, in fact, so learnt by the clairvoyant, who ascends in trance to the world of the Real; that there is a vast system of correspondences, or analogies, throughout the universe; and that things in general are arranged in series of three. Thus, to quote Davis' own illustration of correspondences, degrees, and series, in the human body we have the Head as the Cause, the Chest as the Effect, the Abdomen as the End or Ultimate. We have the mouth, the stomach, and the intestines as another series; or, again, we have saliva, gastric juice, and bile; or blood, lymph, and perspiration. So in the mineral world we find "interior, mediatorial, and exterior forms"; in industry, farmer, mechanic, and manufacturer. Whilst in the ideal State the legal, medical, and clerical professions "are a trinity forming one Whole, which corresponds to Wisdom."<sup>1</sup> With this key the secrets of the universe may be unlocked.

In the third part, "A Voice to Mankind," is set forth a rather crude Socialism, ending up with a scheme for the salvation of mankind by the organisation of society into phalanxes of Co-operators.

As regards Davis' attitude toward the Christian theology, it should be added that in the *Revelations* he goes through the books of the Old Testament—or, as he calls it, "the Primitive History"—seriatim, and endeavours to show that they have no title to exclusive or infallible inspiration; and of Christ he explicitly speaks, alike in this and in his later works, as a great moral reformer, but not in any special sense divine.

It is not easy to form a just appreciation of the book. The mistakes, indeed, where the nature of the subject admits of the statements being put to the test, are frequent, gross, and palpable, and many passages, as already shown, are pretentious nonsense. In its treatment of philosophical themes the style is for the most part wordy and diffuse, and the meaning

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 770.

elusive beyond the tolerated usage of philosophers. But nevertheless, at its best, there is a certain stately rhythm and grandiloquence which partly explains the favourable impression produced on Bush, Chapman, and others. And whilst the book is obviously the work of an imperfectly educated man, its qualities are more remarkable than its defects. Viewed merely as an effort of memory, it is a stupendous work to have been produced by a man less than twenty-one years of age, whose few months of schooling had barely sufficed to impart the beggarly elements, and whose life had been mainly spent, since childhood, in working hard for his living. His later occupation as a professional clairvoyant no doubt gave him more leisure for study, but it is denied by those around him that he made use of his opportunities. His friends, indeed, not unnaturally gloried in the deficiencies of his education as tending to enhance the marvel of his trance utterances, and Davis himself protested that up to that time he had read only one book in his life, a romance apparently, called the *Three Spaniards*.<sup>1</sup> But the Rev. A. R. Bartlett, who knew him intimately from 1842 to 1845, i.e. in the three years immediately preceding the dictation of the *Revelations*, says that "he possessed an inquiring mind—loved books, especially controversial religious works, which he always preferred whenever he could borrow them and obtain leisure for their perusal. Hence he was indebted to his individual exertions for some creditable advances which he made in knowledge."<sup>2</sup> Davis, in his *Autobiography*, apparently referring to this passage, says that he borrowed the books from Mr. Bartlett in order to lend them to his friends, but had neither time nor inclination to read them himself.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is the clairvoyant's memory that is at fault, for it seems clear that he had read books prior to 1845, though not necessarily many books.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is perhaps more probable that he had read very few, and that their contents were the more readily stored up in a memory of enormous but indiscriminating retentiveness. Amongst these books, it may be surmised, was the *Vestiges of Creation*, or some similar work, containing in popular form an account of the nebular hypothesis and the main facts of the geological pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography (The Magic Staff)*, pp. 186, 304, etc. New York, 1876, thirteenth edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Revelations*, Introduction, p. x.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 199, 200.

<sup>4</sup> Bush states (*Davis' Revelations Revealed*, p. 11) that Davis, writing to him from Poughkeepsie some time before the inception of the *Revelations*, quoted a passage from Swedenborg's *Arcana Caelestia*, giving the exact reference.

gression,<sup>1</sup> and some English or Scotch geological text-book, possibly some book of Hugh Miller's, for the geology described is that of the British Isles.

The third part of his work, "The Voice to Mankind," was no doubt based on some book—perhaps Brisbane's *Social Destiny of Man*—advocating Fourier's views on Socialism, which just before the date of the *Revelations* had spread in the eastern States of America and had there excited extraordinary enthusiasm. Brisbane himself is mentioned amongst those who attended the delivery of the *Revelations*, and countersigned the reports.<sup>2</sup> The Fourierist newspaper, *The Phalanx*, was started in New York City in October, 1843; the great Convention of Associationists met in the same city in the following year; and most of the Socialist communities of that day, not only those which were originally founded on Fourierist lines, but semi-religious associations, such as Brook Farm, Hopedale, and Oneida, started in New York State, or in the States immediately adjoining. It is impossible that young Davis should have escaped the contagion of the time.

As regards the philosophy and theology, Professor Bush testifies that the *Revelations*, for the most part, accurately reflect Swedenborg's views; that the coincidence in the language in several cases is "all but absolutely verbal," and that in one instance Davis gives an accurate analysis of one of Swedenborg's scientific books, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, a translation of which, published a year or two before in England, had recently made its appearance in America.<sup>3</sup> Bush finds an argument for Davis' supernatural power upon this analysis. The book, he says, had only recently been translated; very few copies (all consigned to one publisher) had reached America, and his inquiries had satisfied him that not one of these few copies had actually come into the hands of Davis or his circle. His inference is that Davis acquired the information clairvoyantly. Bush does not give details

<sup>1</sup> Davis, in his *Autobiography* (pp. 322, 323), says that during the progress of the lectures, owing to remarks being made on the similarity of his doctrines with those set forth in the *Vestiges* (published in 1844), he purchased and glanced at the book, but had not actually read more than a page at most. There is, of course, some resemblance in the general treatment of the facts. But I have compared several passages in the *Revelations* with corresponding passages in the *Vestiges*, and I cannot find any such detailed coincidences as to make it certain that Davis had actually borrowed from the earlier book. Indeed, it seems pretty clear, from his introduction of geological and astronomical terms and facts (*e.g.* *grauwacke* and the names of the planetoids), which are not apparently mentioned in the *Vestiges*, that he must, in any case, have had some other source of information.

<sup>2</sup> *Nature's Divine Revelations*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Letters to the *New York Tribune*, Nov. 15th, 1846, and Aug. 10th, 1847.

of his investigations, and it is obvious that it would be extremely difficult to offer satisfactory proof that Davis had not had access to this, or any other work of Swedenborg's. In the particular case referred to (pp. 587, 588 of the *Revelations*) the knowledge shown might conceivably have been derived from Bush himself, who, during his attendance on one of the lectures, may have discussed the book aloud with some friend. And, speaking generally, Davis' own statement that he had read no books on the subjects dealt with in his lectures, supported though it is by the testimony of Fishbough and others, is quite insufficient to override the enormous improbabilities involved. Moreover, we have the direct assertion of Bartlett, who was in a position to know, to set against that of Fishbough, whose knowledge was at best second-hand. And, lastly, Davis and his friends are not immaculate witnesses, for they are guilty of having deliberately suppressed all reference to an awkward fact, viz. the previous publication of some other lectures by the seer, which were not altogether in accordance with the later *Revelations*.<sup>1</sup>

It is unlikely, however, that there was any conscious plagiarism, and almost certain that there was rarely direct

<sup>1</sup> In 1845 there had been published in New York, under the title *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, a small pamphlet containing four lectures by Davis on the mysteries of human magnetism and electricity. In this pamphlet Davis writes of himself in the clairvoyant state:—

"I possess the power of extending my vision throughout all space, can see things past, present, and to come. I have now arrived at the highest degree of knowledge which the human mind is capable of acquiring . . . I am master of the general sciences, can speak all languages," etc., etc.

In this early work Davis had taught that salvation lay in the belief in Christ and His resurrection; whereas in the *Revelations*, as already said, he explicitly disavowed dogmatic Christianity. It must be presumed that Fishbough and the rest knew of the earlier work, and had felt the difficulty involved in the conflict between the earlier and the later utterances of the one infallible prophet. There appear, indeed, to have been also numerous minor discrepancies. At any rate, it is significant that neither in the sketch of Davis' life by Fishbough, which is prefixed to the *Revelations*, nor throughout the work itself, is there any mention of this earlier publication. Davis himself, in his *Autobiography* (p. 276), dismisses it in a single paragraph, in which he explains that the title was wrongly spelt and should have been *Clairlativeness*. Presumably there was at least one language, therefore, as well as one system of theology, of which his knowledge at that epoch was imperfect.

I have not been able to see a copy of *Clairmativeness*. It is not, so far as I can discover, included in Davis' collected works, and does not appear to have been reprinted. The foregoing account of it is based on Sunderland's review of it in *Pathetism* (1847). Mattison (*Spirit Rappings*, pp. 121, 122) suggests that Davis and his friends called in and destroyed the pamphlet. It is noteworthy that, in the Preface to volume i. of the *Great Harmonia*, Davis speaks of the *Divine Revelations* as his first work. It is fair to add that in volume iii. of the *Great Harmonia* (p. 210) he explicitly recants the assertion of infallibility quoted above from his earlier work, explaining that this belief in his own infallibility comes naturally to a clairvoyant.

verbal reproduction of borrowed passages. In his later books and lectures, indeed, which purported to be produced under spiritual impression, but not in the trance, a few charges of wholesale verbal plagiarism have been substantiated against him. The most striking case of the kind is the parallelism of certain passages in the *Great Harmonia* (vol. iii., published in 1852) and in Sunderland's *Pathetism* (1847). That Davis should have deliberately copied those passages, half a page at a time, and that he should have chosen for the purpose a book written by a fellow-believer, which contained, moreover, a criticism on his own writings, and would certainly be familiar to many of those who read his own book, argues a want of foresight which is scarcely credible. It is probable that the real explanation is to be found in his possession of an extraordinarily retentive memory, such as is not infrequently associated with the somnambulist state. The same explanation no doubt applies to the other charges brought against him. But in the case of the *Revelations* I am not aware that, however obviously the ideas and the phraseology have been borrowed, any plagiarism of sentences or paragraphs, with the exception of the cases referred to by Bush, has ever been proved.<sup>1</sup>

But if all that Davis could offer was a garbled reproduction of books accessible to all, it is impossible to conceive that any public, however superficially educated, could have demanded thirty-four editions of his book in less than thirty years. Something the clairvoyant did no doubt contribute of his own to bind his gleanings into a golden sheaf. Despite pretentious ignorance, mistakes of grammar, fact, and logic, misty metaphysics, and second-hand Socialism, there is a certain imaginative quality in the work which gives it an independent value. What the clairvoyant poured out was not merely undigested fragments of other men's ideas; there is in the book a fairly consistent scheme of thought, the

<sup>1</sup> See Sunderland, *The Trance*, p. 104; and compare *The Great Harmonia*, vol. iii. pp. 92, 93, 96, 101, 102, 136 with *Pathetism*, pp. 74, 75, 105, 101, 102, 111. See also, for other cases, Mattison, *Spirit Rappings*, etc., pp. 121, 122, 126; Asa Mahan, *Modern Mysteries*, etc., p. 30. In *Human Nature* (London, 1868), vol. ii., p. 321, the authoress of *Primaval Man*, an "inspirational" work published in 1864, shows that Davis, in his *Arabula* (1867), had quoted several paragraphs from the earlier book with a few verbal alterations. Davis, writing to *Human Nature* later in the same year (p. 407), explains that he got perplexed in the proof-reading by various quotation marks which had been misplaced, and that he imagined himself in this passage to have summarised the views of the authoress, not to have made a direct quotation. He further excuses his mistake by pointing out that if he cannot claim the credit of the passage referred to, neither can his victim, since her book was admittedly "inspirational."

guiding conception of which had in those days sufficient novelty and audacity for the English publisher to think it necessary to point out that the theory of organic evolution, though rejected by such men as Owen and Lyell, had found many distinguished advocates on the Continent.<sup>1</sup> Davis had, in fact, realised something of the orderly progression from the primæval firemist; something of the unity in complexity of the monstrous world; something, too, of the social needs of his time and of ours—the waste, the injustice, the manifold futilities and absurdities involved in the present stage of economic evolution. It was partly because he could appreciate the bigness of the ideas with which he dealt, and in a semi-articulate, barbarous fashion could make other people appreciate them too, that the *Revelations* had such an extraordinary and immediate success. Partly, too, the secret lay in the moral attitude of the author. The whole book is transfused by a vague enthusiasm—an enthusiasm not always according to knowledge—for the moral regeneration of mankind, like that which in England inspired the Owenite and later the Co-operative movement, which in America expressed itself in phalansteries, in religious revivals, and in abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, or meat, and which in both countries found perhaps its fullest expression for a few years in the movement known as Modern Spiritualism. And, indeed, it was the fulfilment—I had almost written the accidental fulfilment—a twelvemonth later, in the eyes of Davis and his followers, of the prophecy quoted above, of freer spirit-intercourse upon earth, that after all is mainly responsible for the fame achieved by the Great Harmonial Philosophy. The fulfilment was not, of course, “accidental.” In the first place, the Spiritualism of the years subsequent to 1848 was not a different movement from the Spiritualism whose course we have been tracing prior to that year. It was characterised by the same ideas, but found other external manifestations. In the second place, there is no doubt that Davis and the little band who gathered round him helped materially to the fulfilment of this prophecy. It is conceivable that but for them and the movement they represented the Rochester knockings might have remained as barren of results as the Cock Lane ghost, or any other exploded Poltergeist.

We learn from Davis' *Autobiography* that during the fifteen months in which the *Revelations* were being dictated in New York, the three persons immediately concerned—Dr. Lyon, Fishbough, and Davis—were dependent mainly

<sup>1</sup> *Brief Outlines and Review*, etc.

on the money earned by the latter by means of his clairvoyant prescriptions for disease. When this source of income proved insufficient, they were forced to borrow what was necessary for the publication of the book; the money being advanced by a middle-aged lady who shortly afterwards became the wife of A. J. Davis.

But when the book was published the Poughkeepsie seer found himself already famous; and his later life belongs to history.<sup>1</sup> The rumour of his séances and of the pending revelation had spread far, and the appearance of the book had been anxiously looked for in many quarters. A little band of reformers soon gathered round him, and it was resolved to publish a paper which should be the mouthpiece of the new philosophy.

The Rev. S. B. Brittan, a Universalist minister, was appointed the editor-in-chief of the new organ; and associated with him in the work of writing and editing were the Rev. W. Fishbough and the Rev. T. L. Harris, then twenty-four years of age, both of the same denomination; the Rev. W. M. Fernald, J. K. Ingalls, Dr. Chivers, Frances Green, and others.<sup>2</sup>

Harris had, in the early part of 1847, formally withdrawn from the Universalist Church, and later in the year went on a lecturing tour to spread the knowledge of the new Revela-

<sup>1</sup> So far, for our account of Davis' early life and circumstances, we have had to depend almost exclusively on his *Autobiography*, *The Magic Staff*, written some years later, and on the Preface to the *Revelations*, written by Fishbough, but founded largely on Davis' own statements. As we have already seen, the Preface omits all mention of one fact of cardinal importance in the clairvoyant's past life. Nor can the *Autobiography* be regarded as an entirely trustworthy authority, either for the inner life of the man or for his external relations. Few men can regard themselves and their work with the impartial eye of the historian. And when the subject of the *Autobiography* claims to be in receipt of information direct from the "Great Centre of intelligence, the positive sphere of thought, the Spiritual Sun of the Spiritual Sphere," it may be anticipated that the need for justifying these tremendous pretensions will take precedence over the claims of mere mundane happenings. The seer's descriptions of what he did and felt, how he acted towards his fellow-men, and what visions of spiritual things were vouchsafed to him, were, no doubt, written in good faith, but they should probably be read as representing primarily his own later conception of how it would have best become the dignity of the youthful prophet to have felt and done.

<sup>2</sup> In September, 1847, within a few weeks of the appearance of the *Revelations*, Professor Bush, who had hitherto been, as we have seen, one of Davis' most enthusiastic champions, published a small pamphlet, *Davis' Revelations Revealed*, in which he solemnly warned the public against being misled by the numerous errors, absurdities, and falsities contained in that work. Viewed in the light of Swedenborg's teachings, he declared, it was clear that Davis, although himself apparently an honest and single-hearted young man, had been made the mouthpiece of uninstructed and deceiving spirits. Further, he pointed out that Davis' pretended revelation was no isolated phenomenon; there were

tion. He was known as the poet of the little circle; and from the outset there was some friction between him and Davis. Each, in fact, was possessed with a jealous vanity which could tolerate no rival pretensions. Early in 1848 there came a complete rupture between them, Fishbough taking the part of Davis and Brittan siding with Harris. The immediate cause of the rupture was a scandal in connection with Davis and the lady already mentioned. Whatever ground there may have been for the scandal—and it is by no means clear that Davis was in fault—the two were married in July, 1848; and a few weeks later a formal reconciliation took place between the Poet and the Prophet. But they never worked together again.

The first number of the *Univercælum* appeared on December 4th, 1847. The prospectus set forth that "an interior and spiritual philosophy" was its basis; that it would devote special attention to psychology, including dreams, somnambulism, clairvoyance, prophecy, trance, and kindred subjects; that it would be the organ for the communications made through A. J. Davis, who would begin by contributing a series of articles on physiology and medicine; and, generally, that "the establishment of a universal System of Truth, the Reform and Reorganisation of Society," were the ultimate objects contemplated. In his editorial article in the first number, Brittan thus expresses the central idea of the new philosophy:—

"The *Univercælum* will, in its general tone and tendency, recognise the Great Supreme Intelligence as a Cause, Nature as the Effect, and the immortalized Human Spirit as the Ultimate Result, the three being united in the formation of one Grand Harmonious System. The Deity will be considered as an infinitely intelligent Essence, not existing separately from the Universe, but entering into and actuating and vivifying all things, from the most ponderous globe to the infinitesimal particle of matter. This Great Essence will be considered as an organized Being, possessing faculties corresponding to those of Man, only in an infinite degree—as constituting the Soul of which the material Universe is the Body. The Infinite Soul and Infinite Body are thus united in the same way as the finite soul and finite body are united in the formation of man; and

already many cases of the kind, "and, if we mistake not, the indications are rife of a general demonstration about to be made, or now being made, of the most pernicious delirium breaking forth from the world of spirits upon that of men" (p. 7).

The reason for this rapid change of tone was, no doubt, the change in the seer's attitude towards Christianity already referred to.

hence, according to an ancient record, 'Man is created in God's own image.'

"This great intelligent Essence being the Soul of Nature, the Laws of Nature will be considered as the outward expression of the will or thoughts of that Soul, in the same way as the positions and movements of the human body are the expressions of the will or thoughts of the spirit within. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Again, in the first article in this first number, "On the Necessity for new and higher Revelations, Inspirations, and forms of Truth, for the benefit of Mankind at the present day," Fernald points out the deficiencies of the last or Christian revelation. Christ stood indeed at the head of the human race, as its supreme moral exemplar; but His teaching furnished us with no new principles even of morality; much less did they provide an adequate philosophy of God, Nature, Immortality, and the Organisation of Society. It is on these subjects—as the slow progress of the world since Christ had shown—that light was chiefly needed; and the revelations of A. J. Davis were, the writer contended, the first instalment of the new inspiration which should supply the need.

This belief, that a new revelation was about to burst upon the world, seems to have been shared by all the men and women who wrote in the *Univercælum*. Thus Fernald elsewhere, in an article on "The Pending Revelations," <sup>2</sup> expresses his belief that the "Great day of final battle between the Demon of Darkness and the Angel of Light is near at hand." Warren Chase, in an enthusiastic article, "hails with joy the new philosophy as the positive sign of a good time coming. It shadows forth distinctly the approaching commencement of that condition of earth and man portrayed more or less vividly by Isaiah, Daniel, Jesus, the book of Revelation, and by Swedenborg and Fourier." <sup>3</sup> Another contributor, Mrs. Peabody, writing on "Communion with the Dead," asserts that "they (*sc.* the spirits of the dead) may be all round us without our discovering them, because our spiritual vision is not strong or clear enough," and that ultimately "the union of the two worlds may form as much a part of the consciousness of every disciple as it did of the Saviour Himself." <sup>4</sup>

It is to be noted that though the *Univercælum* continued for more than a year after the outbreak of the Hydesville

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. pp. 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i. p. 343.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. iv. p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. ii. p. 177.

rappings, its contributors appear to have been slow to recognise in them the fulfilment of their hopes. There is, so far as I can discover, but one allusion to the subject in its pages. In the third volume<sup>1</sup> there is a note on "Strange Manifestations," signed, "W. F." (Fernald). The writer, in his editorial capacity, explains that a correspondent has sent him an account of some singular manifestations taking place at Auburn. He promises to investigate the occurrences as soon as possible and lay the result before the readers of the *Univercalum*. "We think, however," he continues, "that this is a question which should be put to the torture before any conclusions are definitely announced thereon," lest premature discussion of the matter should serve the cause of superstition and fanaticism.

The writers in the *Univercalum* appear to have looked to a reconstruction of the economic organisation on Socialist lines as the first indispensable step towards the coming millennium. Thus one writes: "We are in earnest in the advocacy of general reforms and the reorganisation of society, because such is the natural counterpart and outer expression of the interior and spiritual principles which we are endeavouring to set forth." In conformity with this view, we find articles expounding the general principles of Socialism, much information about the building associations, the industrial associations, the trades unions, the protective unions, and other co-operative organisations which appear at this time to have been springing up all over the country; and occasionally vague hints of a grand scheme for realising the new social ideal in a community. One of the leading writers on this subject is Fernald, but we have also an article by Horace Greeley, on "Life—Ideal and Actual," and editorials on the same subject by J. K. Ingalls. Sunderland makes his appearance in a long letter, defending the claims of Pathetism. Davis contributes a series of articles on cholera, dyspepsia, etc., afterwards republished as volume i. of the *Great Harmonia*; whilst we learn from the advertising columns that Harris has become the pastor of the "First Independent Christian Society," and is conducting services in that capacity twice each Sunday. In one pronouncement of Harris we find an indication of the rupture already referred to between himself and Davis. He issues a solemn warning against "a tendency on the part of certain minds to place implicit reliance on all statements which come from persons in states of mental Illumination: to make their words Authoritative; to receive

<sup>1</sup> Page 155.

their sayings as Oracular and Infallible."<sup>1</sup> In view of the later career of the writer, this utterance is in itself a fine example of life's irony.

There are two cases recorded in the columns of the *Univercalum* of revelations somewhat like those of Davis. The first case is published on the authority of a gentleman in Akron, Ohio. No names are given, but the editor professes himself satisfied of the good faith of his informant; and, indeed, the narrative bears the stamp of truth. The prophet, in this case a working mechanic, writing in November, 1847, gives an account of a spiritual experience which had befallen him in September, 1836, when he was eighteen years of age. He earnestly desired to become a preacher, and had gone to his pastor for instruction. The pastor had in the course of conversation asked him how he would prove, apart from the Bible, the existence of God. The question rankled; he took it home and pondered over it; it kept him awake at night and held him from attending properly to his work. Then, after a day or two, on the 16th September, 1836, the solution came.

"I went to my dinner with a troubled mind. My brain felt hot. I ate but sparingly. After dinner I strolled into the pasture back of the house, walking with my hat in my hand. The cool breeze fanned my brow. I wandered until the bell reminded me that it was one o'clock. I returned towards the shop; while on my way I stopped and sat down. I then and there began to doubt the existence of God, then the existence of matter, then of myself, of my power and ability to move, and at the same time attempted to move my hand and could not, and immediately mother appeared to me."

His mother (dead some time previously) then proceeded to instruct him on the nature of God, the world, man's soul, and other spiritual mysteries. At the end she said, "Now you have become convinced there is a God. You need no longer doubt your own existence. Move your fingers a little, and then you can get up. Remember what I have told you. Go in peace." When he returned to the shop it was almost night.

Two days later he wrote down the substance of his mother's teachings, and had kept it in his trunk until the autumn of 1847, when he first learnt of the similar revelations of A. J. Davis. This earlier trance utterance presents in brief the same general ideas as those found in *Nature's Divine*

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 280.

*Revelations.* We have the same pervading conception of evolution and development by law, the same condemnation of alcohol, tea, and tobacco, the same depreciation of the biblical records, and similar intimations of social reform. But there is nothing in the writing which is otherwise noteworthy, nor does it seem to be beyond the mental capacity of a serious and intelligent youth of little education.<sup>1</sup>

Of the other case we have fewer details. In connection with the approaching trial for insanity of one Pascal Smith, an account is given of the events which led to the preferment of the charge. In 1845, or thereabouts, J. T. Mahan, a youth employed upon an Ohio River steamboat, became a magnetic clairvoyant. At first he was employed in medical diagnosis by one Dr. Curtis, president of a medical college in Cincinnati. Later, however, being taken in hand by J. P. Cornell, of the same town, he "developed a wide sweep and wonderful clearness of mental vision," "and brought forth a system of physical and intellectual science" which is said to have been equal to that of A. J. Davis, and to have resembled it in general outlines. Thereafter Cornell, with other prominent citizens—Gilmore, Boucher Wattles, and others—dedicated their property—some 200,000 dollars, it is said—"each to the other and all to God," and formed a co-operative and agricultural association. They started a magazine for the furtherance of spiritual and social science, and purchased a large property on the Ohio River, to give the new community a local habitation. Unfortunately, the seer Mahan appears to have been influenced by self-seeking persons, and developed very extravagant tastes; financial disaster and exposure followed. No further account of the community is given in the *Univercalum*, nor any details of Mahan's revelations.<sup>2</sup> From another source, however, we learn that the community—the Cincinnati Brotherhood—lasted for three years, 1845-8, and that the land and other property which they purchased on the banks of the Ohio in 1846 represented the salvage from an earlier community—the Clermont Phalanx—which had gone to pieces just before.<sup>3</sup>

To return to the *Univercalum*. That paper had already in the first twelve months of its existence absorbed another kindred organ, the *Christian Rationalist*, and taken over its editor (Fernald) and subscribers. In 1849 more and more of its space was given up to chronicles of Socialist and co-operative movements; and finally, in July of that year, the *Uni-*

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iii. pp. 353, 369, 385.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i. p. 345.

<sup>3</sup> Noyes' *History of American Socialisms*, pp. 11, 374.

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*vercælum* gave place to *The Present Age*, under the editorship of W. M. Channing. The new organ, whilst still occasionally treating of animal magnetism, psychology, and clairvoyance, was primarily an organ of social reform, and the Poughkeepsie seer and his leading colleagues seem no longer to have been included amongst the contributors. Of them and their doings more will be told in the next book.

BOOK II  
EARLY AMERICAN SPIRITUALISM



# EARLY AMERICAN SPIRITUALISM

## CHAPTER I

### IN ARCADIA

IT was in Arcadia that the mysterious rappings were first heard. Arcadia is a township in Wayne County, New York; and in December, 1847, one John D. Fox, a farmer by occupation, a Methodist by religious conviction, entered on the tenancy of a house in Hydesville, a small village in that township. The household consisted, beside John D. Fox and his wife Margaret, of two unmarried daughters, Margaretta and Katie, aged fifteen and twelve years respectively. There was also a married son, David Fox, living about two miles from the parents' homestead, and a married daughter, Mrs. Fish, afterwards successively Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Underhill, living in Rochester, N.Y. The house itself, of which an illustration is given in Mrs. Underhill's book, *The Missing Link*, was built, as was usual in new settlements at that time, of wood, and consisted apparently of one floor only, with a cellar below, and a loft or garret above, the whole being little, if at all, bigger than a labourer's cottage in England.<sup>1</sup>

The former tenant, one Michael Weekman, who had resided in the house about eighteen months, is said to have heard from time to time loud knockings and other noises, for which he could find no apparent cause. His testimony, however, appears to have been given only after the raps which occurred during the Fox tenancy had made the whole subject notorious.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Capron (*Modern Spiritualism*, p. 33) describes it as a small framed building one and a half stories high.

<sup>2</sup> It is dated April 11th, 1848. See *Modern Spiritualism: its facts and fanaticisms*, by E. W. Capron. Boston, 1855.

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But it is matter of history that on the evening of the 31st of March, 1848, the Fox family, who, by their own account, had passed several disturbed nights previously by reason of the raps and other noises in the house, went to bed early, in order to make up their arrears of sleep. What follows is based upon the testimony of the Foxes. The girls were already in bed, and their parents—who occupied another bed in the same room—were about to follow, when the raps were again heard. On this occasion, in reply to a challenge given by one of the girls, the raps repeated, sound for sound, the noises which she made by snapping her fingers, and again and again gave the number of raps asked for. At this proof of an intelligent cause for the raps, Mrs. Fox, prescient that the matter was one of no ordinary moment, resolved to call in her friends and neighbours, that they also might bear witness. From the account given by one of those neighbours, William Duesler, written down on April 12th, 1848, the following extract is taken—

“The first I heard anything about them (the noises) was one week ago last Friday evening (31st day of March). Mrs. Redfield came over to my house to get my wife to go over to Mr. Fox’s; Mrs. Redfield appeared to be very much agitated. My wife wanted I should go with them, and I accordingly went. When she told us what she wanted us to go over there for, I laughed at her, and ridiculed the idea that there was anything mysterious in it. I told her it was all nonsense, and that it could easily be accounted for. This was about nine o’clock in the evening. There were some twelve or fourteen persons there when I got there. Some were so frightened that they did not want to go into the room. I went into the room and sat down on the bed. Mrs. Fox asked questions, and I heard the rapping which they had spoken of distinctly. I felt the bedstead jar when the sound was produced.

“Mrs. Fox then asked if it would answer my questions if I asked any, and if so, rap. It then rapped three times. I then asked if it was an injured spirit, and it rapped. I asked if it had come to hurt anyone who was present, and it did not rap. I then reversed the question, and it rapped. I asked if I or my father had injured it (as we had formerly lived in the house), there was no noise. Upon asking the negative of these questions the rapping was heard. I then asked if Mr.— (naming a person who had formerly lived in the house) had injured it, and if so, manifest it by rapping, and it made three knocks louder than common, and at the same time the bedstead jarred more than it had done before. I then inquired if it was murdered for money, and the knocking was heard. I then requested it to rap when I mentioned the sum of money for which it was murdered. I then asked if it was one hundred, two, three, or

four, and when I came to five hundred the rapping was heard. All in the room said they heard it distinctly. I then asked the question if it was five hundred dollars, and the rapping was heard. . . . I then asked it to rap my age—the number of years of my age. It rapped thirty times. This is my age, and I do not think anyone about here knew my age except myself and family. I then told it to rap my wife's age, and it rapped thirty times, which is her exact age; several of us counted it at the time. I then asked it to rap A. W. Hyde's age, and it rapped thirty-two, which, he says, is his age; he was there at the time and counted it with the rest of us. Then Mrs. A. W. Hyde's age, and it rapped thirty-one, which, she said, was her age; she was also there at the time. I then continued to ask it to rap the age of different persons (naming them) in the room, and it did so correctly, as they all said.

"I then asked the number of children in the different families in the neighbourhood, and it told them correctly in the usual way, by rapping. Also the number of deaths that had taken place in the families, and it told correctly. I then asked it to rap its own age, and it rapped thirty-one times distinctly. I then asked it if it left a family, and it rapped. I asked it to rap the number of children it left, and it rapped five times; then the number of girls, and it rapped three; then the number of boys, and it rapped twice. Before this I had asked if it was a man, and it answered by rapping, it was; if it was a pedler, and it rapped."<sup>1</sup>

The affable intelligence proceeded by the same method to give further particulars of the murder; and even the initials—C. R.—of its first name and "sir name"; but refused on that occasion to gratify curiosity further.

On the two following days some hundreds of persons came to witness the marvel; and on the Sunday, again to quote from Mr. Duesler's account, the raps indicated, in reply to his questions, that the body of a man had been buried in the cellar. From the statement of David Fox, preserved for us by his sister, Mrs. Underhill,<sup>2</sup> we learn that in the early days of April, 1848, the Fox family and some of their neighbours, following the indications given by the spirit, dug in the cellar to the depth of about three feet, when they were stopped by water, without finding anything. Later, in July of the same year, when the water in the hole had gone down, the digging is said to have been resumed, a depth of several feet was reached, and some teeth, bones, and hair supposed to be human, and fragments of a broken bowl were discovered; a wooden board was also found, which apparently covered a

<sup>1</sup> *Explanation and History of the mysterious Communion with Spirits*, by E. W. Capron and H. D. Barron; 2nd ed., pp. 15, 16. Auburn, N.Y., 1850.

<sup>2</sup> *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism*, p. 18, etc. New York, 1885.

hollow space. But the authority alike for the discovery and for the identification of the teeth and bones appears again to be the Fox family alone. The incident is not even mentioned in Capron and Barron's book (1850), and in Capron's *Modern Spiritualism* (1855) it is introduced with the preface, "It is not generally known that in the summer of 1848 Henry Beach and Lyman Granger, of Rochester, and David S. Fox and others . . ." <sup>1</sup> Again, some of the neighbours were found to recollect that, at a time vaguely described as "one winter," a pedlar had called in the village, had failed to redeem his promise to call next day, and had never more been seen; also that the earth in the cellar of the house afterwards inhabited by the Fox family had been observed at that time to be loose; also that another neighbour had seen in the kitchen of the house a figure resembling that of the pedlar. <sup>2</sup>

It should be added that Mrs. Fox had herself elicited most of the facts about the alleged pedlar before calling in the neighbours, and Mr. Duesler's catechism would therefore seem to have been dictated by her. <sup>3</sup> Further, no corroborative evidence of the supposed murder, or even of the existence of the man supposed to have been murdered, was ever obtained. Even Capron, the sympathetic historian of the movement, can only say that the (alleged) discovery of the (possibly) human teeth and bones affords "a shade of circumstantial evidence" for the story. <sup>4</sup>

Shortly after these incidents Margaretta Fox went to Rochester, N.Y., to stay with her married sister, then known as Mrs. Fish, and Catherine visited another neighbouring town, Auburn. In both these places the raps broke out with renewed vigour. Mrs. Fish herself and many other persons in Rochester became mediums for the mysterious sounds, and the like result followed with several inmates of the boarding-house in Auburn where the younger sister stayed. <sup>5</sup> Sometimes the contagion was conveyed by a casual visit. Thus Miss Harriet Bebee, a young lady of sixteen, had an interview of a few hours with Mrs. Tamlin, a medium of Auburn, and on her return to her own home twenty miles distant the raps forthwith broke out in her presence. <sup>6</sup> In the course of the next two or three years, indeed, the rappings had spread throughout the greater part of the eastern States.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33, quoted from a pamphlet published in 1850 by one Lewis.

<sup>3</sup> Capron and Barron, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 54. Mrs. Hardinge Britten (*History of Modern American Spiritualism*, p. 37) writes to the same effect.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Thus a writer in the *New Haven Journal* in October, 1850, refers to knockings and other phenomena in seven different families in Bridgeport, forty families in Rochester, in Auburn, in Syracuse, "some two hundred" in Ohio, in New Jersey, and places more distant, as well as in Hartford, Springfield, Charlestown, etc.<sup>1</sup>

A year later a correspondent of the *Spiritual World* estimated that there were a hundred mediums in New York City,<sup>2</sup> and fifty or sixty "private circles" are reported in Philadelphia.

The Fox family—the mother and her three daughters—practised no unwise parsimony of their spiritual gifts. In the course of the years 1849 and 1850 they appear to have given demonstrations of their power in several large towns before considerable audiences. Their claims to supernormal power did not, of course, escape challenge. Again and again committees were appointed to examine the subject and report.<sup>3</sup> But for some time the source of the rappings remained inexplicable. Horace Greeley, for instance, writes in his organ, the *New York Tribune*, in August, 1850, as follows:—

"Mrs. Fox and her three daughters left our city yesterday on their return to Rochester, after a stay here of some weeks, during which they have freely subjected the mysterious influence by which they seem to be accompanied to every reasonable test, and to the keen and critical scrutiny of the hundreds who have chosen to visit them, or whom they have been invited to visit. The rooms which they occupied at the hotel have been repeatedly searched and scrutinised; they have been taken without an hour's notice into houses they had never before entered. They have been all unconsciously placed on a glass surface concealed under the carpet, in order to interrupt electric vibrations; they have been disrobed by a committee of ladies appointed without notice, and insisting that neither of them should leave the room until the investigation had been made, etc., etc., yet we believe no one to this moment pretends that he has detected either of them in producing or causing the Rappings; nor do we think any of their contemners has invented a plausible theory to account for the production of these sounds, nor the singular intelligence which (certainly at times) has seemed to be manifested through them. . . . Whatever may be the origin or the cause of the 'Rappings,' the ladies in whose presence they occur do not make them. We tested this thoroughly and to our entire satisfaction."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *Spiritual Philosopher* (1850), vol. i. p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. iii. p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> Capron and Barron, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-48.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in the *Spiritual Philosopher*, vol. i. p. 39.

But early in the following year an explanation was furnished. In the middle of December, 1850, the Fox girls came to Buffalo, N.Y., and stayed there for some weeks, giving public exhibitions of their marvellous powers. Among those who visited them were three doctors—Flint, Lee, and Coventry, Professors at the University of Buffalo. On the 17th February, 1851, these gentlemen wrote a joint letter to a local newspaper—the *Commercial Advertiser*—pointing out that the rappings could be explained by movements of the knee-joints, and stating that a lady of their acquaintance had actually produced similar sounds by that means. Mrs. Fish at once challenged the doctors to prove the truth of their theory at a personal interview, a challenge which the three doctors accepted. The following is their report of what took place:—

“DETECTION OF THE FOX GIRLS.

“The invitation thus proposed was accepted by those to whom it was addressed, and on the following evening, by appointment, the examination took place. After a short delay, the two Rochester females being seated on a sofa, the knockings commenced, and were continued for some time in loud tones and rapid succession. The ‘spirits’ were then asked whether they would manifest themselves during the sitting and respond to interrogatories. A series of *raps* followed, which were interpreted into a reply in the affirmative. The two females were then seated upon two chairs placed near together, their heels resting on cushions, their lower limbs extended, with the toes elevated, and the feet separated from each other. The object in this experiment was to secure a position in which the ligaments of the knee-joint should be made tense, and no opportunity offered to make pressure with the foot. We were pretty well satisfied that the displacement of the bones requisite for the sounds could not be effected unless a fulcrum were obtained by resting one foot upon the other, or on some resisting body. The company, seated in a semicircle, quietly waited for the ‘manifestations’ for more than half an hour, but the ‘spirits,’ generally so noisy, were now dumb. . . . On resuming the usual position on the sofa, the feet resting on the floor, *knockings* very soon began to be heard. It was then suggested that some other experiment be made. This was assented to, notwithstanding the first was, in our minds, amply conclusive. The experiment selected was, that the knees of the two females should be firmly grasped, with the hands so applied that any lateral movement of the bones would be perceptible to the touch. The pressure was made through the dress. It was not expected to prevent the sounds, but to ascertain if they proceeded from the knee-joint. It is obvious that this experiment was necessarily far less demonstrative to an

observer than the first, because if the bones were distinctly felt to move the only evidence of this fact would be the testimony of those whose hands were in contact with them. The hands were kept in apposition for several minutes at a time, and the experiment repeated frequently for the course of an hour or more with negative results; that is to say, there were plenty of *raps* when the knees were not held and none when the hands were applied save once. As the pressure was intentionally somewhat relaxed (Dr. Lee being the holder), two or three faint, single *raps* were heard, and Dr. Lee immediately averred that the motion of the bone was plainly perceptible to him. The experiment of seizing the knees as quickly as possible when the knockings first commenced was tried several times, but always with the effect of putting an immediate *quietus* upon the *manifestations*. . . . The conclusion seemed clear that the *Rochester knockings* emanate from the knee-joint. Since the exposition was published we have heard of several cases in which movements of the bones entering into other articulations are produced by muscular effort, giving rise to sounds. We have heard of a person who can develop knockings from the ankle, of several who can produce noises with the joints of the toes and fingers, of one who can render loudly audible the shoulder, and another the hip-joint. We have also heard of two additional cases in which sounds are produced by the knee-joint."

In a letter dated the 21st of February Dr. Lee, one of the three signatories, explained that the movement, or partial dislocation of the knee-joint, probably consisted in "the movement of the *tibia* outward, partly occasioned, I believe, by pressure on the foot, there being great relaxation of the ligaments about the knee-joint, but chiefly by the action of the muscles of the leg below the knee." The ability to produce sharp raps by "cracking" the smaller joints is, of course, not uncommon. Newman Noggs was a "medium" of this kind. One Chauncey Burr earned some fame at this time by giving lectures on Spiritualism, in which he demonstrated that the raps could be produced by the toe-joints.

A few weeks after the report of the Buffalo physicians a connection by marriage of the Fox family, Mrs. Norman Culver, stated that Margaretta Fox had confessed to her how the raps were produced. Mrs. Culver's statement, duly written out on the 17th April, 1851, and attested by two witnesses, a doctor and a clergyman, was published in the *New York Herald*. The chief points in the deposition are that Mrs. Culver had for two years believed in the raps as genuine, but recently, noting some suspicious circumstances, she had offered to Catherine to assist her. Catherine—

Margaretta being absent—had gladly accepted the offer, and explained that the raps were produced by the knees and toes, but chiefly by the latter. Some practice was required, and if the feet were thoroughly warmed the raps would come more readily. Mrs. Culver tried, and became fairly adept. She continues:—

“Catherine told me how to manage to answer the questions. She said it was generally easy enough to answer right if the one who asked the questions called the alphabet. She said the reason why they asked people to write down several names on paper, and then point to them till the spirit rapped at the right one, was to give them a chance to watch the countenance and motions of the person, and that in that way they could nearly always guess right. She also explained how they held down and moved tables. (Mrs. Culver gave us some illustrations of the tricks.) She told me that all I should have to do to make the raps heard on the table would be to put my foot on the bottom of the table when I rapped, and that when I wished to make the raps sound distant on the wall, I must make them louder, and direct my own eyes earnestly to the spot where I wished them to be heard. She said if I could put my foot against the bottom of the door the raps would be heard on the top of the door. Catherine told me that when the committee held their ankles in Rochester, the Dutch servant girl rapped with her knuckles under the floor from the cellar. The girl was instructed to rap whenever she heard their voices calling the spirits. Catherine also showed me how they made the sounds of sawing and planing boards. (The whole trick was explained to us.) When I was at Rochester last January Margaretta told me that when people insisted on seeing her feet and toes she could produce a few raps with her knee and ankle.”

Mrs. Culver adds that she learnt from Catherine that Elizabeth Fish (Mrs. Fish's daughter) accidentally discovered how to make the raps, by playing with her toes against the footboard when in bed. Many naughty little girls before and since appear to have made the same discovery.

Mrs. Culver's statement, though it fits in with the Buffalo demonstration, may not be thought conclusive in itself. But it receives indirect confirmation from the fact that the apologists for Spiritualism could find nothing worse to say of it, or of Mrs. Culver herself, than that the statement about the part played by the Dutch servant girl at the Rochester investigations was obviously incorrect, because at the Rochester investigation of November, 1849, the meetings were not held at the Foxes' house at all, but at the houses of members of the committee, or in a public hall; that the Foxes at that

time could not afford to keep a servant girl, and further, that Catherine herself was not present at these meetings. It is obvious that, independently of the fact that there may have been more than one investigation by a committee at Rochester, inaccuracies of this kind in reporting facts at second hand are quite compatible with honesty on the part of the reporter.<sup>1</sup>

These exposures seem, however, to have done little to check the progress of the movement. Apart from the general eagerness to believe the marvellous, there were three special reasons for their ineffectiveness. In the first place, the Buffalo doctors did not claim, except in one instance, actually to have demonstrated that the knocks were produced by the knee-joints or toe-joints; they had at best only shown that appearances were consistent with their being so produced. The faithful were not slow to take advantage of this loophole. But if any reader should now be disposed to question the sufficiency of the explanation put forward by the Buffalo doctors, he should note that, in the first place, no pains have ever been taken by the Spiritualists themselves to disprove the Buffalo demonstrations. Of course, conclusive experiments in such a case are not easy to devise, because of the extreme difficulty of locating with approximate accuracy the source of a sound. But it is precisely on that account that we are not justified in attaching weight to loose and vaguely worded statements made by irresponsible observers, so little qualified for their task that they have not even recognised this initial difficulty. It is frequently reported that the sounds proceeded from quite a different direction from the medium; that they were heard to come from the door, the walls, the ceiling; or generally that they were heard in such circumstances that it was physically impossible for the medium to have produced them. If in place of these general statements—with which the diligent student may fill his note-books, if it so please him—we could find in the whole literature of Spiritualism but one case, in which, in the presence of competent observers, and under conditions well ascertained and fully described, the raps were actually heard, when there was good cause for believing it impossible for any person present to have made them, we should no doubt do well to suspend our judgment, at any rate, as regards that one case. In default of such evidence the later confessions of the two younger Fox sisters, though not, of course, conclusive, are at least pertinent. In

<sup>1</sup> See letters by Capron in the *New York Express*, reprinted in *The Spirit World*, vol. iii. pp. 18, 93, and *Modern American Spiritualism*, by Emma Hardinge (Mrs. Hardinge Britten), London (Burns), no date, p. 70.

the autumn of 1888 Mrs. Kane (Margaretta Fox) and Mrs. Jencken (Catherine Fox) made public, and apparently spontaneous, confession, that the raps had been produced by fraudulent means. Mrs. Kane even gave demonstrations before large audiences of the actual manner in which the toe-joints had been used at the early séances. Mrs. Jencken, at any rate, if not also Mrs. Kane, afterwards recanted her confession.<sup>1</sup>

Several confessions of the kind were, however, made at the time. Thus in October, 1851, a girl of thirteen, named Almira Bezely, was tried on the charge of murdering her infant brother. Almira had apparently been a rapping medium for some months, and had herself through the rappings predicted the baby's death. At the trial her father and sister testified that, after her arrest on her own confession of murder, Almira explained that she had made the rappings with her feet, and showed them how it was done.<sup>2</sup> Again, in the pamphlet, *Knocks for the Knockings*, published by the Brothers Burr, in 1851, there is quoted an affidavit, duly attested before a justice of the peace, by one Lemuel J. Beardslee, who states therein that he was a rapping medium for about three months, and that he produced the sounds voluntarily by his toes and shoes, and gave answers to mental questions by carefully watching the questioner's countenance, and noting hints involuntarily given.<sup>3</sup> Again, a cabinet-maker named Hiram Pack, of 488, Pearl Street, New York, gave to Mr. Mattison a written statement to the effect that he had made to order two "medium" tables, which had machinery for rapping concealed in the bed of the table, operated by wires carried down the legs.<sup>4</sup> But it may be surmised that the demands of the credulous could generally be satisfied by less elaborate apparatus.

<sup>1</sup> See *The Death-blow to Spiritualism*, by R. B. Davenport (New York, 1888); also *New York Herald* of 24th September and 10th October, 1888; *Light* for November and December, 1888; and *Journal S. P. R.*, December, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted, from a contemporary account of the trial given in the *Providence Journal*, October 23rd, 1851, in *Spirit Rapping Unveiled*, p. 172, by the Rev. H. Mattison (New York, 1853). Other persons, it should be noted, gave evidence to the effect that they had heard the rappings and did not believe that Almira had caused them. Amongst the grounds given for this belief, persisted in in spite of the culprit's confession, were that it was not possible for Almira to have made the raps; that she had been watched closely, and no trickery had been detected; and that the answers given by the raps alluded to facts not within Almira's knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174. Mr. Maskelyne (*Pall Mall Gazette*, April 18th, 1885) states that some thirty years previously he had been asked to repair a little apparatus for a spirit rapper, and that from its construction he inferred that the apparatus was fastened under the flounces of a dress, and used for producing raps.

It seems clear, in the second place, that the Buffalo demonstration fell short, in that it failed to give a complete explanation of the case. It is probable that the raps were produced by various methods; and that where the conditions rendered one device impracticable, another was employed. He would be a poor conjurer who could not employ a variety of means to produce his effects. The Rev. Eli Noyes, indeed, claimed to have produced raps in four different ways, and to have succeeded in deceiving the whole company; while Mr. Chauncey Burr boasted his acquaintance with no less than seventeen methods;<sup>1</sup> and the descriptions given by various Spiritualist witnesses point strongly to a diversity of origin for the mysterious sounds. Mr. W. Duesler describes the sounds as raps or knocks which jarred the bedstead, and one particular rap—louder than common—sounded like the falling of a heavy stick on the wooden floor above their heads.<sup>2</sup> One of the editors of the *Excelsior* (New York) says that the raps varied "from a light, clear, metallic sound to a dull, muffled one, like a rap with the knuckles upon a partition covered with cloth."<sup>3</sup> A witness in the *Spirit World*<sup>4</sup> speaks of "a clear, distinct sound . . . nearly resembling the spark of transmitted electricity, only softer and muffled." Spicer<sup>5</sup> says that the prevailing rap is like the sound made by a pheasant confined in a strong wooden box and pecking vigorously to get out; or again, like a blow on the table with the knuckles. Fishbough describes the sounds as "characterised by a kind of vibrating sepulchral rumble";<sup>6</sup> whilst De Morgan, some years later, writes that the raps occurring in the presence of Mrs. Hayden were "clean, clear, faint sounds such as would be said to *ring* had they lasted. I likened them at the time to the noise which the ends of knitting needles would make if dropped from a distance upon a marble slab and instantly checked by a damper of some kind."<sup>7</sup>

From such varying descriptions as this it may be inferred, on the one hand, that the Buffalo doctors had not furnished a complete explanation of the mystery; and on the other, that the claim repeatedly put forward by the early Spiritualists, that the sound of the raps was unique and inimitable, and once heard could never fail to be distinguished

<sup>1</sup> From Burr's pamphlet, *Knocks for the Knockings*, quoted in *Spirit Rapping Unveiled*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Capron and Barron, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *History of the Strange Sounds*, etc., by D. M. Dewey, p. 52. Rochester, 1850.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. ii. p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> *Sights and Sounds*, pp. 210, 230.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>7</sup> *From Matter to Spirit*, p. xli.

from all other sounds, must be accepted with some qualification.<sup>1</sup>

But there was a weightier argument which helped to discount the effects of the Buffalo exposure, and no doubt gave the rapping mediums a longer lease of popularity. The theory of simple fraud did not explain how it came about that the raps could correctly reply to questions of which the questioner alone knew the answer, or even to mental questions. Nothing is more striking in the early history of spirit-rapping than the numerous accounts of correct information being given in answer to the questions of persons who were complete strangers to the medium. Nor does the testimony to this portent proceed only from the Spiritualists. The Rev. Asa Mahan, First President of Cleveland University, who wrote a book to denounce the errors of the Spiritualists and to prove that spirits had no part in the matter, gave many instances of the kind resting upon credible testimony; and is driven—or perhaps I should rather say hastens—to conclude that the rappers possessed the power, by odyllic force, of reading the thoughts of those who consulted them.<sup>2</sup> It was this circumstance which most impressed the early investigators in this country who attended Mrs. Hayden's séances; and apparently went far to convince so astute an observer as the late Professor De Morgan.<sup>3</sup> When we read—as we frequently do in the literature of the time—that the spirits rapped out names of friends dead many years before, and correctly answered all kinds of test questions, to the number sometimes of fifty at a time, expressly prepared for their confusion, we feel that those early Spiritualists had perhaps some justification for the faith that was in them. But in fact the explanation was in most cases an extremely simple one; and there can be no reasonable doubt that Mrs. Culver and Lemuel Beardslee have correctly indicated it in their depositions.

The approved method of consulting the oracle at the early séances was for the questioner to repeat a number of possible answers to his question, until a rap indicated the correct one.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Capron and Barron, *op. cit.*, p. 41, "The sounds have never been imitated, nor do we believe they can be." Judge Edmonds, however, whose experience in such matters was very wide, and whose judgment was probably sounder than that of most of his contemporaries, frankly admits that he had never heard a sound which he could not imitate; and that he had known mediums deliberately to counterfeit the raps. (*Letters on Spiritualism*, Memorial Edition, p. 180. London: James Burns, 1874.)

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Mysteries Explained and Exposed*. Boston, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> See his account of a séance with Mrs. Hayden in the early fifties, quoted in Book III. chap. i.

The following is extracted from an account of a séance famous in the annals of Spiritualism, which was drawn up by Mr. Ripley and published early in 1850 in the *New York Tribune*.<sup>1</sup> At this meeting the "Rochester ladies" were the mediums, and J. Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, N. P. Willis, General Lyman and others were amongst the consultants. After various communications had been given—

"Mr. J. Fenimore Cooper was then requested to enter into the supra-mundane sphere, and proceeded to interrogate the spirits with the most imperturbable self-possession and deliberation. After several desultory questions to which no satisfactory answers were obtained, Mr. C. commenced a new series of inquiries. 'Is the person I inquire about a relative?' *Yes* was at once indicated by the knocks. 'A near relative?' *Yes*. 'A man?' *No answer*. 'A woman?' *Yes*. 'A daughter? a mother? a wife?' *No answer*. 'A sister?' *Yes*. Mr. C. then asked the number of years since her death. *To this the answer was given in rapid but distinct raps, some counting 45, others 49, 54, etc. After considerable parleying as to the manner in which the question should be answered, the consent of the invisible interlocutor was given to rap the years so slowly that they might be distinctly counted. This was done. Knock, knock, knock, for what seemed over a minute, till the number amounted to 50, and was unanimously announced by the company.* Mr. Cooper now asked, 'Did she die of consumption?' naming several diseases, to which no answer was given. 'Did she die by accident?' *Yes*. 'Was she killed by lightning? Was she shot? Was she lost at sea? Did she fall from a carriage? Was she thrown from a horse?' *Yes*. Mr. Cooper did not pursue his inquiries any further, and stated to the company that the answers were correct, the person alluded to by him being a sister, who, just fifty years ago the present month, was killed by being thrown from a horse."

As an illustration of the unconscious improvement of evidence by Spiritualist writers, it may be noted that Capron, in giving an account of this séance, substitutes for the passage italicised in the foregoing extract the single sentence, "50 knocks were given, and the number unanimously so announced by the company."<sup>2</sup>

It will be seen that the procedure allowed the medium to gain indications from the manner, the tone of voice, or the hesitancy as to the answer expected. Moreover, she gave herself, as a practised conjurer should, more than one chance. If the answer given proved incorrect, it could always be

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Spicer, *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 76. See also *History of Modern Spiritualism*, by Emma Hardinge, pp. 64-66.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 174.

suggested that the raps had been miscounted or attached to the wrong letters. At the early séances, indeed, if the alphabet was used at all, it was customary for the medium herself to point to the letters, as it was found that the communication was facilitated by this means. And this practice still continued so long as the questions related to general topics, or when spirits like Channing, Swedenborg, or Franklin held the floor. But when a sitter desired a more conclusive test, and especially when he desired to receive a communication from a deceased friend, or an answer to a mental question, the printed alphabet would be placed in his own hands, and he would be requested to move his pencil slowly down it, allowing a short pause after each letter until a rap came. The letter indicated by the rap was then noted down, and the process recommenced. Precisely as in the muscle-reading experiments with which Cumberland and Irving Bishop made us familiar some years ago, the questioner was invited to concentrate his attention on the question asked; and as the tedious process was usually performed in full view of the medium, it is obvious that she had the benefit of any unconscious indications of preference or expectation given by the sitter. Mahan observes with pride that some of his friends, who were possessed of great strength of will and unusual powers of intellectual concentration, were extraordinarily successful in obtaining answers to 'test questions.' In one case this strength of will manifested itself in "loud and emphatic pointing and sticking at particular letters"; and the recorder explains that, had he not known better, he should certainly have come to the conclusion that this emphatic pointing gave the medium the desired cue.<sup>1</sup> It may be added that it frequently happened, if the original propounder of a set of mental questions failed to receive satisfactory answers, that he would be requested to hand his written questions to a more sympathetic sitter, who had been already proved to be in *rappor*t with the spirit. The answers, we are told, would then be elicited without difficulty.<sup>2</sup>

The results attained by this method were certainly very remarkable. But shrewder observers, even of those who believed in the phenomena in general as being of supra-

<sup>1</sup> Asa Mahan, *op. cit.*, p. 221. See also other cases recorded in that book. Mattison, *Spirit Rapping Unveiled*, p. 57; Spicer, *Sights and Sounds*, and the early literature, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Joel Tiffany, *Spiritualism Explained*, p. 123. Tiffany admits that the "spirits" often contented themselves with reading the sitter's thoughts.

mundane origin, soon saw that the hypothesis of spirit-agency in this particular manifestation was at least sometimes superfluous. A gentleman of Baltimore, for instance, writes to Spicer, in August, 1852:—<sup>1</sup>

“For example, I will give you an instance in which my friend the Colonel (*i.e.* the spirit-Colonel communicating through the raps) manifestly to my mind followed the course of my own mental perceptions. I noticed that when I asked what I already knew the answer came more promptly than when such was not the case. In these questions I *expected* the answer; in fact, designed the questions to draw certain ones only. The Colonel spelt my names correctly, using an initial only for the middle one. I then asked him for the middle name, as that was my military name. He spelt it promptly. ‘You have known someone of that name before?’ *Yes.* ‘Where? in this country?’ *No.* ‘England?’ *No.* ‘Scotland?’ *Yes.* (Scotland being what I anticipated from the first.) ‘Perhaps you know the name of the old estate in Scotland from which we came?’ *Yes.* ‘Will you name it?’ (The name I wanted was ‘Auchentorlie,’ a word which I do not remember to have heard from the lips of any but my own household here—certainly known to none of those present except my brother, my uncle, and myself. Now I commonly pronounce this name as though the first syllable was spelt with a *k* instead of the *h*, not caring to strive after the Gaelic guttural *ch*.) So the Colonel began—Auc*k*ent. When the *k* appeared, I noticed the coincidence with my own pronunciation, but also noticed it as an error, and was speculating thereon while the spelling of the word was progressing, but the Colonel pulled up at the *t* and announced a mistake. I questioned upon each of the letters backward, and the *k* was declared wrong and an *h* substituted.”

After this it is surprising to read that the gentleman from Baltimore drew the conclusion, “that we were communicating with an intelligence not embodied in the flesh we did not doubt.”

A few experiments were made expressly to exclude the directing influence of the questioner’s thoughts; but it was found that what the sitter did not know the spirits could not tell.<sup>2</sup> Further than this the ordinary investigator does not seem to have gone. Here and there, indeed, a sceptic did take precautions to prevent observation on the part of the medium. Thus, Professor Page, at a séance with the Fox girls and their mother, effectually concealed the movements of his pencil behind a book, with the result that the raps which he obtained were indistinct and dubious, and the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 369, 370.

<sup>2</sup> Spicer, *op. cit.*, pp. 239, 240; Asa Mahan, *op. cit.*, 216, 217, etc., etc.

answers to his mental questions were in five cases out of six incorrect. His experiments, he tells us, were repeated by different investigators, who generally obtained, under like conditions, incorrect answers.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, indeed, as in a case recorded by Mahan, the answers thus received were ludicrously inappropriate.<sup>2</sup> But to the faithful the results of such an experiment illustrated only the influence of scepticism in frustrating the kindly intention of the spirits. Or, as in the case last mentioned, the comment would be, "Yes, it is certainly odd that the spirit in reply to you should give its name as 'Miserable Humbug,' and say that its diet in the spirit world consisted of 'pork and beans'; and I don't blame you for drawing inferences unfavourable to the medium's honesty; but I have received such convincing tests at other times through the same medium that I feel that I know better." I cannot find any cases at this date recorded at first hand in which precautions against fraud of this kind are even alleged to have been taken with successful results.<sup>3</sup> It would seem, then, that the alleged manifestations of thought-reading by the rapping mediums rests on evidence as inadequate as that for the supernormal character of the rappings themselves.

There was another set of phenomena occurring in 1850, which had obviously some relation to the Rochester rappings, and were regarded by the faithful as almost equally significant of the intervention of the spirit world.<sup>4</sup>

The Rev. Dr. Phelps, of Stratford, Connecticut, was a Presbyterian minister, who had for many years been a believer in clairvoyance, and had himself treated diseases by Mesmerism. He had late in life married a widow with four children—two girls who in 1850 were sixteen and six years of age respectively, and two boys, one eleven and the other three. Dr. Phelps himself was at this time about sixty. On March 10th, 1850, there broke out in his house a series of disturbances, which continued with extreme frequency and violence for several consecutive days, and were renewed at intervals

<sup>1</sup> *Psychomancy: Spirit-Rappings and Tappings Exposed*, by Professor Charles G. Page, M.D., etc. New York, 1853. <sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> Asa Mahan, *op. cit.*, pp. 199, 200, gives a case, but it is not first-hand.

<sup>4</sup> The documents in the Stratford case consist mostly of letters written during the progress of the events to the *New Haven Journal* and other papers. These are nearly all reprinted in the *Spiritual Philosopher*, together with editorials on the subject by Sunderland. Some additional testimony, in the shape of letters from neighbours, was collected by C. W. Elliott, and published in his book, already quoted, *Mysteries, or Glimpses of the Supernatural*. The following account is compiled mainly from these two sources, and is given as nearly as possible in the words of the narrators.

for about eighteen months. Objects of all kinds were thrown about the house, apparently by invisible hands; windows were smashed, and a great deal of damage was done; mysterious writings were produced; raps were heard, which, like the Rochester knockings, would give intelligent—and frequently blasphemous—answers to questions. From two letters, written by one Webster, in the *New Haven Journal*, which were regarded by Dr. Phelps himself as amongst the most trustworthy records of the phenomena, I quote the following:—<sup>1</sup>

“While the house of Dr. Phelps was undergoing a rigid examination from cellar to attic, one of the chambers was mysteriously fitted up with eleven figures of angelic beauty, gracefully and imposingly arranged, so as to have the appearance of life. They were all female figures but one, and most of them in attitudes of devotion, with Bibles before them, and pointing to different passages with the apparent design of making the Scriptures sanction and confirm the strange things that were going on. . . . Some of the figures were kneeling beside the beds, and some bending their faces to the floor in attitudes of deep humility. In the centre of the group was a dwarf, most grotesquely arrayed; and above was a figure so suspended as to seem flying through the air. These manifestations occurred sometimes when the room was locked, and sometimes when it was known that no persons had been there. Measures were taken to have a special scrutiny in regard to every person who entered the room that day, and it is known with the most perfect certainty that many of these figures were constructed when there were no persons in the room, and no visible power by which they could have been produced. The *tout ensemble* was most beautiful and picturesque, and had a grace and ease and speaking effect that seemed the attributes of a higher creation.”

On another occasion, Webster continues, Dr. Phelps was writing at his table—he was alone in the room—and had turned away for a moment. On resuming his seat he found on his table a sheet of paper, which had been quite clean a moment before, covered with strange-looking writing, the ink still wet. A brickbat was seen to start from a large mirror and fall violently to the floor; letters were seen to drop from the ceiling, and turnips covered with hieroglyphs to grow out of the pattern on the carpet, under the very eyes of the astonished family. Chairs would move deliberately across the room, missiles would start from space and dash through costly panes of glass.

From another witness, H. B. Taylor, writing to the same

<sup>1</sup> Elliott, *Mysteries, or Glimpses*, etc., pp. 184, 185.

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paper, we learn that the elder boy was carried across the room by an invisible agency; that the boy's pantaloons were cut into strips, and the doctor's hat whirled up in the air; that a piece of shingle was seen to fly about the room with unknown characters inscribed upon it; and that the supper-table was lifted thrice from the floor when the room was empty. From a writer in the *Spiritual Philosopher*<sup>1</sup> we learn that letters, written by no human hands, were thrown down from the air. The letters proved to contain mischievous and rather childish satires on Dr. Phelps' brother clergymen and other persons. From Laroy Sunderland, at this time editor of the *Spiritual Philosopher*, we learn that on March 11th, 1850, an umbrella was thrown without human hands some twenty-five feet; that on March 13th several persons saw various articles rise from their places, describe a parabola (*sic*), and descend to the floor; that on the following day a brass candlestick was seen to rise and dash itself against the floor until it was ultimately broken; that a large potato was dropped out of the viewless air on to the breakfast-table within a few inches of Dr. Phelps' plate; that the shovel and tongs, together with the iron stand in which they rested, moved into the middle of the parlour, and then danced upon the floor; that the large dining-room table of solid mahogany was seen to rise two feet into the air; that on another occasion a lamp that was burning on the mantelpiece in the elder boy's bedroom was seen to move across the room and set fire to some papers which lay on the bed; that the boy was found to have been hung on a tree by the invisible agency; that his pants were stripped from his body; that a pillow was drawn over the elder girl's face when she was sleeping peacefully, and a piece of tape tied round her neck with such violence that it all but strangled her. Finally, from one of Dr. Phelps' sons by a former marriage, Professor Austin Phelps, we have the following additional particulars: That as Dr. Phelps was walking across the parlour, no other person being in the room, a key and a nail were thrown over his head and fell on the floor at his feet; and that in the evening, in presence of the whole family, a turnip fell from the ceiling in their midst; that at dinner the spoons and forks would fly up out of the dishes; that one day at dinner a bundle of six or eight silver spoons were all at once taken up and bent double by no visible agency; that on another occasion, when he was alone, the raps directed that Dr. Phelps should put his hand under the table, and that, when he complied, it was grasped by

<sup>1</sup> 1850, p. 70.

a human hand, warm and soft. Lastly, that the raps purported to come from a Frenchman, named D——s, who had been clerk to a firm of lawyers who had prepared Mrs. Phelps' settlement; that D——s, through raps, asserted that he was in hell, and that he had, when on earth, cheated Mrs. Phelps in drawing up the settlement; that Dr. Phelps investigated the matter, and found clear evidence of fraud in the matter of the settlement, but not sufficient to justify a prosecution.<sup>1</sup>

The affair naturally created much excitement in Spiritualist circles. Andrew Jackson Davis himself came down to Stratford, and gave his certificate to the phenomena. He explained that, speaking generally, the raps were produced by discharges of vital electricity from the elder boy's organism; that when magnetism preponderated in the systems of the boy and girl, nails, keys, books, and other objects would fly *towards* them; when electricity preponderated such objects would be repelled; but that the spirits frequently initiated and directed these movements; that, in fact, as he was impressed to declare, the majority of the disturbances were caused by spirits, of whom he had himself seen no less than five present, as "delegates from the spirit land," in Dr. Phelps' house. The same high authority also recognised the hieroglyphics inscribed on the turnip already mentioned, the boy's pants, and elsewhere, as being spiritual symbols having no affinity with any earthly language, oriental or other. By interior impression he was able to interpret the message of goodwill conveyed, as thus: "A high society of angels desire, through the agency of another and a more inferior society, to communicate in various ways to the earth's inhabitants."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Laroy Sunderland and Mrs. Fish were inclined to attribute the manifestations entirely to the agency of lying, mischievous, or insane spirits, and the former even questioned whether the Poughkeepsie seer had correctly translated the vegetable hieroglyphs. Mr. Beach, whose testimony is quoted below, believed that there was nothing superhuman in these mysterious occurrences. For his part, he did not believe in ghosts. "The theory is," he writes, "that there exists in Nature an element as yet unknown to the scientific world."

In order to secure, if possible, at once the interest of the

<sup>1</sup> From a statement given to the Rev. C. Beecher, and embodied in his book on *Spiritual Manifestations*, pp. 18-24. Boston, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse* (New York), edition of 1875, pp. 77-117.

reader and his sympathy with the Spiritualist interpretation of the manifestations, I have ventured, in the preceding pages, to base my account of the Stratford disturbances, not on what the several narrators themselves saw, but on what they understood that other people had seen. Not one of the marvels so far related is described by a person who professes to have been actually present; and Professor Austin Phelps' account was written nearly thirty years afterwards. No eye-witness, indeed, so far as I can discover, ever claims to have seen a turnip issue from the carpet or the ceiling, or a brickbat from the mirror, to have seen Dr. Phelps' little boy carried across the room by an invisible power, or a candlestick jump up and pound against the floor, or inanimate objects describe a parabola, or any other kind of curve, unassisted.

What they did see was much less dramatic. Dr. Phelps tells us that he saw with his own eyes more than thirty broken panes of glass; that he watched the movements of objects with care and close attention; that "I witnessed them hundreds and hundreds of times, and I know that in hundreds of instances they took place when there was no visible power by which the motion could have been produced"; and that he never could find out how the rapping was done. Laroy Sunderland saw some of the hieroglyphs and the letters which had been written by the spirits; he also saw a window in which every pane had been broken; and he heard rapping under his feet whilst he was at breakfast. *Veritas*, writing on September 21st in the *New Haven Journal*, says that he was struck on the arm by a clothes-pin, and is sure that no one in the room threw it. Also that in the parlour a peach stone fell at the feet of one of the members of the family, and that shortly afterwards two or three fragments of apple and a piece of anthracite coal fell at intervals close to him, and that he put a piece of apple in his pocket, and kept it as a memorial of the marvellous incident. Further, that on the following morning a cup, an iron spoon, and a couple of apples were thrown, the latter striking two members of the family.

Mr. Newson, of the *Derby Journal*, writes, that when he and three other persons were standing outside the girls' bedroom listening to the rappings, they heard something thrown with great violence against the door, instantly sprang into the room, and found the young lady (of sixteen) in bed in a very nervous state, with a very red cheek. A large white pitcher had, it was found, been thrown against the door, and broken.

The Rev. Mr. Mitchell saw sentences which had been

written on the walls, made-up figures which had been arranged in various parts of the house, objects which had been thrown about; also he heard loud noises and screamings.

The Rev. Mr. Weed had also seen the furniture disarranged, and dolls dressed up to look like live figures.

The things which Mr. Beach and Mr. Day saw were so interesting that I quote parts of their accounts in their own words.

Mr. Beach writes in the *New York Sun*, April 29th, 1850:—<sup>1</sup>

“While our conversation was quietly proceeding, there seemed to be a general start of all present, the boy instantaneously sitting up in bed. I was then looking at the carpet, on a line parallel to the front side of the bed and of the mantelpiece, when I caught sight of a matchbox, about four inches long by three wide, within an inch of the floor, if not upon it. I heard a noise corresponding to what would be expected from a heavy iron box of that size, falling from about the height of the mantelpiece; and at the same time saw the box slide toward the bed, and directly away from the mantelpiece about four inches, while the lid flew open, and some matches bounded out upon the floor. The boy denied any agency in the matter, with an expression of innocence that defied the closest scrutiny. . . . A few moments after that event, and while all present occupied their former positions, the boy sat up in his bed as suddenly as before, exclaiming, ‘They have set the bed on fire!’ I sprang instantly to the spot, and saw a piece of printed paper, etc., on fire; securing a piece of it about the size of a dollar, it proved to be a part of the *Derby Journal*. . . . Again, the ladies stood facing the window and me, and about six feet from me—they were side by side, about two feet apart; no one else was in the room. Suddenly the daughter’s right arm straightened, inflicting an apparently severe blow on her companion’s right arm, just below the shoulder, and at the same time she cried out, ‘I am pinched!’ The sleeve of her dress being turned up a little, there was plainly visible a mark closely resembling a severe pinch freshly made.”

Mr. Beach’s theory of these mysterious occurrences has been already quoted.

Mr. Horace Day writes on September 27th, 1851, to Mr. Elliott, author of the book from which I have frequently quoted:—

“While conversing with the family on the subject of their trials and perplexities, the lady of the house ran into the room, and said that her son, a boy of twelve or fourteen, was missing. Except on the face of the father, I saw no expression of alarm or apprehension. He seemed greatly excited; but the rest of the family, consisting of

<sup>1</sup> Elliott, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-3.

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Mrs. P., a daughter, a lady visitor, and her son, certainly manifested no extraordinary emotion. After a few hurried remarks, I noticed that Mrs. P. led the way to the backyard. What reason there was for not first examining the house did not appear. This was the first thing that looked suspicious to me, coupled with the general air of imperturbability over the family. The boy was found in the hay-mow, in an apparently comatose state, from which he recovered in the course of an hour. . . . The similarity of the writing, which Dr. P. showed me as being 'spiritual,' to that of the boy when I got him into a room alone, together with the singular fact that every broken window could be reached only from the doorway of the young ladies' bedroom, conspired to increase my contempt for the whole concern. . . . Dr. P. seems never to have recognised his son's handwriting, though his room was flooded with his lucubrations, in a regular schoolboy's hand."<sup>1</sup>

Further, from a full account of the matter compiled by Capron from the various records preserved by the family, and authenticated by conversation with Dr. Phelps, we learn that, speaking generally, the disturbances centred round the elder boy and girl; that they ceased when the children were sent away; that Dr. Phelps in particular was favoured with several striking manifestations when alone with Harry; and, finally, that when Harry was despatched to a school in Philadelphia, the spirits destroyed his books, tore his clothes, and generally became so outrageous that Harry was brought home again to Stratford, when the disturbances finally ceased.<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps the most interesting evidence is that furnished by Andrew Jackson Davis, in the article already referred to. Confronted with a practical problem in spiritual dynamics, the seer found his position a peculiarly delicate one. Should he pronounce the phenomena to be genuine, it might go hard with his reputation as a philosopher if some of them were afterwards proved to be fraudulent. On the other hand, as a Harmonial Philosopher, it would ill become him to depreciate what his followers already acclaimed as a demoniac visitation. He found safety in a middle course. After giving the certificate already quoted, the seer proceeded to point out that "the young Harry frequently failed to discriminate, during certain moments of mental agitation, between the sounds and effects which he himself made and those sounds which were produced by a spiritual presence"; and he explains as follows the portent of the boy being tied to a tree: "I

<sup>1</sup> Elliott, *op. cit.*, pp. 200, 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Spiritualism*, etc., by E. W. Capron, pp. 132-71.

discovered when viewing the circumstance from my *superior condition* . . . that, to control the boy from effecting some premeditated imprudence, a spirit near him, taking advantage of the electrical state of his system, actually made him unconsciously instrumental in tying himself to a tree," and to complete the work, afterwards made the boy feel frightened, and believe that he had called for help, when in fact he had not done so.<sup>1</sup> And again, "It is possible—and my impressions strongly move me to assert the probability thereof—that the spirits have employed some impressible person in the family, or in the Stratford Community, to write some of those communications which were there received, also to arrange the expressive tableaux."<sup>2</sup> No utterance of the Poughkeepsie seer reveals a profounder insight.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Page 112.

## CHAPTER II

### SOME DWELLERS IN ARCADIA

SINCE, as shown in a previous chapter,<sup>1</sup> naughty little girls have for many generations amused themselves and mystified their elders by rapping on the foot of their wooden bedsteads and throwing about the less expensive crockery, and the world has gone on as before, we must look to something else than the novelty or the mystery of the manifestations for an explanation of the world-wide results which followed from these exploits of the Hydesville and Stratford children. That explanation is, of course, to be found in the conditions of the time. And first amongst these conditions was the recent familiarity of the American people with the phenomena of the induced trance. As shown in the first part of the present work, these phenomena, which had been known and studied in France, Germany, and generally on the continent of Europe, for more than two generations, had only in the decade 1840-50 attracted any wide recognition in the two great English-speaking countries. That recognition appears to have come at about the same time in both England and America, and through the same means—the demonstrations of itinerant lecturers.

The interest, so recently excited and still actively spreading, in the somnambolic phenomena, helped the cause of nascent Spiritualism in various ways. It furnished, in the first place, a machinery already organised for the rapid spread of the new manifestations, in the shape of a large number of professional clairvoyants. Some of these clairvoyants, like Mrs. Tamlin<sup>2</sup> and Mrs. Bushnell,<sup>3</sup> were not slow to include spirit-rapping amongst their accomplishments. Others were content to work side by side with the rapping mediums who now sprang up throughout the land.

<sup>1</sup> Book I. chapter ii.

<sup>2</sup> Capron and Barron, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Spicer, *Sights and Sounds*, p. 88. London, 1853.

From the early Spiritualist journals it is evident that a large part was played in the first few years by healing and trance mediums simply. In the second place, Mesmerism furnished the popular mind with a ready-made philosophy of the whole matter. As previously shown, apart from the general disposition to believe in the marvellous fostered by the various electric, magnetic, and odylic theories, many persons had already been induced through trance utterances to believe in the possibility of spirit intercourse. Of the manner in which Davis and his circle were prepared by clairvoyant revelations for the advent of the new dispensation we have already spoken. Dr. Phelps, of Stratford, had first had his interest excited, some years previously to the Poltergeist manifestations, by the marvels of clairvoyance. So Warren Chase, of whom we shall speak later, had, in 1843, made experiments in Mesmerism with a few friends, and had ordered a dozen copies of *Nature's Divine Revelations* in 1847, as soon as it was issued;<sup>1</sup> and generally throughout the country the attention given to clairvoyance and Mesmerism prepared the way for the greater marvels of Spiritualism.<sup>2</sup> Many even of the chief critics and opponents of the new movement, such as Asa Mahan, B. W. Richmond, and E. C. Rogers, whilst denying the evidence of spirit intervention, found no difficulty, on the strength of their studies in the literature of Animal Magnetism, in accepting the phenomena in the lump. All these writers are agreed in explaining the raps, the movements of tables, and the Poltergeist performances generally, as illustrations of odylic force.<sup>3</sup> To its inventor, the reader should perhaps be reminded, odylic force was an impalpable emanation of such exquisite tenuity that its presence could be detected by no instrument less delicate than the human organism, and that only in persons of exalted nervous sensibility. To harness this exquisite essence to the gross antics of the kitchen furniture was surely an illegitimate extension of the theory.

But probably the mesmeric movement of the previous decade helped the new propaganda most conspicuously by furnishing a band of able editors and lecturers already trained and equipped for service. Of those who assisted at the birth of the *Revelations* and afterwards united in editing the *Universalium*, many in the course of the next two or three years

<sup>1</sup> *Forty Years on the Spiritual Rostrum*, pp. 14, 15. Boston, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> For additional instances see *Modern American Spiritualism*, by Emma Hardinge, pp. 274, 346, 408, etc., etc.

<sup>3</sup> See *Modern Mysteries*, etc., pp. 326, 327, and *passim*.

became editors of papers devoted to one aspect or another of the new movement.

Till as late, indeed, as the end of June, 1849, when the *Univercælum* ceased to exist, none of the adherents of the Harmonial Philosophy had publicly recognised the importance of the new physical manifestations. But in the spring of the following year, as we have already seen, Davis visited Stratford, there witnessed some of them for the first time, and became convinced of their reality.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of the same year the first number of a paper called the *Spirit Messenger* was published in Springfield, Mass., under the joint editorship of the Rev. R. P. Ambler, a Universalist minister, and Apollos Munn, which appears to have been Davis' chief organ for the next two or three years; for, indeed, partly no doubt alienated by the intolerable arrogance of the Poughkeepsie seer, partly because two of this trade of prophet can rarely agree together for long, the little band of Harmonial Philosophers were soon widely scattered. By the middle of 1851 we find some six or seven papers in existence devoted to the propaganda, in most of which the late editors of the *Univercælum* had a part. At Auburn was published *Disclosures from the Interior and Superior Care for Mortals*, under the editorship of J. D. Scott and T. L. Harris; and another paper, *The Spiritual and Moral Instructor*, was started in the same town under the editorship of T. S. Hiatt, with Fishbough as a leading contributor. In September, 1851, was published at Boston the first number of *Heat and Light*, a review of A. J. Davis' philosophy, by W. M. Fernald, being the principal article.<sup>2</sup> Again, S. B. Brittan, in 1852, brought out a well-written monthly periodical called the *Shekinah*, which, during its brief career of about eighteen months, represented Spiritualism at its soberest and best. In 1853 appeared *The Spiritual Telegraph*, a weekly paper edited by Brittan conjointly with Partridge, a New York merchant, which lasted for nearly eight years.

But the first in the field of the Spiritualist editors was Laroy Sunderland, whose acquaintance we have made in previous chapters. In July, 1850, Sunderland started in Boston a paper called the *Spiritual Philosopher*, which in the following year changed its title to the *Spirit World*. In his editorial address he offers the hospitality of his columns to all sects, schools, and parties, and "to each world in the constitution of the Universe." But even at this epoch he showed

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse*, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Spirit World*, vol. iii, p. 76.

something of the critical temper which had distinguished his later writings on Mesmerism, for in another article in the same number on the "Spiritual Knockings," after incidentally mentioning that he had himself made pneumatology a subject of investigation for the last thirty years, and had no doubt at all as to the existence of other spheres beyond our own, he reviews the *History* by Capron and Barron, pointing out several difficulties in the spirit theory and defects in the evidence so far adduced. Sunderland had not at that time had the opportunity to satisfy himself as to the origin of the knockings. A few weeks later, however, his own daughter, Mrs. Margaretta Cooper, became a medium; and he writes in October, 1850: "The manifestations of the Spirit World have been continued in our own family in Charlestown, and our Office in Boston, with increasing and wonderful interest . . . the mysterious sounds have been made in nearly all the rooms in our house, and have been heard at different times by different people. The responses to questions are made freely, *at our table*, during meal times, which are thus prolonged often to an hour and a half by conversation with our Heavenly visitants." He adds that articles of furniture had been moved, that the spirits had made musical sounds, that members of the family and strangers had been touched and handled by the spirits, that manifestations had been made to the sense of sight, and, finally, that communications had been vouchsafed, as he believes, "from the *Higher Spheres*, giving important information relating to the Spiritual Dispensation now opening to the Universe of Human Beings."<sup>1</sup>

But this state of exaltation was not to last long. Perhaps his reversion to a more sober state of mind was hastened by the result of a hoax played upon him in the early part of the year 1851. An illiterate letter, purporting to come from a woman who was anxious for news of her dead daughter, was sent to Sunderland. He submitted it to the spirits, and received from them a message of consolation to transmit to the anxious inquirer. The letter, however, was a hoax, and the inquirer and her spirit daughter alike fictitious.<sup>2</sup> But it seems probable that in any case the caution—natural or acquired—which is so conspicuous in his earlier work would have led him sooner or later to reject the extravagant absurdities of the Spiritualists around him.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Philosopher*, vol. i. pp. 68, 69.

<sup>2</sup> Capron, *Modern Spiritualism*, pp. 211, 212. The author of the hoax was a clergyman named Austin, who wrote in the *New York Express* under the pseudonym of "Shadrach Barnes."

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In fact, we find that in later numbers, at any rate, of the *Spirit World* Sunderland, though still believing that spirits were concerned in some of the manifestations, yet constantly urges his readers not to put implicit confidence in so-called spirit revelations, nor even to believe that all the phenomena commonly ascribed to spirit intervention have necessarily an extra-mundane cause. He points out that table-tipping and other physical movements, and trance speaking or writing, may often be due solely to unconscious action on the part of the medium; and, generally, that it is unwise to believe that a message comes from Swedenborg or St. Paul, merely because the spirit or the medium says so. A few years later even this qualified belief in Spiritualism seems to have left him almost as completely as his former enthusiasm for Phreno-Mesmerism. Warren Chase mourns over him as a backslider; and in the later book already quoted we find him pointing out that "spirit-possession" can in most cases be explained as possession by the idea of spirits present in the medium's own mind; and that, "unfortunately for 'spiritualism' technically so-called, neither the 'mediums' nor the 'spirits' who speak through them have ever been able to show us where the human ends and the really spiritual begins in these nervous phenomena."<sup>1</sup>

However, at this early period Sunderland seems to have entertained no doubt of the central fact of spirit intercourse; and it is probable that the adhesion thus early in the movement of an investigator of this type, who combined shrewdness and caution with his enthusiasm, and who was already widely known by his lectures and published writings, did much to attract thinking men to the subject.

A man of a different type, who also owed his conversion to Spiritualism mainly to his earlier acquaintance with the mesmeric trance, was the Rev. J. B. Ferguson. Jesse Babcock Ferguson was born in 1819.<sup>2</sup> He went to school at the age of eleven in Winchester, Virginia, and two years later, at the age of thirteen, was chosen by the Presbyterian Missionary Society of Shenandoah and Frederick Counties (Virginia) to conduct a school in a new settlement. The school was carried on at one end of a log house, and a shoemaker, who worked at his trade behind a partition at the other end, held himself in readiness, if required, to assist

<sup>1</sup> *The Trance*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> This account is taken partly from the book, *Supra-mundane Facts in the Life of the Rev. J. B. Ferguson*, edited by T. L. Nichols (London, 1865); partly from Ferguson's own book, *Spirit Communion: a Record of Communications from the Spirit Spheres*, etc. Nashville (U.S.), 1854.

the youthful teacher in keeping order amongst his scholars, some of whom were seven or eight years older than himself. Later he was apprenticed to a printer, and afterwards earned his living by light work in a newspaper office, whilst he attended his classes at the Woodstock Academy. He married young, became the editor of a religious miscellany, and rapidly acquired fame as an eloquent preacher. Finally he settled in Nashville, the capital of Tennessee, and there drew around him a large and devoted congregation. He became, indeed, one of the most noted preachers in the South, received honorary degrees from two universities, and was on many occasions invited to preach before public bodies and to discharge public appointments. Because of his eloquent addresses and exhortations and his pronounced patriotism, he became a notable figure in the Civil War on the Confederate side.

In the years 1842-3, early in his married life, Ferguson had investigated the phenomena of Animal Magnetism, and as a result had satisfied himself of "(1) the possibility of mind acting through the outward senses of other bodies beside its own; (2) of its acting apart from its own and all external senses, and of holding communion with disembodied mind." In his portfolio he had, as he tells us, written in 1844: "If we may be allowed an opinion, where an opinion is scarcely allowable, we would say that from the invisible world there will be such a manifestation of the Saints that the veil of flesh and sense will be rent away, and the connection will be permanent. The Cherubim, or 'living creatures,' will appear upon the earth."<sup>1</sup> His wife was apparently the clairvoyant subject in these experiments, as she afterwards became the medium through whom he chiefly received spiritual communications.

When the rappings and spiritual manifestations first broke out, Ferguson tells us that he was inclined to attribute them to imposture and fanaticism. Some years later, however, in 1853, he visited a rapping medium in Ohio, and witnessed the usual phenomena; received correct answers to mental questions through the alphabet, and a communication purporting to come from a deceased fellow-preacher. Thereafter he was favoured with other manifestations, including the speaking in foreign tongues, and ultimately his wife and young daughter became mediums for writing, speaking, and

<sup>1</sup> *Spirit Communion: a Record of Communications from the Spirit Spheres, with incontestable evidence of personal identity*, by J. B. Ferguson, p. 11. Nashville, 1854.

seeing visions. An automatic communication given through his wife is quoted in chapter iv. below.

Ferguson's high character, his eloquence, and the breadth and liberality of his religious views gave him wide reputation and influence, and there is no doubt that his advocacy did much to advance the propaganda of Spiritualism in the South. He appears to have kept his faith unchanged until the end. His last public appearance in connection with Spiritualism was in England, whither he accompanied the Brothers Davenport in 1864, in order to introduce them to a new public under the most favourable auspices.

But after all Poltergeists and a widely diffused interest in Animal Magnetism were factors to be found at this time in most European countries. It was rather in the conditions of a new and rapidly expanding civilisation, and perhaps in the special genius of the American people, that the explanation must be sought for the extraordinary spread of the new movement. In the first place, we find a nation in whom the standard of popular education and intelligence was much higher than in England, and probably most other European countries at the same date. But this very diffusion of education was in some aspects mischievous. In the older civilisations the world of ideas is still an oligarchy, with a constitution to some extent fixed and defined. There are recognised standards and precedents for the guidance of thought in every department. But in the American Republic of fifty years ago every man claimed the right to think for himself, and to think as extravagantly and inconsequently as he chose. Again, the geographical conditions gave speculation a freedom which would have been impossible in a more settled society. Even the eastern States were at this time very sparsely populated; civilisation was daily enlarging its boundaries and absorbing more and more of the unclaimed territory around. In 1850 not thirteen in a hundred of the American people lived in towns of 8,000 inhabitants. Thus we find, outside the few large cities, an immense fringe of semi-rural "townships," carved out of the wilderness but yesterday, and filled with an enthusiastic horde of pioneers who had learnt to read and to think from men, or as we have just seen, from children, scarcely better trained and equipped than themselves. In those raw, outlying districts there was no intellectual centre, no recognised conduit through which the gathered experience of the centuries could flow, such as exists in every town and almost every village in Europe. There was inevitably expended on the problems

of life a large amount of vigorous but crude and undisciplined thinking; and the results stand on record now in the history of various American religious epidemics, of American Socialisms, of American phrenology, of crusades against alcohol, tobacco, pork, and in favour of free land, free marriage, and equality of the sexes.

It is in conformity with this view that we find the early American Spiritualists, almost to a man, adopted every plank of the platform roughly indicated above. Sunderland, indeed, as we have already seen, had cooled somewhat towards phrenology, and seems to have held aloof from most of the popular enthusiasms. But his critical temper was, of course, exceptional. There were no such reserves in the attitude of the ordinary Spiritualist.

Of all the popular enthusiasms of the time, that which was most intimately bound up with Spiritualism was the Fourierite movement, which had shortly before swept in a great wave over the United States. There appears to be some natural affinity between Socialism of a certain type and Spiritualism. The vision of a new heaven will perhaps be most gladly received by those whose eyes have been opened to the vision of a new earth, the dwelling-place of righteousness. It is certain that many Socialists have been Spiritualists. The veteran Robert Owen was converted to the new faith a few years before his death. The Shakers claimed to have had spiritual communications as early as 1837, and to have received at that time predictions of the advent in a few years of fuller revelations:<sup>1</sup> and many of the older American communities were founded by leaders who claimed direct inspiration from spiritual sources. But the connection between the Socialist revival of 1840-50 and the gospel of 1848 was more intimate still. There were those who traced a definite resemblance between the ideas of Fourier and Swedenborg, especially in the doctrine of Universal Analogy taught by Fourier and the well-known "Correspondences" of the Swedish seer. It is certain that there were many disciples of the one prophet who joined in the cult of the other. The list of writers in the *Phalanx* and the *Harbinger*, given by Noyes in his *History of American Socialisms*,<sup>2</sup> contains many names

<sup>1</sup> Elder Evans seems hardly to be justified in his claim. From the (unfortunately anonymous) account of an eye-witness quoted by Noyes (*History of American Socialisms*, pp. 604-9. London, 1870) and from the signed letter given in Spicer's *Sights and Sounds* (p. 349), it seems clear that the alleged communications were not only purely subjective, but that they had little in common with the Spiritualistic manifestations which they were supposed to foreshadow.

<sup>2</sup> Page 212.

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—such as Horace Greeley, Stephen Pearl Andrews, Henry James, and J. Garth Wilkinson—which were afterwards well known in connection with Swedenborgianism or Spiritualism. Of the two leading Socialist communities founded under religious impulses in the early forties, before the main crop of "Phalanxes," Brook Farm, as is well known, cultivated Swedenborgianism; whilst Hopedale, in the person of its founder, the Rev. Adin Ballou, helped towards the propaganda of Spiritualism. Of the two most successful secular communities of the day, the Wisconsin Phalanx was founded by a Spiritualist, Warren Chase, and the North American Phalanx had Horace Greeley as a Vice-President. Nor did the connection between the two movements cease with the revelations of 1848. Two or three years later the Auburn Spiritualists, headed by Thomas Lake Harris and James D. Scott, founded the Mountain Cove Community; while Harris himself later inaugurated a new Spiritualist society at Brocton, N.Y., and afterwards at Santa Rosa, California. Another communist society of the same type was the Harmonial Society, founded under angelic direction by one Spencer, an ex-Methodist minister, and his wife in 1855. Again, T. L. Nichols and other Spiritualists were members of the Socialist community of Modern Times, founded on Long Island in 1851.<sup>1</sup> And many of the "inspired" writings of the time sketched out plans for an ideal society to be founded on communist or phalansterian lines. Andrew Jackson Davis and the other writers in the *Univercelum*, as already pointed out, preached social reconstruction as the concomitant of spiritual regeneration.<sup>2</sup>

Of the typical American Spiritualist of the early days—the man who began with Socialism and, adding thereto in due course all the other reforms above enumerated, finally found in Spiritualism the creed which would unify all his enthusiasms—no better illustration could be found than in the life of Warren Chase. Fortunately there are ample materials for the study. With a confidence, which again is typical of the man and the time, that what was so profoundly interesting to himself could not fail to have both interest and value for others, he has given to the world two autobiographies—*The Life Line of the Lone One: an Autobiography of the World's Child*,<sup>3</sup> and *Forty Years on the*

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Rostrum*, p. 50. An interesting summary of the relations between Socialism and Spiritualism, on which the account in the text is largely based, will be found in Noyes' book, already quoted.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 173. <sup>3</sup> Fifth edition. Boston (U.S.), 1868.

*Spiritual Rostrum*<sup>1</sup>—the former dealing mainly with his Socialist, the latter with his Spiritualistic experiences. Born in 1813 in Pittsfield, a little village of New Hampshire, he never saw his father, and his mother, unwedded, died when he was five years old. In accordance with the laws of the State, the friendless orphan was "apprenticed" by the Selectmen of the township to a farmer, who was bound, in return for his services, to feed and clothe the child until the age of twenty-one, leaving him free to attend school in the winter, and giving him a sum of money on completion of the full term. The farmer proved a brutal master, and neglected his side of the bargain, and the boy escaped in his fifteenth year, and was finally bound over by the Selectmen to another family, by whom he was kindly treated. In this new place he had the opportunity of attending school for the first time, soon learnt to read, and made good progress with his studies generally during the next four or five years, passing on from thence to the academy at Gilmanton Corners. Here he appears to have read the works of various Freethinkers, and to have adopted their views. The *Boston Investigator* was at this period of his life his guide, and Rationalism his religion. In 1835, when twenty-two years of age, he left New Hampshire and went away West, into what was then Michigan Territory, to seek his fortunes in new lands. There he found friends, and in January, 1837, married a young girl then employed as school teacher. Of his wife we are told that she had already learnt to eschew pork, tobacco, and coffee, a renunciation which Warren Chase himself did not imitate until some years later, and that she soon gave up her former faith (Baptist) to adopt the views of her husband. In course of the next few years children were born to them, of whom more than one died; and they went through many vicissitudes in trying to make for themselves a home and a living in the still unsettled West. In 1838 they moved to Southport, in Wisconsin, and for some years endured the bitterest poverty, living through a whole winter with their one child on potatoes mainly, with a little flour, milk, and butter, sent by kindly neighbours, hardly richer than themselves, in pity for the delicate child. There, as a homeless, landless outcast, "the World's Child" had opportunity to meditate on social and economic problems. Gradually, as the settlement developed, his worldly affairs improved. He achieved a modest competence, and a certain position amongst his fellow-townsmen; he was appointed

<sup>1</sup> Boston, 1888.

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Street Commissioner and Road Master in 1843. In the following year came the turning-point of his life. He had already, in the winter of 1843-4, been studying Mesmerism, in company with a few friends, under the guidance of Sunderland's paper, the *Magnet*. At the same time he had imbibed from the *New York Tribune* and other journals Fourier's scheme of Socialism. The matter was much discussed through the winter in the local Lyceum. The glowing accounts of the success already achieved, or manifestly about to be achieved, by various communities already organised, fired the imagination of the untaught settlers. They were dazzled by the great vision of peace, order, and harmony, of want and crime abolished, of toil translated by the magic of co-operation into pleasure, and earth made to yield tenfold increase, of the return of exiled Justice, and the vanished reign of Saturn. Early in 1844 they formed an association, with shares of twenty-five dollars each, and sent out a small committee to select a suitable spot for the realisation of their dreams. A tract of virgin soil was chosen in Fond-du-lac County, near the present town of Ripon, situated on the banks of a beautiful stream. They named their new home Ceresco, in honour of the goddess Ceres. Thither, in the middle of May, 1844, the pioneers of the new settlement, nineteen men and a boy, marched with their waggons and household goods, reaching the spot on the seventh day. They at once set to work to prepare for the coming winter.

"The long days were well filled with toil by the pioneer Socialists, and the short nights were devoted to sleep on the ground, under the tents. The Scotch sailor cooked for them in open air, and they ate on rough boards, under the shade of a bower, when it did not rain; and when it did, they ate standing, to avoid an excess of water on the body, and because they could shed rain better in that position. They put in one hundred acres of wheat on the prairie for the next season, and potatoes, and corn, etc., for the running season. On the morning of June 10th the ground was white with frost, and used up most of the corn, and beans, and vines, which they had hurried up on the new sod, so beautifully turned, where no rock nor root was in the way of plough and spade. They also began to erect three dwellings, twenty by thirty feet each, one and a half stories high, and thirty feet apart, which were completed by winter, from oak trees, which furnished, without saw-mills, the frame, the clap-boards, the shingles, and the floors, and all except the stairs and upper floors, which were obtained at a saw-mill twenty-two miles distant, at Waupun. A saw-mill was also erected, and a dam; and on this, in the hardest

work and most exposed labour, could be found the Lone One, almost every day, never to be beaten at hard labour nor outdone in devotion to what he believed true. It was late in winter before the saw-mill was in running order, and then the stream was frozen too much for use, and they had to winter once without many boards for man or beast. The hay, which was abundant, supplied the place of boards for shelter for beasts and for beds for the families."<sup>1</sup>

The community lasted for six years, the numbers rising at one time to about 180, of whom more than two-fifths were under twenty-one years of age. Of all the communities of the time it was perhaps the most successful. The members worked and danced and sang and held high debate. They solved the religious difficulty by allowing each denomination to use the hall for worship in rotation; they brought up their children and kept themselves free from debt; and when, in 1850, partly through internal friction and jealousy, partly because some among the members were hastening to get rich elsewhere, the society was dissolved, it enjoyed the distinction, unique perhaps amongst the secular communities of the time, of yielding a substantial profit to its members at the division of the communal property. Warren Chase had been its virtual founder, was throughout its existence its leading spirit, and was ultimately entrusted with the duty of winding up its affairs.<sup>2</sup>

But meanwhile the World's Child was beginning to take a prominent part in the larger political life outside. He was at this time known as an active reformer, advocating the abolition of property in land, of usury, of banks and banking, of capital punishment; freedom for the negro; and equal rights of property, of person, and of franchise for men and women. In 1846 he was elected a delegate from Fond-du-lac County to a Constitutional Convention of Wisconsin Territory. In

<sup>1</sup> *Life Line*, pp. 117, 118.

<sup>2</sup> In the following passage he gives its epitaph:—"Had been a great stock and grain grower, raising in one season as high as ten thousand bushels of wheat. Had one genius who did most of its preaching and law business, and others who attended to the sanitary department. Never used intoxicating drinks, nor allowed them on its farm. Never used profane language, nor allowed it, except by strangers. Never had a law suit, nor legal counsel. Had little sickness, and no religious revivals. Never had a case of licentiousness, nor a complaint of immoral conduct. Lived a strictly moral, honest, upright, and virtuous life; and yet was hated, despised, abused, slandered, lied about, and misrepresented in all the country round about—mostly by preachers. Kept a school of its own all the time. Took five or six newspapers to each family. Stopped work on Sunday to accommodate the neighbours, and rung its bell for meetings. But they danced without rum, or vulgarisms and profanity. They had meetings without prayers, and babies without doctors." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 126, 127.)

1848 Wisconsin was admitted to the Union as a State, and Chase was elected as a member of its first Senate. At the meetings of this body he sat side by side with a fellow-Spiritualist, one Latham Sholes, and in their joint desk they kept for spiritual refreshment and for sale to their fellow-Senators copies of *Nature's Divine Revelations*.<sup>1</sup> In 1849 he was nominated by the "Free Soil" party for the Governorship of the State. For the next thirty years he seems to have taken a prominent part in politics, moving ever westward to new lands, and eventually becoming a member of the Californian Senate. During those thirty years he was also untiring in his advocacy, by lectures and writings, of the new gospel of Spiritualism. Never had cause a more single-hearted nor, for the type of men whom he addressed, it may be surmised, a more persuasive advocate. An enthusiastic visionary, he believed in other men as thoroughly as he believed in himself. It would have been as ungracious as futile to seek to demonstrate to such a man that the movement in which he found the realisation of his dreams for the future of humanity was founded on folly and fraud. He remained happy in his faith until the last, and deserves some better tribute than the numerous "inspirational" poems which, in his later years, were dedicated to him by grateful mediums.

Another convert, gifted with the same childlike simplicity, and with no less enthusiasm for humanity, was John Murray Spear, one of the most attractive figures amongst the early Spiritualists. Born in 1804, he had been baptised by John Murray himself, whose name he bore. As a child he worked in a cotton factory, and thereafter was apprenticed to a shoemaker in Abington, Mass. But his earnest desire was to be a preacher. Ill health and the untimely loss of his hard-earned savings interfered with his purpose for a time; but ultimately, through the aid of his brother and the well-known Universalist, Hosea Ballou the younger, he received the necessary instruction, and preached his first sermon in December, 1828. In 1836 he heard W. Lloyd Garrison speak, at once accepted his views, and thenceforward became a prominent champion of the emancipation of the negro. So much ill feeling was aroused against him by his advocacy of the unpopular cause that he was forced to resign his pastorate in New Bedford, and removed to Weymouth, Mass. A few years later, in 1844, whilst lecturing in favour of Abolition, he was attacked by the mob and so seriously injured that his

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Rostrum*, p. 68.

life was endangered. In the following year he removed to Boston, and in company with his brother Charles published a weekly paper, *The Prisoner's Friend*, designed, as its prospectus explained, to promote the abolition of capital punishment, criminal reform, and the spread of peace and general intelligence. Thereafter for the next six or seven years Spear appears to have devoted himself almost entirely to helping the poor, and especially prisoners or accused persons, by his personal service, advice, and, where needful, money. He would attend the various courts, and go bail for many who must otherwise have been imprisoned pending their trial; he would visit the prisons, and perform all such offices as a large charity could suggest; he would communicate with the prisoners' friends, write their letters for them, sometimes pay their fines, or support their innocent wives and children; and when the prisoners were released he would, so far as his ability served, help them to find honest employment. All this time he was lecturing and writing and doing all that in him lay to further the cause of the prisoner. In one year he is reported to have given as many as eighty-one lectures on prisons and the cause and treatment of crime, to have distributed 7,500 books to prisoners, and to have travelled 8,000 miles.

Outside his lecturing, such work as Spear did no doubt depended largely, if not almost altogether, for its success on the personal influence of the man. A committee which found bail for prisoners would have been liable to be defrauded again and again; and a committee governed, as any such body must be, by definite rules could scarcely have performed to such good purpose, or with such spontaneous grace of human kindness, the innumerable acts of mercy with which Spear's life appears to have been filled during these years. It may have been a wise instinct which led him to refuse compliance with the expressed wishes of many of his friends, that he should form a committee or society rather than work single-handed. But such single-handed effort, however disinterested the worker and however noble the cause, has its peculiar dangers; and if Spear's long and successful labours for the poor and suffering led him at last to believe that he was chosen and appointed from among all the children of men to be the evangelist of a new gospel, much may be forgiven to one who had already done so much, and who had fairly earned the title of the "American Howard."

Spear's attention was first called to the Spiritualist

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manifestations in 1851. On the 31st March of the following year his hand was involuntarily moved to write a message, signed "Oliver," and understood to come from the spirit of one Oliver Dennett, a friend who had nursed him in 1844 during the illness which followed the assault by the mob of anti-Abolitionists already referred to. The message bade him go to Abington, a town twenty miles distant from Boston, where he then was, and call upon one David Vining; the object of the mission was not stated. Spear went as he was bidden, found that a man named David Vining lived, not in Abington, but in an adjacent town, Weymouth, and was then suffering from severe neuralgia. At Spear's touch the pain left him, and he fell later into a refreshing sleep. Spear stated—and no doubt quite honestly—that he had never heard of David Vining until the message came to him; but it is to be noted that Spear had in his youth worked as a shoemaker at Abington, and in manhood had lived for some years in Weymouth, and had therefore probably many links with these localities.

Other missions of a like kind were imposed upon him. Later his hand was moved to execute various drawings, representing in some cases parts of the human body, inscribed with appropriate texts from the Bible and other mottoes. There were also geometrical drawings and strange unintelligible figures, of which no interpretation was vouchsafed. A little later in the same year the spirit of John Murray introduced himself at a séance, and asked that a reporter might be found to take down the discourses which he proposed to deliver through the lips of his namesake. A reporter was found, and the discourses were actually published at the end of 1852, under the title *Messages from the Superior State*. They treat of righteousness, of the glories of the spirit spheres, of the final salvation of all mankind, and of the spiritual illumination which was about to shine upon the world. Spear's later "inspired" writings are treated of below, in chapter v. Spear paid more than one visit to this country, and was a familiar figure at gatherings of English Spiritualists in the earlier years of the movement.<sup>1</sup>

The restless energy of the American people, and their freedom from the restraints imposed in older societies by

<sup>1</sup> The foregoing account of Spear's life is based on the *Biographical Sketch* by Mrs. H. F. M. Brown, in the *Educator* (Boston, 1857), the Preface to *Messages from the Superior State*, edited by S. C. Hewitt (Boston, 1852), and Adin Ballou's *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, chap. xii.

tradition and authority, were nowhere more conspicuous than in the realm of faith. Unfortunately there was no attempt at an authoritative enumeration of the strength of the various religious denominations until a much later date than that which we are now considering. But it is certain that out of the population of twenty-three millions given by the census of 1850 a relatively large proportion belonged to no special Church.<sup>1</sup> There are many circumstances, indeed, which indicate the fluid character of the religious views commonly held; notably the rapid spread of Millerism and other religious epidemics, the recent revival of Swedenborgianism, and the facility with which preachers and congregations alike from time to time changed their religious tenets. All these features appear to have been symptomatic less of the weakness and instability of the religious impulse than of a certain freshness and spontaneity in its manifestation, strictly comparable with the insistent, childlike questioning of social problems to which reference has already been made.

The ranks of the Spiritualists were naturally recruited largely from those who had freed themselves entirely from the Christian tradition, and had therewith lost all definite hope or belief in a future life. One of the most prominent of these converts was Professor Hare; and by the general testimony of the Spiritualist writers of the time, Hare was but one of many in like case.<sup>2</sup> But the converts who were most active in the propaganda came as a rule from the Churches, and especially from those who, like the Friends, the Unitarians, and the Universalists, held some liberal or attenuated form of Christian doctrine. Thus amongst the earliest converts we find the Friends Isaac Post and George Willetts, the Swedenborgians Courtney, Tiffany, and Bush, and ministers of various denominations, such as Sunderland, Fernald,<sup>3</sup> Newton, Hammond, Ferguson, Allen Putnam, etc.

No religious body gave a larger contingent to the new faith than the Universalists. Of those whose names have already been mentioned as associated with A. J. Davis on the

<sup>1</sup> Judge Edmonds (*Spiritualism*, vol. i. p. 9, eighth edition, by Edmonds and Dexter, New York, 1853) says that there were but five millions of professed Christians; but he gives no grounds for this estimate, and there were no official figures on the subject until much later.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Edmonds and Dexter, *op. cit.*, vol. i. pp. 53, 61. *Telegraph Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 79, 122, 469, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Fernald (*Spirit World*, vol. iii. p. 90) deprecates the title of Swedenborgian; but he certainly at this time held, and continued for many years to hold and express the leading Swedenborgian doctrines. Probably, however, the title of his then recently extinct paper, the *Christian Rationalist*, fairly indicates his position.

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*Univercœlum*, Harris, Fishbough, and Brittan, as said, were all Universalist ministers, whilst Fernald at one time appears to have been connected with the same denomination. Later, we find prominent in the ranks of Spiritualism R. P. Ambler, Adin Ballou, J. M. Spear, S. C. Hewitt, and many others who had been educated for Universalist pulpits. A correspondent of the *Univercœlum* had expressed his fear lest the new movement should prove merely a division of the older denomination; and charges of the same kind continued to be brought against the Davisian theology. It would be pertinent to inquire, therefore, what special characteristics of the Universalist faith led its followers to bulk so largely in the Spiritualist movement. Universalism, to quote the definition of its American historian, Dr. Eddy, is "the doctrine of the final holiness of all men through the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> In one form or another the Universalist belief is almost as old as Christianity itself. In America the foundation of the sect is usually ascribed to John Murray. But Universalist tenets were held in America long before Murray, as Dr. Eddy shows. So early as 1636 there were two prominent mystical writers who preached the doctrine, Samuel Gorton and Sir Harry Vane, then Governor of Massachusetts. It is noteworthy that in its beginnings the doctrine seems habitually to have been associated with mysticism. No doubt the central dogma, as commonly held until within recent years—the immediate and unconditional entrance into glory of every human soul at death—is based on the mystical doctrine of the divine and incorruptible nature of the soul, from which it followed that all sin belonged to the body, and that all the consequences of sin ceased with the death of the body. Contributory sources of the faith in America were the Rappists, a sect of German mystics, who migrated to America in 1803, and there founded a Society of celibates, who had all things in common, and looked for the early advent of the millennium; and the Dunkers, or German Baptists, a sect which founded a monastic Socialist community at Ephrata early in the eighteenth century. In fact, the doctrine of Universalism, though not necessarily under that name, has been very generally held by the religious communist societies.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of which we are now speaking the Universalist

<sup>1</sup> *Universalism in America*, by R. Eddy, D.D. Two volumes. Boston, 1884-6.

<sup>2</sup> See Eddy, *op. cit.*; Noyes' *History of American Socialisms*; Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (London, 1875).

Church in America was in a state of transition. From an early date in the nineteenth century a bitter controversy had been waged within its ranks on the nature of the change at death. The orthodox section, comprising at first the great majority, held what appears to have been the primitive doctrine, that in the next life there is no room and no need for repentance, but that salvation comes to all alike at death. The younger school, called Restorationists, denounced this doctrine as immoral and contrary to the authority of the Bible; their opponents used hard words in return, and the dissension waxed so bitter that in August, 1831, a convention of Restorationists, which included Adin Ballou, drew up a manifesto in which they declared that "the doctrine of no future accountability and immediate entrance into glory" was incompatible with "pure religion and subversive of the best interests of Society," and therewith seceded from the Communion. But notwithstanding this secession, it seems clear that many of those who remained held the same Restorationist tenets, and the rationalist view, in fact, grew so rapidly that, in 1878, a representative convention of Boston Universalists drew up a statement of the general belief of the Church on this subject, in which it is laid down that "we believe that repentance and salvation are not limited to this life. . . . In respect to death, we believe that, however important it may be in removing manifold temptations and opening the way to a better life . . . it has no saving power."

Such, then, was the position of the Universalist Church in the middle of the nineteenth century. Founded originally on a revolt from the rigid and unlovely eschatology of orthodox Protestantism, its younger members had recently carried the rationalising spirit still further, so that some of them had already separated themselves from the parent body, and others still within the pale were less openly working towards the same position. To men who had thus been preoccupied for a generation with the problem of a future life, and who had for themselves evolved the conception of it as a life of probation and progress, the new philosophy of the Spiritualists came as a most welcome and timely revelation. Or it would be equally true to say that their preoccupation with the problem led them to grasp with eagerness those signs and wonders which seemed to hold out the promise of light in the darkness, and to shape their meaning in conformity with their own dearest hopes. It is certainly not without significance that for the first few years, at any rate, several editors of Spiritualist papers and a large proportion of the more

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influential and respected speakers and writers had originally been Universalist ministers.

One of the best known of the early Universalist recruits was the Rev. Adin Ballou, a member of a family who had for two generations occupied a leading position in American Universalism, and who had himself, as already indicated, taken a prominent part, on the rationalist side, in the Restorationist controversy. In 1842, the same year which saw the beginnings of the more famous community of Brook Farm, Ballou had founded near Milford, in Massachusetts, the Society of Hopedale, to be, in his own words, "a miniature Christian republic." In the year 1850 spirit manifestations of various kinds—raps, movements of furniture, "direct" writing and various trance phenomena—appeared in the community. Later, within a few days of the death of their son, the Rev. Adin Augustus Ballou, in February, 1852, the parents received, through the hand of one Elizabeth Reed of the community, messages assuring them of their son's happiness and giving a sketch of his life and surroundings in the spirit sphere, with other information of the customary character. In the middle of the same year Adin Ballou published his testimony, for the following amongst other reasons, as set forth in his Preface: "Because he believes that a just and discriminating faith in Spirit manifestations, such as he sets forth, will promote the regeneration of mankind individually and socially. Because he believes that only the dawn of the manifestations has yet appeared, and desires to assist in preparing all well-disposed minds for the brightness of the approaching day."<sup>1</sup>

Others there were, of a spiritual temperament like that of the early Friends, who whilst still holding to the central doctrines of Christianity, had severed themselves from connection with any Church or Christian society. Josiah A. Gridley was a doctor practising in Southampton, Mass. From his own account of himself<sup>2</sup> we learn that he began life in poverty with feeble health, which had prevented him in youth from pursuing his studies for the ministry, and continued to beset him throughout his later years. He was further hampered in his career by the charge of a wife, also in weak health and at times deranged, and a numerous family. Throughout, however, his main preoccupation appears to

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, Preface, p. li. Liverpool, 1853. (Reprinted from the second American edition.)

<sup>2</sup> *Astounding Facts from the Spirit World*. Southampton, Mass., J. A. Gridley, 1854.

have been with spiritual matters. This is his own account of his life history :—

“With an ardent and unwaning desire to find the true and unerring way of God, I ran rapidly through the various and multi-form sectarianisms of the churches, as the Congregationalist, Methodist, Unionist, Perfectionist, etc., till I reached Paul’s charity, when sectarianism of every form retired, for that is an inclosure into which its profane and unhallowed feet never enter. Yes, I ran through all these, and in 1834-5 I was convicted for a higher life. The sinning and repenting that I had followed under the instruction of all my teachers, from 1816 (when I was fourteen years old), became to me exceedingly loathsome.

“I sought help from the most renowned Spiritualists of that day, but none understood my wants—none knew the unutterable desires of my thirsty soul. I had been filled for years with the blessings of ‘Revivals,’ but they could no longer reach that aching void. I finally left everything that bore the name of religion and betook myself to God.”<sup>1</sup>

But even before he ultimately found spiritual peace, Gridley had been the subject of frequent monitions and angelic interpositions. He was constantly impressed, even before seeing the patient, with the cause of the disease and the treatment to be followed, and attributes the remarkable success of his practice to his communion with the spirit world. He gives an instance in which, in 1842, he believed himself to have been the medium for effecting a miraculous cure. He was seated at the bedside of a dear friend, having done all that his art could effect to relieve her pain, and believing her to be near death.

“In this emergency, with external hope cut off, I seated myself at her bedside with my forehead in my hand, and my elbow resting on my knee. In this position I opened my mind upward. The swelling tide from the spirit world *set in*, while each rolling surge which came in quick succession carried up my spirit to a point of faith and *power* that seemed to me *omnipotent*. The object I dreamed not, but instantly as on the next buoyant surge, were evolved these words, which echoed through my spirit, mighty as the roar of a thousand thunders, ‘In the name of the living Christ, I bid these pains leave you.’ I knew she was healed.”<sup>2</sup> . . .

He did not move or speak, but the pain left the patient and she recovered. Like celestial guidance, as he believed, followed him also in his business matters ; on more than one

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Page 188.

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occasion saved his life or that of others; directed him in all his actions, telling him when to give and when to withhold charitable doles; for the space of some months, for his own spiritual edification, forbade him to make any charge for his medical services; and ultimately for a season withheld him from practising his profession at all.

Finally, within a few weeks of the death of his son Albert, he was privileged to have an interview with him in the spirit.

"My spirit stretched itself immeasurably and inconceivably into the sympathetic network of the heavens in its lengthened desires for my son. Within two or three minutes he was by my side. After exchanging the fulness of our affections upon each other, which no language of earthly lovers can reach, as I had desired, he first most strikingly and unmistakably impressed me with his identity. He then showed me his condition and the body he occupied—the heavenly radiance that glowed from within and through that body may be *felt* better than uttered. It was transparent; I could see through it, yet its lineaments were clear and well defined; it was verily a glorified body . . . I now desired to know whether he remembered the Truths of which we had so often spoken together during the last years of his earthly pilgrimage, and whether he was still interested in them. In reply, had he instantly daguerreotyped them in letters of fire on the wall before me, they could not have appeared more clear and distinct. Such a conception is very near the truth—they seemed to roll out from the glorious body that stood beside me like a rapidly unfolding canvass, till they completely covered the whole wall of the room."<sup>1</sup>

A man whose lifelong experience had thus anticipated the teachings of the Spiritualists became inevitably one of the early converts to the new faith. It was not until February, 1852, however, that he came into close contact with the movement. In that month he found a medium in his own household, in the person of a young man who had been a personal attendant on his deceased son Albert. From this time he held almost daily converse with the "spirits." There can be no doubt that Gridley's simplicity offered a strong temptation to the young man Nathan, and probably to other members of his household. The most singular scenes of confusion and disorder took place at the early séances, explained by later utterances as denoting war between good and evil spirits who were contending for the body of the medium. Articles of furniture were moved about; spirit messages were written in various parts of the house in chalk;

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 170.

and on one occasion a famous manifestation of a later date was anticipated—the breakfast-table was laid by spirit agency.<sup>1</sup>

The earlier communications to the circle appear to have been written or spoken almost exclusively through the organism of the young man aforesaid, the communicating intelligences purporting to be the son already mentioned, one or two intimate friends of Gridley, or of other members of the circle, and occasionally more famous personages. Later, Gridley himself became a medium, and was "impressed," like Davis, to utter spiritual truths.

The communications, not unnaturally, reflected Gridley's own peculiar views on spiritual matters. Much of the book, indeed, is devoted to the defence of the Christian doctrines and the biblical miracles from the attacks of A. J. Davis.<sup>2</sup> Apart, however, from these apologetics and the affirmation, again in opposition to Davis, of the existence of evil as something in its nature distinct from good, the book differs little from other revelations of the period. It enters minutely into the geography of the spirit spheres, the nature of the spiritual body, and other matters of the kind. There are, moreover, traces of one or two mystical doctrines to be found; especially the "interior" breathing, which Gridley describes as a real physical experience of his own;<sup>3</sup> and which afterwards figured prominently in T. L. Harris' later mystical writings.

Of those whose faith in a future life, tottering apparently under the stress of a recent bereavement, was restored and enlarged by the Spiritualist manifestations, the most notable instance was John Worth Edmonds, next to Andrew Jackson Davis the most popular and most influential of the early American writers on the subject. Judge Edmonds had been a Senator of the State of New York, and a State Prison

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> The defence was not perhaps always successful from the orthodox standpoint, as the following extract will show. Gridley had asked the spirits for an explanation of the sun's standing still in the valley of Jehoshaphat, Davis having said that Joshua's statement was mistaken. The answer is:—

"Mr. Davis sometimes draws hasty conclusions. When he affirms that the laws of nature are as unchangeable as their Eternal Author, he affirms the truth; but the laws of Nature in Joshua's time might have produced some wonders equal to those in our own day, when we have seen the ignorant cobbler, in an incredibly short time, converted into one of the profoundest philosophers of the age. Mr. Davis should know that an angel's face, acting as a mirror or luminous cloud of the right density, could reflect the sun's descending rays for a much longer period than usual, upon the contending armies of Israel. Cannot the merest schoolboys with a couple of mirrors make the sun stand still all day in the bottom of the deepest well, if they choose?" (p. 74).

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 262.

Inspector, and at the time of his first public utterances on Spiritualism was a judge of the Supreme Court of the State, and in the fifty-second year of his age. He describes his initiation as follows:—

“It was in January, 1851, that my attention was first called to the subject of ‘spiritual intercourse.’ I was at the time withdrawn from general society; I was labouring under great depression of spirits. I was occupying all my leisure in reading on the subject of death, and man’s existence afterwards. I had in the course of my life read and heard from the pulpit so many contradictory and conflicting doctrines on the subject that I hardly knew what to believe. I could not, if I would, believe what I did not understand, and was anxiously seeking to know if, after death, we should again meet with those whom we had loved here, and under what circumstances. I was invited by a friend to witness the ‘Rochester Knockings.’”<sup>1</sup>

His attention was arrested by what he then saw, and by his reflections on the momentous consequences which must follow, if the Spiritualist interpretation were the true one. He invoked the aid of several friends, amongst them an accomplished electrician, and together they attacked the problem. In the course of a few months’ investigation Judge Edmonds satisfied himself that the rappings and other physical phenomena were not due to any human agency. But what impressed him from the first at least as much as the raps themselves, and the movements of tables and chairs and musical instruments which accompanied them, was the apparent ability of the power which caused the raps to respond to mental questions. Of the explanation of this seeming mystery enough has already been said in a previous chapter. Further, on one occasion his doings on a voyage were faithfully chronicled for the benefit of his friends at home, and other indications of supernormal powers of acquiring knowledge were vouchsafed to him.

In August, 1853, in order to meet the constant attacks in the Press, he made a public profession of his new faith and the nature of the investigations which had led up to it. Later in the same year his young daughter Laura, who had hitherto, on account of her religious belief, held aloof from her father’s pursuits, became developed as a medium. She gave in the first place various proofs of clairvoyance; and later spoke several languages unknown to her in the normal state; her musical powers also became largely developed; and she frequently described spirits unknown to her, who were

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualism*, by Edmonds and Dexter, vol. i. p. 71.

recognised from her description as friends of persons present with her.<sup>1</sup> Meantime, through the years 1853 and 1854, Judge Edmonds, with a few chosen friends, was holding a circle for the receipt of spiritual communications through the mediumship of himself, Dr. Dexter, and others. Copious extracts from these communications were published in the two portly volumes already referred to, the first in 1853, the second early in 1855. The work appears to have had an enormous sale, and no doubt exercised a great influence on the rising faith. The spirits who chiefly communicated to the little circle were Swedenborg and Bacon; Luther and Calvin were reported as present on one occasion, but left without giving any token or message.<sup>2</sup>

Such in brief were the social and intellectual conditions in which the new religion had its birth, and such were its first apostles—lecturers on Mesmerism, Socialists and reformers, revivalist preachers, Unitarian and Universalist ministers. Laroy Sunderland and J. R. Buchanan, and somewhat later, Professors Hare and Mapes, represented the critical and philosophic aspect of the new movement, and gave it what seemed an assured scientific foundation. The strong impulse which transformed the tricks of mischievous children, in other circumstances merely a nine days' wonder for a gaping village, into the beginnings of a new gospel of hope and freedom proceeded from men like Warren Chase and John Murray Spear, full of crude but sincere aspirations for the bettering of the world; men whose eyes were often blinded by the very splendour of their distant ideals to all that was sordid and contemptible in the present. There were many men of the same type who were at that very time labouring for the abolition of negro slavery; and it is interesting in this connection to note that at a later period both Abraham Lincoln and William Lloyd Garrison professed their faith in Spiritualism.

The shaping of the doctrines of the new religion was the work of men, many of whom shared with the Socialists and reformers their large enthusiasms and their generous incapacity to see the trickeries and mean egotisms which surrounded them, but whose aspirations tended to religious rather than to social ideals. These men came for the most part, as we have seen, from the outlying fringes of orthodoxy, the Churches in which, under the powerful solvent of in-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. ii. pp. 44, 45.

<sup>2</sup> For some accounts of these spirit communications and of Edmonds' other experiences see below, chaps. iii., iv., and v.

tellectual freedom, the sharp outlines of dogmatic Christianity were already beginning to disappear. There were comparatively few Methodists and Episcopalians amongst the advocates of the new faith, but many Friends, Unitarians, and Universalists. Sometimes, as would seem to have been the case with Judge Edmonds and Adin Ballou, the intellectual openness to new ideas was quickened under the stress of recent bereavement into a vivid personal craving.

In this manner for a time the new faith seemed to focus in itself much that was finest and most generous in the religious and social aspirations of the growing nation, and spread through all classes of society with a rapidity and persistence unapproached by any other religious movement of modern times.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

SO far, in considering the phenomena presented at spirit séances, we have confined our attention mainly to the rappings. But while these remained for some time the chief source of interest and the standard means of communication with the invisible intelligences, other physical phenomena were soon added. So early as the autumn of 1849, indeed, Capron and Barron, in their *History*,<sup>1</sup> record a series of séances, with Mrs. Tamlin apparently as chief medium, though Catherine Fox occasionally assisted, at which tables were rocked and tilted, small objects moved about, a guitar played, and so on. The Rev. C. Hammond's account of a séance with the Foxes, in January, 1850, testifies to similar phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Later in the same year, as we have already seen, Sunderland was favoured with a surprising variety of manifestations in the domestic circle. In many of the earlier sittings the phenomena, as in the Hammond case and in Tallmadge's account quoted below, seem to have taken place in the light, the table round which the circle sat affording sufficient cover for the musical performances and other manifestations. Sometimes, indeed, as in the two cases last cited and in Elliott's séance,<sup>3</sup> the investigator was alone with the two, or three, Fox girls and their mother.

But when a larger circle was to be entertained—and the circles of the day frequently numbered from twenty to thirty persons—the advantages of darkness and of singing or piano playing during the period of incubation were early perceived. Capron's séances in 1849 were held in the dark; and the more violent physical demonstrations nearly always took place, if the circle was a large one, in the dark.<sup>4</sup> The sitters were

<sup>1</sup> Pages 69 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-32.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in his book, *Mysteries, or Glimpses*, etc., pp. 146-51.

<sup>4</sup> See *e.g.* *Spirit World*, vol. ii. p. 126, vol. iii. pp. 102, 103, etc.

also, as in later times, generally enjoined to sing or play on some musical instrument—a compliment which the “spirits” frequently reciprocated by rapping an accompaniment to the tune. In these earlier séances, again, the precaution of holding hands all round the circle appears to have been frequently, but by no means invariably, observed.

Very few critical accounts of the earlier séances have been preserved; but they are not needed. The accounts given by Spiritualists themselves, when they condescend upon detail, are sufficient to show that we need look for no other cause for the results described than trickery of the most trivial and vulgar kind—trickery for the most part too obvious to need a commentary.

But as I desire to put the case at its strongest, I propose to select in the present chapter the best accounts which I can find given by Spiritualists, beginning with extracts from the personal experiences of some of the leaders of the movement, told by themselves.

One of the most distinguished of the early converts was the Hon. N. P. Tallmadge, Governor of Wisconsin. In a letter to a friend, dated April 12th, 1853, which was published in most of the journals at the time, he gives some account of his experiences, the most remarkable of which were connected with the “spirit” of the late John C. Calhoun. He held, on dates not specified, several sittings with the Fox family—the mother and two unmarried daughters—generally with no other persons present. At these sittings he received, through the raps, communications purporting to come from Calhoun. The table was also alleged to move when no one was near it. Further, on one occasion Tallmadge tells us that he sat *on* the centre of the table, and the three ladies sat at the sides, with their hands and arms resting upon it. Notwithstanding this added weight, the table rose, “*and was suspended in the air about six inches above the floor.*” Tallmadge pours just scorn upon the hypothesis, put forward by some ignorant persons, that this stupendous manifestation could be explained by electricity. At a later séance bells and a guitar were placed on a drawer under the table, and music of indescribable beauty was produced. The climax was the production of direct spirit-writing. The first sitting held for this purpose was a comparative failure. The mediums were the three Foxes, and Tallmadge was the single sitter; but only a few vague pencil marks were produced.

Through the raps, however, an appointment was made for

the following Friday (date not specified), at seven. Apparently the sitters were the same as before.

"We met, pursuant to appointment, took our seats at the table, our hands and arms resting on it as usual. I placed the paper with my silver-cased pencil on the drawer, and said:—

"My friend, I wish the sentence to be in your own handwriting, so that your friends will recognise it.' He replied, 'You will know the writing.' He then said, 'Have your minds on the spirit of John C. Calhoun.'

"I soon heard a rapid movement of the pencil on the paper, and a rustling of the paper, together with a movement of the drawer. I was then directed to look under the drawer. I looked, and found my pencil outside of the drawer, near my feet, but found no paper on the drawer where I placed it. On raising up the drawer I discovered the paper all under it. The sheets were a little deranged, and on examining, I found on the outside sheet these words: '*I'm with you still.*'"

Tallmadge showed the sentence to several friends, who, according to his report, recognised the writing as "a perfect facsimile" of Calhoun's; and two witnesses added that the abbreviation "*I'm*" was characteristic of the deceased statesman. Upon which Tallmadge comments:—

"How significant, then, does this fact become! We have not only the most unequivocal testimony to the handwriting itself, but, lest any skeptic should suggest the possibility of an imitation or a counterfeit, this abbreviation, peculiar to himself, and known only to his most intimate friends, and which no imitator or counterfeiter could know, is introduced by way of putting such a suggestion to flight for ever."<sup>1</sup>

Another well-known name is that of William Lloyd Garrison, who gave his testimony in the *Liberator* of March 3rd, 1854. At the sitting which he describes the medium was Mrs. Brown (formerly Mrs. Fish). The date is not given, but it occurred "recently." The circle consisted of ten persons, four of whom were ladies. Raps and other demonstrations were given. Then by means of the raps the alphabet was called for, and

"letter by letter, it was rapped out that the medium must put her feet in the custody of one of the party, and then we were told to wait for demonstrations. This was evidently done to convince

<sup>1</sup> *The Healing of the Nations*, by Linton and Tallmadge, pp. 474-82. New York, 1858.

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everyone present that the medium had nothing to do with the phenomena, by way of fraud or collusion; and during the entire sitting (a protracted one), before any remarkable feat was performed, the medium was invariably ordered to take such a position as to render it clearly impossible for her to be privy to it. The presence of several spirits was indicated during the evening, and satisfactory tests were made; but the most communicative and efficient one purported to be that of 'Jesse Hutchinson.' It was he who had been playing bo-peep with us under the table; and now that the medium was secured to the satisfaction of all present, he renewed his salutations not only to us personally, but to nearly every one of the circle. The ladies had their dresses, and the gentlemen their pantaloons, pulled, and their feet patted, in the most emphatic manner. . . . He then spelt out the following communications by the alphabet: 'I am most happy, dear friends, to be able to give you such tangible evidence of my presence. The good time has truly come. The gates of the New Jerusalem are open, and the good spirits, made more pure by the change of spheres, are knocking at the door of your souls.'"

After this a bell was put under the table and rung, and a stick was moved about; three spirits, two of them being the well-known Abolitionists, Isaac T. Hopper and Jesse (Hutchinson), wrote their autographs on paper placed for the purpose in the same spot, and spirit hands grasped—also under the safe cover of the table—the feet and hands of the company.<sup>1</sup>

Adin Ballou unfortunately gives no details of his personal experience of the physical phenomena; he merely recounts, in general terms, that he had heard at the circle noises of various kinds, had seen tables and other articles of furniture move about, with or without contact of the medium's hands, and had witnessed "direct spirit-writing," besides other lesser marvels.<sup>2</sup>

Judge Edmonds' testimony to the physical manifestations is also wanting in detail. In his *Appeal* to the public, dated August 1st, 1853, he merely describes in general terms levitation, tiltings, and other violent movements of tables and chairs, ringing of bells, and so on. But there is one particular manifestation, reference to which is excluded from the *Appeal*, because it occurred when Judge Edmonds was alone, which possesses a special interest, since we have two

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Hare, *Experimental Investigation*, etc., pp. 327-9. Hare ascribes the account to Henry Lloyd Garrison, but there seems to be no doubt that the famous Abolitionist is intended. The séance is referred to in the *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. p. 418, and William L. Garrison is said to have been present.

<sup>2</sup> *The Modern Spirit Manifestations*, pp. 19, 20.

accounts of it, written by the judge at a considerable interval. This is the later account, dated March 13th, 1859:—

“And, finally, after weeks of such trials, as if to dispel all idea in my mind as to its being done by others, or by machinery, the rappings came to me alone, when I was in bed, when no mortal but myself was in the room. I first heard them then on the floor, as I lay reading. I said, ‘It’s a mouse.’ They instantly changed their location from one part of the room to another, with a rapidity that no mouse could equal. ‘Still, it might be more than one mouse.’ And then they came upon my person—distinct, clear, unequivocal. I explained it to myself by calling it a twitching of the nerves, which at times I had experienced, and so I tried to see if it was so. It was on my thigh that they came. I sat up in bed, threw off all clothing from the limb, leaving it entirely bare. I held my lighted lamp in one hand near my leg, and sat and looked at it. I tried various experiments. I laid my left hand flat on the spot—the raps would be then on my hand, and cease on my leg. I laid my hand edgewise on the limb, and the force, whatever it was, would pass across my hand and reach the leg, making itself as perceptible on each finger as on the leg. I held my hand two or three inches from my thigh, and found they instantly stopped, and resumed their work as soon as I withdrew my hand.

“‘But,’ I said to myself, ‘this is some local affection, which the magnetism of my hand can reach.’ Immediately they ran riot all over my limbs, touching me with a distinctness and rapidity that was marvellous, running up and down both limbs, from the thighs to the end of the toes.”<sup>1</sup>

On comparing this account with that given in a contemporary extract from his diary,<sup>2</sup> we find some interesting variations:—

(1) Nothing is said about the raps on the floor preceding the raps on the thigh: the account in the diary begins, “To-night, after I had gone to bed, and while I lay reading . . . I felt a touching on my left thigh,” etc.

(2) Nothing is said about the raps being felt on the hand when laid flat on the limb; on the contrary, it is expressly stated that this procedure stopped the manifestation.

(3) Nothing is said about the stopping of the raps when the hand was held two or three inches from the thigh.

(4) “They ran riot all over my limbs” is represented in the contemporary account by the following sentence: “After

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in the *New York Tribune*, March, 1859. Reprinted in *Letters and Tracts*, p. 156. Memorial Edition. London, James Burns (no date). <sup>2</sup> *Spiritualism*, by Edmonds and Dexter, vol. i. pp. 18, 19.

this there came a storm of touchings from my *left* big toe, all the way up my *leg* to the upper part of my thigh. . . . This storm ran up and down my *leg* several times in a perfectly straight line," etc. From a perusal of this earlier account there seems no sufficient reason for regarding the experiences as other than subjective.

In the case of some other manifestations witnessed by Judge Edmonds, we also have the advantage of two accounts, in this case by different witnesses. C. W. Elliott quotes a report, dated 25th May, 1851, given him by a friend, of a séance at which two young men of Springfield (Gordon and Cooley) were the mediums. The séance was held at the house of Charles Partridge on the 21st May, and Edmonds, Gray, and some fifteen or twenty others were present. In the first place Gordon gave various manifestations of trance speaking and writing:—

"After this the spirits desired the lights put out, and, every vestige and gleam of light being excluded, in the most pitchy darkness, a series of proceedings took place, which utterly and entirely disgusted me; of course, anything done in the dark is useless, so far as convincing people goes. We sat and listened, for about one hour and a half, to a perfect pandemonium of noises, bangs on the table as loud as could be made by hand or foot, loud slaps, bells ringing loudly, the table creaking, flapping its leaves and turning quite upside down, as was announced by the exclamations of those about it, Judge Edmonds continually exclaiming, 'I'm touched—now I am tapped on the shoulder—hear that—now they are at my feet, now my head,' and then he would cry out, 'They are pulling my coat-tails—they are pulling me towards Margaretta (Fox)' . . . . Meanwhile the white-haired (medium) was going on in the most extraordinary manner, crying out, seemingly scuffling and contending with spirits who wanted to take possession of him. At one time Dr. Gray says, 'They have lifted him up in the air,' and someone else rejoined, 'No, he is standing on his chair'; at length, amid a loud outcry, and exclamations of, 'Don't, I don't want to; leave me alone,' accompanied by the noise of a struggle, he was dragged into the closet and shut up there; this we knew from Dr. Gray's exclamations. Presently Dr. Gray was also sent in there, then Judge Edmonds, finally all the mediums and some others. We were then favoured with the most absurd series of noises from this closet that ever was heard: loud bangings, a chorus of Auld Lang Syne, sung by all the *closeites*, accompanied by raps on the door, and scrapings on an old violoncello, which was in the closet, violent ringing of bells, which were afterwards hurled out into the room, and then rang all around a sort of accompaniment to the music in the closet. . . . We left

them at last at half-past eleven still in there, the noises going on as loud and meaningless as ever."<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, Partridge published a full report of the proceedings at this séance in the New York papers, from which we learn that, in addition to Gordon and Cooley, E. P. Fowler and Mrs. Fox and her daughters were present. The most interesting variation is in Partridge's account of the spirit lights seen at the beginning of the dark séance, which do not appear to have been visible to Elliott's correspondent.

"At the stage of the proceedings last alluded to it was proposed by someone to darken the room, in order to try whether the lights or sparkles known frequently to accompany the manifestations in former instances would be perceptible. It was accordingly done, and the lights were observed at different times and in different parts of the room—sometimes resembling phosphorescent flames, sometimes forming luminous clouds moving about, sometimes like glistening stars, crystals, or diamonds. Physical demonstrations increased in variety and force, and continued for three hours, 'during which,' says Mr. Partridge, '*the Judge seemed to be in the possession of the spirits.*' Many things occurred to him, which he mentioned, that he alone could be conscious of, though we could perceive that something extraordinary was going on with and around him. Many things, however, also occurred which all could witness."<sup>2</sup>

In other respects—except for the omission of all mention of the "levitation"—the account given by Partridge agrees pretty closely with that furnished by Elliott's correspondent, the main difference being in the mental attitude of the reporter. Judge Edmonds himself, in describing this séance, states that his experience on that night finally convinced him that the manifestations were produced by no mortal agency.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that Edmonds professes to have seen on various occasions the odic light issuing "like a pale, shadowy smoke" from the magnet, the human head and fingers, and from the members of the circle before a séance.<sup>4</sup>

Almost the only experiences in these early days to which the name of experiments could be applied were those recorded by Dr. Hare, sometime Professor of Chemistry in the University of Pennsylvania, and a member of many

<sup>1</sup> *Mysteries, or Glimpses of the Supernatural*, pp. 167, 168.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Sights and Sounds*, p. 120, etc. The account given by Spicer is considerably abridged, and I have not had the opportunity of consulting the original.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritualism*, by Edmonds and Dexter, vol. i. pp. 25-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters and Tracts*, pp. 169, 170; from a letter to the *New York Tribune*, dated April, 1859.

learned societies. Even here there was nothing that deserved to be called scientific investigation. The machinery, indeed, was not ill-devised, but its use did not dispense with the necessity for close and continuous observation of the human agent; and there is no evidence that Hare recognised this necessity, or took any steps to guard against trickery.

He was, at the time when his attention was first called—in the summer of 1853—to the spirit manifestations, already seventy-two years of age, and his book,<sup>1</sup> published two years later, shows him to have been ready—when once his first repulsion from the subject had been overcome—to accept without questioning the most amazing testimony, and to place implicit trust in the mediums with whom his investigations were conducted.

Briefly, Hare's apparatus was of two kinds. The first, a wooden board about four feet long, supported on a fulcrum about a foot from one end, and at the other end attached by a hook to a spring balance. A glass vessel filled with water was placed on the board near the fulcrum, between it and the spring balance; a wire gauze cage attached to an independent support, and not touching the glass at any point, was placed in the water, and the medium placed one or both hands in the wire cage. In this position he could, of course, exercise no appreciable effect on the balance if he was effectually prevented from touching the apparatus at any other point. Nevertheless, on several occasions the balance showed a variation of weight, on one occasion indicating the exertion of a force of eighteen pounds at what was assumed to be the point of application. Gordon was the medium on this occasion; but the medium generally employed for this class of manifestation was a little boy of eleven, of whom we shall hear more later. No details of the experiments are given, and there is no evidence that any measures were taken to prevent the medium from forcing up the short end of the lever. The experiment, indeed, is chiefly of interest as having apparently furnished the model for the more elaborate trials of a similar nature conducted some years later by Sir W. Crookes.

The other machine, of which Hare invented several varieties, consisted essentially of a revolving disc, with the letters of the alphabet printed round its circumference, and attached to a table. The disc was actuated by a band passing over a small wheel, attached to one leg of the table or

<sup>1</sup> *Experimental Investigation: The Spirit Manifestations*, etc., by Robert Hare, M. D. New York, 1855.

fastened to a fixed weight on the floor, so that as the table moved different letters would come under the pointer. The primary object of the device was to secure that the medium should not see what letters were indicated by the pointer. Further, it was sometimes sought, by placing on the table a small board supported on castors or on metal balls, and causing the medium's hands to rest on the board, to prevent the medium from exercising any direct force on the table except in a downward direction. Again no details are given of the experiments, not even, as a rule, the names of the medium and the persons present; and there is no indication that any precautions were taken to guard against trickery on the part either of the medium or her friends. The only particulars of interest which Hare gives are that the spirits always expressed a dislike to the use of the board supported on castors or balls, and professed to find it extremely difficult to give intelligible messages when the medium could not see the alphabet, because, as they explained, it was in such a case necessary to see through Hare's eyes. Some "spirits," indeed, through the mouths of their mediums, refused to have anything to do with the machines, or tried and failed to produce any results.<sup>1</sup>

Even if we had the fullest confidence in Dr. Hare's competence as an investigator, it is clear that experiments of this kind, unless carried out with the most stringent precautions, could carry little weight. But his readiness to accept the most amazing and ludicrous accounts from others; his own complete faith in the communications received from various spirit worthies—Washington, Franklin, etc.; and, finally, the simplicity shown in the following extract from a speech delivered at the New York Conference in September, 1854, show that any confidence in his capacity for an investigation of this nature would be misplaced. I have not space to quote the whole speech, but a brief extract will no doubt suffice. Hare was on his way to attend the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Montreal. He was accompanied by a boy-medium, apparently the same boy who was the medium in the balance experiments.

"Next morning, while yet in their state-room on board the boat, they [*i.e.* Hare and the boy] found the door locked and the key missing. They searched for a long time unsuccessfully, when the spirits said it was in the bottom of the carpet-bag. But the key of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 41-3, etc.

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the carpet-bag was also gone, when the spirits said it was at the bottom of the trunk, and on taking out the baggage they found it, and then found the key of the door at the bottom of the carpet-bag.

"When they arrived at Montreal and put up at their hotel, he hunted his baggage for his toilet-case, but could not find it. The spirits told him it was under the bolster of his bed. He raised the bolster and searched, but could not find it. He had his eye upon the boy all the time. The spirits told him to look again, and upon raising the bolster again, precisely where he had looked before, he found it. It was impossible, he said, that the boy could have done this, for he stood in the same place all the time, and could not have moved without his seeing him.

"The next evening they went to a large party, at the house of a lady, to hold a circle. They had packed the spirit-scope, balls, and other apparatus in the carpet-bag. There were many sceptics and disagreeable persons present, many counter-mediums, as he supposed. When they came to open the carpet-bag they could not find the key. They went to the table, but could not get any communications. They entered into another room with the boy, and the spirits spelled out, by means of raps, that he would get the key before he got home. Whilst he was riding along the streets of Montreal on his way home the key came down upon his breast!

"On another occasion, while alone with the boy in their room, and after they had locked up the balls, spirit-scope, shaving-case, etc., in his carpet-bag, the balls were, in some inscrutable way, taken from the carpet-bag and fell upon him in a shower. Then came the box, razor-strap, etc., all falling, apparently, from above, on and around him."<sup>1</sup>

Among the most widely celebrated manifestations of these early days were the spirit-writings given through the mediumship of Mr. E. P. Fowler, a younger brother of the well-known phrenologist. The case is of special value for our present purpose as having been the leading case selected as illustrative of the phenomena in general, in a discussion between Brittan, editor of the *Shekinah*, and Dr. B. W. Richmond, a friendly sceptic, which was carried on in 1852.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Fowler, a young medical student, was a member of the New York circle. This is his own account of the first spirit-writings, contained in a letter written at Brittan's request on March 26th, 1852, and published in the *Shekinah* :—<sup>3</sup>

" . . . On the night of the 21st November, 1851, while sleeping alone in the third story of the house, I was awakened about one

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Modern American Spiritualism*, by Emma Hardinge Britten, p. 118. London: J. Burns (no date).

<sup>2</sup> Republished in book form in the following year at New York.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. i. pp. 301-4.

o'clock by sounds of footsteps in my room. Looking up, I saw five men, some of them dressed in ancient costume, walking about and conversing together. Some of them spoke with me, and among other things told me not to be frightened, that they would not harm me, etc. I attempted to rise, however, to go downstairs, but found that my limbs were paralysed. These strange visitants remained with me about three hours, and finally disappeared while going towards a window and when within about two feet of it. They did not open the window. During the succeeding night, and at about the same hour, I was again awakened in a similar manner, and saw several persons in my room. Some of those who were there on the previous night were present, with others whom I had never seen before. One of them had what appeared to be a box about 18 inches square; it seemed to contain electrical apparatus. They placed the box on the table, and then electrical emanations, like currents of light of different colours, were seen issuing from the box. One of the company placed a piece of paper, pen, and ink on the lid of this box. The luminous currents now centred around the pen, which was immediately taken up and dipped in the ink, and without the application of any other force or instrument, so far as I could perceive, the pen was made to move across the paper, and a communication was made which I have since learned was in the Hebrew language. This information I received from Professor Bush, to whom the writings were submitted for translation, and whose letter addressed to you will accompany this statement. Soon after three o'clock my new companions left me as they had done the previous night, taking the box with them. During the time they were in my apartment I was in possession of my natural senses, and not only saw *them*, but the furniture in the room, by means of the illumination which their presence caused; and I also heard the clock strike and carriages passing in the street."

In a later letter, dated August, 1852,<sup>1</sup> Fowler adds some particulars about other writings. Another piece of Hebrew was written in his room at three o'clock in the afternoon (date not stated), he having been previously requested by the spirits to leave the room for that purpose. This piece of Hebrew, like the other, was a quotation from the Old Testament. Again, returning one day in the middle of December, 1851, to his room, about three o'clock p.m., he found upon his table "written upon a sheet of drawing-paper which was incidentally left" there, the legend, "Peace, but not without Freedom," followed by the autographs of forty-three spirits. Subsequently, according to a statement signed on the 25th December, 1851,

<sup>1</sup> Published in Richmond and Brittan's *Discussion*, p. 12. A much fuller account, by Fowler, is given in the Appendix to Edmonds' and Dexter's *Spiritualism*, vol. i. pp. 443-51.

by sixteen members of the New York circle,<sup>1</sup> the spirits, owing ostensibly to the omission of any history of the occurrence and the irregular mode in which the signatures of the attesting members of the circle had been affixed to the document, directed the medium to burn it, and undertook to write another. Accordingly, two pieces of parchment were placed on the table in Fowler's bedroom, and on the morning of the 23rd of December, when the medium arose, he found the same legend inscribed on the parchment, together with the signatures of fifty-six spirits, including many of the original signatories of the Declaration of Independence, in their characteristic handwriting. At a meeting held on the 25th December the spirits were asked whether each wrote his own name on the parchment, and answered emphatically, "Yes!" Thus far Mr. Fowler's own letters and the statement drawn up by the circle on the 25th December, 1851. Later, in reply to Dr. Richmond's challenge in the *Discussion*, already referred to, a second and a fuller statement of the circumstances was drawn up and signed by eight witnesses. This later statement, and Brittan's covering letter, are alike undated, but from the dates of the corresponding letters of Richmond, it would appear to have been written in August or September, 1852.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from internal evidence, the authenticity of the writings, it will be seen, depends exclusively on the testimony of the medium, a young medical student with a turn for drawing. It becomes important, then, to scrutinise the character of the writings themselves. A reproduction of the fifty-six spirits' autographs is given at the end of Mrs. Hardinge

<sup>1</sup> Published in No. 9 of the *Spiritual Telegraph*.

<sup>2</sup> *Discussion*, pp. 14-16. It is important to point out certain discrepancies in the evidence.

(1) Fowler, in his own letter of 25th March, 1852, says the spirit signatures were written on the first occasion on a piece of paper "incidentally left" in his room. In both of the statements signed by members of the circle it is expressly said that the paper was placed there by direction of the spirits.

(2) Fowler says the writing was executed on the first occasion in the daytime, but the statement of the 25th December says that it was written upon "in the course of the night." The later statement agrees in this respect with Fowler's own version.

(3) The earlier statement says that the medium awoke "on the morning of the 23rd December," and found the second legend and set of signatures written on the parchment. The later statement says that the writing was executed "during the night of the 23rd December."

The first two of these discrepancies were pointed out by Richmond in the *Discussion*. Brittan, in his reply, only alludes to *one* discrepancy, and without specifying its nature, or attempting to explain it, says that it is only apparent, being due to careless copying on his part. It is clear that he has not even taken the trouble to understand the charge of inaccuracy which he attempts to refute.

Britten's *Modern American Spiritualism*, and the curious can examine it for themselves. Richmond, a not unsympathetic or unduly sceptical witness, as will be seen in the sequel, could not digest the spiritual autographs. After comparing them carefully with each other and with the originals which they counterfeited, he drew attention to many points of unlikeness with the originals, and to a common family resemblance between themselves, and hinted pretty plainly that they were the work of one hand—and that hand the medium's.<sup>1</sup> The only relevant point in Brittan's reply is that the tremulousness of some of the lines was due, not, as Richmond had suggested, to the slowness of the movement necessary to an unpractised forger, but to the roughness of the parchment.

An examination of the Hebrew writing proves still more illuminating. This had been submitted to the Swedenborgian George Bush, himself an occasional attendant at the circle, who writes of it, as quoted by Brittan in his first letter,<sup>2</sup> that "altogether the specimens are of a very extraordinary character, such as I cannot well convey by any verbal description." The letter then goes on to express Bush's own conviction of the medium's honesty. In replying, Richmond points out that Brittan has omitted one important sentence from Bush's letter, as originally printed in the *Shekinah*, and himself supplies the omission, viz.: "The first of these manuscripts was in Hebrew, containing a few verses from the last chapter of the prophet Daniel. This was correctly written, with the exception of several apparently arbitrary omissions, and one rather violent transposition of a word from an upper to a lower line."<sup>3</sup> Bush does not appear to have carried his analysis further; but Richmond submitted the writing to two or three Hebrew scholars, one of whom, the Rev. W. Carter, a graduate of Yale, enters into details of the errors referred to. Carter points out that it is quite clear that the Hebrew was copied by a person so completely ignorant of the language as not even to know that it is written from right to left. Thus, the quotation begins in the middle of a line; but it is the right half of the line (in Hebrew *the beginning*) which is copied, corresponding to the last part of the ninth verse of the twelfth chapter of *Daniel*, "*and sealed till the time of the end.*" The first part of the next verse, "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried," which no doubt made up the left half of the interrupted line, is omitted (except the

<sup>1</sup> *Discussion*, pp. 45 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19. Bush's letter was originally written at Brittan's request, and published in the *Shekinah*, vol. i. pp. 305-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

word "Many"), and the quotation continues, "*Many but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise.*" In the original Hebrew words equivalent to "shall understand" form the conclusion of this verse. But these words in the "spirit" Hebrew come at the end of the quotation, *i.e.* they have apparently been carried on from the right-hand extremity of the last line but one to the left-hand extremity of the last line. In English, of course, this would leave the order of the words unaffected. In the Hebrew it has the effect of taking the two last words of the tenth verse, and inserting them in the middle of the twelfth verse, making the end of the quotation read, "*Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to days a thousand three shall understand.*"<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps hardly necessary to consider further these particular instances of spirit-writing. It will be seen that the evidence for their production by spirits rests ultimately on the testimony of one man—the medium; that the witnesses who have recorded the circumstances, and vouch for the medium's trustworthiness, are so little concerned to be accurate that several discrepancies may be detected even in the scanty records which they have published; that the Spiritualist champion cannot see these discrepancies when they are pointed out to him; that in quoting the testimony of his own Spiritualist expert he suppresses (no doubt in perfect good faith) the only passage which is calculated to damage his cause; that this Spiritualist expert, though admittedly a competent Hebrew scholar, is unable to appreciate the real significance of the mistakes which he points out; and finally, that the claim of spirit authorship derives but questionable support from an examination of the writings themselves.

That these deficiencies in the evidence were not conspicuous to the Spiritualists may be inferred from Brittan's conclusion on the matter in his controversy with Richmond:—

"I leave this part of my subject with a single additional remark. If it be difficult to convince sane men that spirits wrote that parchment, the reason will be found to consist in their obstinate scepticism rather than in any defect in the testimony."<sup>2</sup>

But Richmond was critical of the phenomena only when, as in the case last considered, their authenticity seemed to involve the Spiritualist interpretation. In all other cases he

<sup>1</sup> A corresponding analysis of the errors in the Hebrew quotation, by Professor Vail, of Concord, together with a facsimile of the quotation, is published in Mattison's *Spirit-Rapping Unveiled*, pp. 118-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Discussion*, p. 19.

shows himself fully as hospitable to new marvels as his opponent in the argument. It is Richmond who first introduces the famous Ashtabula Poltergeist, which he uses to support his own view of the electro-odysic origin of the manifestations. Richmond's own account of this case was based mainly on oral evidence from two of the witnesses, Miss Martha Cowles and Mrs. Rachel Cowles, with whom he had a long-standing acquaintance. Later, Brittan procured an exhaustive history of the case from Mr. L. M. Austin, of Austinburg, Ashtabula County, Ohio, which is countersigned by Richmond's two informants and five other persons.

Mr. Austin, dating his letter on the 4th February, 1853, begins characteristically by acknowledging Brittan's letter of the 19th *instant*, and then proceeds to tell the following story:—

A young widow, H., after the sudden death of her husband, came to reside with a neighbour in Austinburg, Mr. S. M. Cowles. Soon after her arrival she became a rapping medium. Later she went to Marlborough to study anatomy, and on her return to Austinburg in the autumn of 1851 told a weird story of various uncanny manifestations which had attended her during her recent studies. Shortly after similar disturbances broke out, in H.'s presence, in the Cowles' house. The stair-ropes jumped up and followed H. when she went up to the bedroom. When she and her friend were in bed, in the dark, muskets, cartridge belts, candlesticks, and other objects came from all quarters and piled themselves in the middle of the room; tables moved; spirit raps were heard; washstands and chairs started from their places when H. came into a room; pillows, brushes, boots, and other light articles flew around. At Marlborough, when she resumed her anatomical studies, the manifestations were still more outrageous. One night H. and her room mate, alarmed by the most frightful sounds, 'beheld standing by their bedside the spectre of the corpse that they had been dissecting, all reeking and ghastly, as they had left it on the table, save that one of the arms was folded across the breast—a change which was actually found to have taken place when the remains were examined.' On another night H.'s brother, at her entreaty, came to the side of the bed where H. and her friend lay, 'and saw by the moonlight a human skull dancing up and down over their heads.'

Such, in brief, was the story. The account, it will be observed, is dated February, 1853, and the disturbances which the witnesses attest took place in the autumn of 1851. Moreover, not one of the eight signatories appears actually to have seen anything remarkable. Most of the movements

took place in the dark, or when H. was alone, or were witnessed by visitors to the house whose attestation is not given. No single incident is so described as to make it clear that anyone who signed the account professed to have ever seen anything in the act of moving. The disturbances at Marlborough rest upon H.'s word alone.

But Richmond is quite as ready to accept the phenomena as Brittan himself. The stair-rods, muskets, and candlesticks, he explains, moved from their place because they were attracted by the magneto-odylic energy radiating from H. He adds some details (gathered, as he alleged, in conversation) which the signed account does not give, viz. that a glass tumbler, a watch with crystal glass, and a scent-bottle were not moved, owing, no doubt, as he points out, to glass not being susceptible to the magneto-odylic attraction. A pillow charged with the same force was projected *towards* a person who was badly frightened, and therefore negative. The chairs, tables, etc., moved in the wake of H. as she passed through a room, under the combined force of "electrical vacuum" and odylic attraction. The phenomena took place mostly in the dark, because light interferes with the evolution of this subtle force, and were most violent at Marlborough, because the emanations from the dead bodies in the dissecting room reinforced the odylic energies proceeding from the medium.

Lastly, the vision of the dead body was a vision only, emanating by odylo-cerebral sympathy from the brain of the doctor, who had altered the position of the corpse after the ladies had left the laboratory.<sup>1</sup>

There were some manifestations at this time which, though apparently of rare occurrence, created a profound and lasting impression on all who witnessed them, and are constantly referred to in the early books and discussions. One of them was the phenomenon of human levitation; another, of a table tilting at an extreme angle, without the objects resting on it falling off. The most circumstantial account which I have come across of the latter manifestation is contained in a communication made by Dr. R. T. Hallock at a meeting of the New York Conference on June 18th, 1852. As Dr. Hallock was himself the Secretary of the Conference, it may be presumed that the account preserved in the minutes, and quoted therefrom in the *Spiritual Telegraph*, is accurate. The sitting took place on June 11th at the house of Mr. Partridge, and the medium was one Daniel D. Hume (Home),

<sup>1</sup> *Discussion*, pp. 89-91, 262-72, etc., etc.

then at the beginning of his distinguished career. There were seven sitters:—

“On the table round which we were seated were loose papers, a lead pencil, two candles,<sup>1</sup> and a glass of water. The table was used by the spirits in responding to our questions, and the first peculiarity we observed was, that, however violently the table moved, everything on it retained its position. The table, which was mahogany and perfectly smooth, was elevated to an angle of about 30 degrees, and held there, with everything on it remaining as before. It was truly surprising to see a lead pencil retaining a position of perfect rest on a polished surface inclined at such an angle. It remained as if glued to the table, and so of everything else on it. The table was repeatedly made to resume its ordinary position and then its inclination as before, as if to fasten on us the conviction that what we saw was no deception of the senses, but a veritable manifestation of spirit presence and of spirit power. They were then requested to elevate the table to the same angle as before, and to detach the pencil, retaining everything else in precise position. This was complied with. The table was elevated, the pencil rolled off and everything else remained. They were then asked to repeat the experiment, retaining the pencil and everything else upon the table stationary, except the glass tumbler, and to let that slide off. This also was assented to, all the articles retained their position but the tumbler, which slid off and was caught in the hands of one of the party as it fell from the lower edge of the table.”<sup>2</sup>

At another séance with the same medium a witness relates that he stood upon a table which canted to an angle of forty-five degrees without throwing him off.<sup>3</sup>

But unquestionably the most striking manifestation of spirit power was the levitation of the human body. This particular marvel was vouchsafed at a very early period of the movement. Even in February, 1851, Sunderland writes in the *Spirit World*:<sup>4</sup> “We have been assured by eye-witnesses that Mr. Gordon has been taken up, and his body moved some distance, entirely by spiritual hands.”

About a year later, at the house of Dr. Gray, in New York, the same medium is said to have been carried through the air a distance of sixty feet.<sup>5</sup> From Mr. Isaac Rehn, President of the Harmonial Society of Philadelphia, we have a detailed account, written in 1855, of a similar performance with the

<sup>1</sup> It is not stated that the candles were lighted.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Brittan and Richmond, *Discussion*, pp. 249-50; also in *Sights and Sounds*, pp. 316-8. This feat is further considered in Book IV. chap. iii. below.

<sup>3</sup> *Sights and Sounds*, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. ii. p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. ii. p. 198, vol. v. p. 195, etc. Brittan and Richmond, *Discussion*, p. 248. Capron, *Modern Spiritualism*, etc., p. 189.

same medium. The incident is said to have taken place "some two years since."

"About the same time a company of persons, whose names, as far as I can recollect, I shall mention, were seated around two tables, joined together, in order to furnish room sufficient to seat the party. The house in which I then lived had two parlours, with folding doors. The two tables referred to occupied the entire length of the front parlour, leaving barely room enough for the chairs at the front end of the room; the other end of the table extended quite to the folding doors, leaving, of course, no passage on either end. It so happened that I was seated at that end of the table projecting into the doorway. The medium, Mr. Gordon, was seated about midway of the tables, on the left, the other seats being occupied by the rest of the company.

"After a variety of manifestations had occurred, the medium was raised from his seat by an invisible power, and, after some apparent resistance on his part, was carried through the doorway between the parlours, directly over my head, and his head being bumped along the ceiling, he passed to the further end of the back room, in which there was no one beside himself.

"Although all the individuals present had not equally good opportunity of ascertaining the facts in this case, the room having been somewhat darkened, still his transit over the end of the table at which I was seated, and the utter impossibility of the medium passing out in other way than over our heads, his continued conversation while thus suspended, and his position, as indicated by the sound, with other facts in the case, leave no reasonable doubt of the performance of the feat."<sup>1</sup>

D. D. Hume figured in another widely celebrated case of the kind. A correspondent of Spicer's, in Boston, thus describes the occurrence, from report:—

"One evening a unanimous request was preferred that the spirits would afford the party assembled some irrefragable evidence of their actual presence. To the utter amazement, as you may suppose, of the entire circle—prepared, as they doubtless were, for something strange—the medium was, on the instant, *lifted into the air, and there suspended by invisible agency for a space of two or three minutes, without touching anything or anybody present.*"<sup>2</sup>

This is the account of the incident as given by Brittan:—<sup>3</sup>

"On the 8th of August, 1852, several gentlemen were assembled at the residence of Ward Cheney, Esq., Manchester, Conn., where in

<sup>1</sup> Hare, *op. cit.*, pp. 291, 292.

<sup>2</sup> *Sights and Sounds*, p. 131.

<sup>3</sup> Brittan and Richmond, *Discussion*, p. 248.

the course of the evening very remarkable demonstrations occurred. One of the editors of the *Hartford Times* was present, and from his account of the exhibition, as published in that paper, I cut the following paragraph:—

“‘Suddenly, and without any expectation on the part of the company, the medium, Mr. Hume, was taken up in the air! I had hold of his hand at the time, and I felt of his feet—they were lifted a foot from the floor! He palpitated from head to foot with the contending emotions of joy and fear which choked his utterance. Again and again he was taken from the floor, and the third time he was carried to the ceiling of the apartment, with which his hands and feet came in gentle contact. I felt the distance from the soles of his boots to the floor, and it was nearly three feet! Others touched his feet to satisfy themselves.’”

Neither Brittan nor the anonymous Bostonian thought it necessary to mention that some time previously to the supreme manifestation the company had adjourned to a darkened room, ostensibly that they might see the “spiritual flashes of light said to have been vouchsafed to other investigators.”<sup>1</sup> They saw apparently nothing, but they heard plenty of raps, and some of them felt Mr. Hume’s boots.

But no account of this marvellous form of manifestation would be complete without Dr. Hallock’s testimony to what he witnessed at Philadelphia. At one of the meetings of the New York Conference,

“Dr. Hallock stated that on the previous Sunday afternoon (in the course of his lecture) while, as he believed, every eye and all thoughts were directed towards him [*i.e.*, Dr. Hallock, the lecturer], Mr. Henry Gordon, the well-known physical medium, who then sat at some distance from, but in front of him, in the perfectly well-lighted room, rose in the air, without any human aid, till the speaker beheld him floating so high that his feet just grazed the top of the seat, above which he hung in the air, where he swayed about from side to side, and turned partly around. By this time the attention of the entire congregation was rivetted on him, when he sank to the ground. The manifestation was imperfect on the part of the power that lifted him up, because it was afterwards declared by the spirits that they intended to have carried him over the heads of the entire congregation, and landed him on the rostrum, had the conditions permitted; but it seemed that the intense astonishment and agitation of the audience had broken the conditions of passivity necessary for the fulfilment of their design, and so he sank suddenly to the ground. Still, there remained the phenomenon of

<sup>1</sup> *Sights and Sounds*, p. 129.

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his having been lifted up and suspended in the air without mortal aid ; in fact, in a manner which no mortal could have achieved. . . . The effect of this marvellous operation of spirits in a crowded assembly and the full light of day, instead of distracting the attention of the audience from the address, intensified it to the utmost degree. 'I think I may say,' added Dr. Hallock, 'that I never was in an assembly where so much serene joy and spiritual exaltation was manifested. Each one felt that it was good to be there. I cannot describe that Pentecostal scene in words.'

I have not come across the testimony of any member of the audience who, according to Hallock, were witnesses with him of this marvellous sight, nor any other reference to the incident in the literature of Spiritualism.<sup>1</sup>

But of all the wonders of the time, few perhaps excited greater interest, or are more liberally attested, than the performances in Koons' "spirit-room." Jonathan Koons was a farmer living in a remote and mountainous district in the township of Dover, Athens County, Ohio. Early in 1852 he became interested in the Spiritualist movement, and it was revealed to him at a séance that all his eight children, and himself in a supereminent degree, were mediums for the spiritual forces. Thereafter, by direction of the spirits, he built, a few feet from his own house, a log building of one room, sixteen feet by twelve, to be used exclusively for spirit manifestations. The room was furnished with a spirit table and rack, supporting drums, triangles, tambourines, and other instruments of music, with a certain visible arrangement of wires, nowhere, so far as I can ascertain, precisely described, attached to some of the instruments, and having suspended from it bells, plates of copper cut into the shape of birds, and other objects. The mediums—generally Mr. Koons and his eldest son Nahum, a youth of eighteen, accompanied occasionally by other members of the family—sat at a smaller table in contact with the "spirit table"; the sitters, to the number of twenty or more, sat on benches beyond—*i.e.* the mediums were between the circle and the spirit table. Phosphorus was placed ready in wet paper for the spirits to show themselves by. Doors and windows were then closed, so as to exclude the light, the candle was put out; Mr. Koons began to play the fiddle, and the spirits responded with a concert, in which another

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Modern American Spiritualism*, p. 279. The most probable explanation of this extraordinary statement is that Hallock suffered a hallucination, of sight at the time, or of memory in the retrospect. See below, Book IV. chap. iv.

fiddle, the drums, a guitar, banjo, accordion, French harp, the horn, tea bell, triangle, tambourine, etc., played their parts. Most of the witnesses appear to have been impressed more by the energy than the excellence of the resulting harmony; more than one tells us with pride that the strains could be heard a mile off. But the music is sometimes described as exquisitely beautiful, or even seraphic; occasionally a choir of angel voices would join in, but the words of the song were rarely articulate. The leading spirit would subsequently address the company, using for the purpose a horn or trumpet to speak through. Of the other manifestations the following extract gives a fair idea:—

“Mr. Koons then said, ‘King, it is very warm here; won’t you take Mrs. Gage’s fan and fan us?’ But before he had finished speaking, the tambourine began to fly around the room like lightning, breathing a strong current of wind and fanning all in the house. Then the phosphorus was taken up and darted around the room like flakes of lightning, and a hand began to develop. We talked with the voice while this process was going on, and tried to urge our spirit friends to write a communication for us. When the hand was formed, it passed around the room and shook hands or touched the hands of many of us. It took hold of my hand, and then of my wife’s. We both felt the shape of a hand distinctly. It then got some paper and a pencil, and laying the paper on the table, right in front of us, began to write with great rapidity, covered one side of the sheet, turned it over again, wrote five lines, signed it, filled the rest of the page with flourishes, folded it, and placed it in my wife’s hand. It then flew around the room, darting from the table up to the ceiling, there making three or four distinct knocks, and darting down and up, repeating the knocks a number of times in succession; it then passed all around the room, stopping and showing the hand to all that wanted to see it. It then commenced darting around the room again, and snapping its fingers as loud as a man could do. It then threw the phosphorus in the back corner of the room, said ‘Good night,’ and was gone. Mr. Koons then lighted the candle, and my wife read the paper which was given her by the spirit hand.”

An extract from the message written under these conditions may perhaps be of interest. The presiding spirit had been urged, by way of a test, to give the sitters, some of whom had come from a distance to consult him, the names of their deceased relatives personally present, as was commonly done by the rapping mediums. He thus excuses himself:—

“On entering the assembly, he [the presiding spirit] looks around upon his anxious inquirers, and sees them attended with their re-

spective safeguards, such as he never saw before. In the discharge of his official duty, however, he is necessitated to exclude himself from the direct view and intercourse of the safeguards, so as to be brought into a nearer relation to the corresponding parties. The interlocution accordingly takes place, when each one in turn begins to interrogate the speaker in his excluded position, on subjects relating to their excluded guard, of which the speaker knows but little or nothing, except the cognition of their presence on his arrival; and in order to acquaint himself with the circumstances and matters inquired after, so as to answer correctly, the speaker has to disencumber himself at every inquiry, and not only so, but would also fail to perform his *devolved* duty by submitting himself to the scrutiny and criticism of the corresponding parties."<sup>1</sup>

It should be added that the spirits by whom these manifestations were produced purported to be a spirit band of pre-Adamite men one hundred and sixty-five in number, of exceeding power and wisdom, bearing the generic name of King. It was from this circle, indeed, that the celebrated John King and his scarcely less famous daughter Katie, beloved of two generations of Spiritualists throughout the breadth of two continents, are said to be lineally descended.

These performances appear to have been accepted by the Spiritualists with the same whole-hearted faith as any of the other manifestations described in this chapter. Hare devotes several pages of his book to discussing the evidence; so at a later date does Mrs. Hardinge Britten;<sup>2</sup> the *Spiritual Telegraph*<sup>3</sup> from the commencement of the phenomena admitted letters and articles from enthusiastic correspondents describing the marvels; and, finally, one of its editors, Charles Partridge, in May, 1855, went to Dover township, had several sittings, and recorded his experiences in a letter of some length in its columns.<sup>4</sup>

There were other physical manifestations at this date which time would fail me to recount: spirit-writing on slates; writing in raised red lines on the bare arm or forehead; formation of spirit hands—this last a prominent feature of D. D. Hume's séances;<sup>5</sup> miraculous materialisation of

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Mr. John Gage to Professor Hare, quoted in Hare's book, already cited, pp. 300, 301.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern American Spiritualism*, pp. 307-33.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. p. 424; vol. iii. pp. 267, 352; vol. vi. p. 132; vol. vii. p. 248, etc.

<sup>4</sup> In du Potet's book, *Traité complet du Magnétisme Animal* (Paris, 1856), a detailed account is given of a sitting with the Koons family by Dr. J. Barthet. On this occasion, in compliment to the nationality of the visitor, one of the written messages contained four words in French (*op. cit.*, p. 517, etc.).

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. *Telegraph Papers*, vol. viii. p. 293.

spiritual ointment;<sup>1</sup> the fire ordeal;<sup>2</sup> spirit lights; apports of objects, and so on. Indeed, there is but one conspicuous manifestation of present-day Spiritualism which could not be paralleled from the records of 1850-5—the “materialisation” of a complete human form. There were, indeed, as we have seen, materialised hands, and some Spiritualists, like Dr. Gray, contended that the spirits habitually created temporary physical organisations, to enable them to deal with material objects. Others held, with Brittan, that the facts so far adduced hardly warranted such a hypothesis. One writer, indeed, Professor Mapes (Phoenix), discoursed learnedly on the means by which the semblance of such temporary organisms could be produced, in accordance with the kinetic theory of gases, with a minimum employment of actual material particles, provided a sufficiently intense energy of motion were imparted to them.<sup>3</sup> But, at any rate, these hypothetical organisations, with the single exception of the hand, had so far apparently been perceptible to the sense of touch alone.

To quote further specimens of the evidence for physical phenomena could hardly serve any useful purpose. The foregoing extracts afford sufficient examples of the best evidence which the most competent and distinguished Spiritualists of the time could offer for their belief, so far as it was based on purely material marvels. To the reader of to-day the mere statement of such belief on such grounds may well appear preposterous. Logical grounds for the belief—as logic is understood in the modern world—were clearly wanting. But the matter should not on that account be summarily dismissed, as a pale recrudescence of mediæval superstition. For which of us is in better case? The causes of belief in the last analysis are not logical. It should not be overlooked that, in the present instance, the men who believed, if not of high intellectual distinction, had at least proved themselves capable, and had won more or less reputation amongst their fellow-citizens, as merchants, preachers, University professors, physicians, lawyers, legislators, and men of science; that many of them had embraced such belief when still in the prime of life and the ripeness of their judgment; that the same beliefs are held by a large number of persons even at the present day. We may feel assured

<sup>1</sup> *Supramundane Facts*, etc., p. 129, edited by T. L. Nichols. London, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. ii. p. 451; vol. iii. p. 189. *Modern American Spiritualism*, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. vii. pp. 117, 149, 185, etc.

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that in one form or another the belief in such marvels, as it has revived again and again in the past, will manifest itself again and again in generations to come; and history shows that those who sneer at such credulity without attempting to understand its causes are perhaps themselves not the least likely to fall victims, precisely because they do not understand.

Some further light will be thrown upon these causes during the consideration, in the next two chapters, of trance utterances and other psychological phenomena. But one remark may be made at this point. However large a part the personal craving for assurance of a future life may have played in predisposing the average Spiritualist to accept the phenomena as genuine, it is clear that this was not the only, perhaps not even the chief cause of belief. The whole history of Animal Magnetism in France and of Mesmerism in England testifies to the contrary; and for further proof we have the curious fact that men like Mahan, Richmond, and Rogers, who rejected the Spiritualistic interpretation, gave as blind a faith to most of the alleged marvels as any Spiritualist of them all. To champion the cause of truth disinherited is always an attractive part; so attractive that many men are too little careful to scrutinise the title of each pretender to the inheritance.

## CHAPTER IV

### CLAIRVOYANCE AND SPEAKING WITH TONGUES

WHEN we turn to the psychological phenomena we find that the records of this period add little or nothing to the evidence already furnished by the Mesmerists for the operation of some special faculty of clairvoyance, or thought-transmission. Not, indeed, but that the Spiritualists of the time firmly believed in the existence of such a faculty, as in some cases an alternative explanation to communication with spirits through the organism of the medium, and held that they had themselves received abundant proofs of its operation. That the medium should answer mental questions, and give information concerning friends long dead and private family matters, was indeed so common an occurrence that Edmonds and others excuse themselves from the superfluous task of furnishing evidence in detail. When, however, details are given, we find as an almost invariable rule that the information came through the raps, and there can be no reasonable doubt that in such cases the real explanation of the mystery lies in the cunning and keen observation of the medium.

It is, indeed, a striking confirmation of this view that, though writing mediumship was quite common at a very early date in the history of the movement, it was only by exception—an exception of the rarest occurrence—that a medium undertook to reply in writing to a question of which the answer was presumably unknown to him.<sup>1</sup> There was no obvious reason for this curious reserve, since the communicating intelligences were wont to be voluble enough on

<sup>1</sup> Two cases are quoted by Mrs. Hardinge Britten (*History of Modern American Spiritualism*). In the first (p. 224) the medium wrote out a copy of the first of a list of questions, but asked that the others should be answered by the raps. The other case (p. 257) is second-hand, and is open to other evidential objections.

all other matters, in heaven or elsewhere, and when speaking through the mouth or writing through the hands of their own relatives, to whom the facts would be known, no such reticence was observed. The inference is irresistible that what the medium did not know the "spirit" could not tell.

There are, indeed, a few instances at this time, which were widely advertised and recorded with all due circumstance, of mental telegraphy at séances. But for the success of this form of mental telegraphy it appeared to be essential to have a professional medium at each end of the wire. The earliest recorded instance of this kind is found in Capron and Barron's *History*.<sup>1</sup>

On the 12th February, 1850, Mrs. Draper, of Rochester, had in the trance an interview with Benjamin Franklin, who gave her, as a test, a violent electric shock, by which her body was visibly shaken, and undertook in a few days to provide an illustration of spiritual telegraphy. The first attempt, three days later, met with only partial success. An appointment was, however, made for the following Wednesday.

"On the day appointed, February 20th, the above-named persons convened; some of the company were late, and as soon as order was observed, the question was asked, 'What are the directions of Benjamin Franklin?' A. 'Hurry; first magnetise Mrs. Draper.' This was done, she immediately saying, 'He says we are behind the time, but he will forgive us this time; we must do better in the future.' The company was divided as follows: Mr. Jervis, Mr. Jones, Mrs. Fox, Mrs. Brown, Catharine Fox, in a retired room, with two closed doors between them. Mrs. Draper, Mrs. Jervis, Mr. Draper, Mr. Willetts, and Margaretta Fox remained in the parlor. Sounds unusually loud were heard in each room by either company, as before, resembling the telegraphic sounds. They were so unusual that Miss Fox became alarmed, and said, 'What does all this mean?' Mrs. Draper, while her countenance was irradiated with animation, replied, 'He is trying the batteries.' Soon there was the signal for the alphabet, and the following communication was spelled to the company in the parlor: 'Now I am ready, my friends. There will be great changes in the nineteenth century. Things that now look dark and mysterious to you will be laid plain before your sight. Mysteries are going to be revealed. The world will be enlightened. I sign my name, Benjamin Franklin. Do not go into the other room.'

"After waiting a few minutes, Mr. Jervis came into the parlor, saying that he was directed by the sounds to come and compare notes. They read as follows: Q. 'Are you all right?' Answered affirmatively; signal for alphabet, and the following was spelled:

<sup>1</sup> Pages 94, 95.

'There will be great changes in the nineteenth century. Things that now look dark and mysterious to you will be laid plain before your sight. Mysteries are going to be revealed. The world will be enlightened. I sign my name, Benjamin Franklin. Go in the parlor and compare notes.' Mr. Jervis returned to his company, and by alphabet was spelled, 'Now all go into the parlor.' The notes were then compared in presence of the whole company. Q. 'Is there anything more from Dr. Franklin?' A. 'I think I have given tests enough for this day.' Q. 'Will it not be better to keep this matter private?' A. 'No; it should be published.' Q. 'In what paper?' A. 'In *Democrat* or *Magnet*.'

Later this form of telegraphy without wires became comparatively common; messages were exchanged between New York and Philadelphia, Baltimore and Pittsburgh, New York and Washington, and so on. Professional mediums were always present at each end of the line; the most effective batteries being Messrs. Gordon, Conklin, Whitney, Mrs. French, and Mrs. Long.<sup>1</sup> There were numerous other instances of spurious clairvoyance, always through professional mediums, including the pellet test, which need not be further discussed at present.<sup>2</sup>

But when we turn from the phenomena of the séance-room to instances of a less obviously manufactured kind, we find a marked deterioration in the quality of the evidence. The records of the first class are unimpeachable. We can have no reasonable doubt that identical messages were given to the expectant circles in Mrs. Draper's house at Rochester, though we may hesitate to credit the results either to Franklin or to thought-transference. But in other cases the attestation is of the most slovenly and inadequate character. When, for instance, Judge Edmonds tells us that his friends in New York were clairvoyantly informed of his doings on a voyage, we can only regret that the judge's legal training did not suggest to him the need for substantiating this statement by furnishing extracts from his own diary and the minutes of the circle; and that the clairvoyant did not catch a glimpse of him when he was engaged in some less readily conjecturable occupation than talking about Spiritualism.<sup>3</sup> When Mr. Jarvis, a Methodist clergyman, narrates that his friend Pickard received the news of the death of his child, and

<sup>1</sup> Hare, *op. cit.*, p. 294; *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. pp. 79, 80, 447; vol. vi. p. 447.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iii., pp. 101, 140; vol. v. p. 400. *Modern American Spiritualism*, pp. 172, 191, 193, 201, 252, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritualism*, by Edmonds and Dexter, p. 30.

actually started on his homeward journey, before the arrival of the annunciatory telegram, we again note the unfortunate omission from Mr. Jarvis' letter (itself undated) of precise hours and other particulars, and the absence of any account from the person chiefly concerned.<sup>1</sup> Or, once more, in the account given, apparently in entire good faith, by Mr. Willetts, one of the early Quaker converts, of two or three instances where excellent advice was given him by spirits in business matters, exhibiting apparently superhuman knowledge of the motives and future actions of third persons, we again note with regret that Mr. Willetts did not think it necessary to date his communication nor to offer any corroborative testimony.<sup>2</sup> Not less striking than the poor quality of the evidence actually forthcoming in such cases is the paucity of the records. The same examples—as was noted by Mahan and other early critics—are quoted over and over again by writers and lecturers on the subject. Even Mrs. Hardinge Britten, the later historian of the movement, whilst explaining that she is embarrassed in her selection by the wealth of the material at hand, including over two hundred narratives in her own possession, contents herself with quoting as examples of this early time the three narratives here referred to from Capron and Barron's book and one other.<sup>3</sup>

In nearly all cases we find that the Brother, Wife, or Child who purported to communicate through the medium—when raps were not the vehicle of conversation—seems to have been taken on trust. There are hardly any detailed accounts of actual proof of their claim being asked for or furnished; whilst, on the other hand, there are several cases recorded where a dead relative or friend greeted the anxious inquirer, and furnished circumstantial proofs of decease, who was afterwards found alive and well. In one case, acting upon information received through the medium, the dead man's relatives dug for his body in a swamp, and after an arduous and unsuccessful search, learnt that the murdered man was sawing lumber in the next county.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Capron and Barron, *History*, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Modern American Spiritualism*, pp. 47-55. Other instances of alleged clairvoyance, thought-transference, etc., at this time will be found in Capron and Barron, *op. cit.*, p. 54; Asa Mahan, *Modern Mysteries*, etc., pp. 227, 228; Adin Ballou, *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, pp. 82, 112; Spicer, *Sights and Sounds*, p. 307, etc.; in the Prefaces and Appendices to Edmonds and Dexter's *Spiritualism*; in Mrs. Hardinge Britten's *History*, pp. 136-40, 253; Richmond and Brittan's *Discussion*, pp. 198, etc.; and in the *Spiritual Telegraph*.

<sup>4</sup> *Spirit World*, vol. iii., p. 38; see also *ibid.*, pp. 36, 37; Asa Mahan, *op. cit.*, pp. 176, 177, etc., etc.

There are a few cases, however, which excited considerable notoriety, of a spirit furnishing detailed evidence of his identity. Probably the best-known case is that of John Chamberlain. At a circle held in Waterford, N.Y., on the 5th and 6th March, 1853, there communicated, through the mediumship of Mr. John Proper, one John Chamberlain, who claimed to have fought in the Revolutionary War, to have frequently seen Washington, and to have died at Point Pleasant, New Jersey, on the 15th January, 1847. Further, he said that he had been the father of eleven children. The postmaster of Point Pleasant was applied to, and all these details (except the having seen Washington) were found to be correct. The case was looked upon at the time as a remarkable proof of spirit identity: and John Chamberlain may perhaps be regarded as the prototype of Abraham Florentine, who communicated some twenty years later through the Rev. W. Stainton Moses. It is perhaps hardly necessary to point out that the evidence, in the earlier case as in the later, depends primarily on the good faith of the medium. And even if we could be satisfied of the good faith, it would be almost impossible to exclude the possibility that a latent memory might have been revived in the trance.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, one case recorded at this time to which it is more difficult to apply this explanation. On the 5th of August, 1854, there died at St. Louis one O. F. Parker. On the following day, at Maryville, Kentucky, Mrs. Ferguson, wife of the Rev. J. B. Ferguson, gave automatically—orally, it would seem, though this is not expressly stated—a long communication purporting to be addressed by O. F. Parker to Mr. Ferguson, who was his cousin and close friend. As proof of identity, he referred, in the first place, to a conversation between them some time before on a peculiarly intimate matter. The writing then went on:—

“But you shall have other evidence. My books I ordered to be sold to defray my funeral expenses; but it was not done. I am afraid, too, that there will be some flaw picked in my life policy, and, if so, I wish you to order my books to be sold to pay my debts, and if they fail, do not fail from any delicacy of feeling to write to my mother, and she will have all properly settled. The policy now is in the hands of Mr. Hitchcock.

“To show you further that I am he, I will remind you of the bill you paid Mr. Hough. The medium, I know and you know, knows nothing of that. I disliked, in your condition, pressed as I knew

<sup>1</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. pp. 69, 70. Capron, *Facts and Fanaticisms*, pp. 284-7. For other cases, see *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. p. 302; vol. v. p. 138.

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you were with your own obligations, to have you add that to your many kindnesses. You must pay yourself."

Other matters were also referred to, and there were interspersed reflections and exhortations of a general kind.

Mr. Ferguson thus comments on the communication :—

"Truth and candour require me to state that the evidence of identity presented by the above communication was overwhelming. At the time it was received the only account we had respecting his death was a brief telegraphic despatch. We have since had every particular confirmed . . . His life policy to which he refers was, from some neglect, without an endorsement of the payment of his premiums, which fact was not known to any of us till six weeks after his death. It was allowed, however, by the generous justice of the company, without difficulty, and without the knowledge on their part of this fact.

"At the time Mr. P. gave us the spiritual communication I supposed the policy to be in the hands of Mr. W. Meriwether, of Kentucky, for whose security it was issued. In the last conversation with respect to it with Mr. P. in life, he informed me it was his intention to leave it with Mr. M., and on his way to St. Louis he stopped in Kentucky for that purpose. I mention these facts and leave them to make their impression, which no honest man can resist.

"It should also be stated that at the same moment, upon my return to Nashville from Kentucky, where the above was received, some eleven days after the death of Mr. P., when I handed it to Mr. M. C. C. Church, he handed me letters from St. Louis detailing the circumstances of Mr. P.'s death and the state of his effects, confirming the particulars given from the spirit world. Of course, no language could express our gratification at the incontrovertible evidence of the reality of our intercourse with the spirit of our worthy relative. There are no less than *eleven distinct particulars* stated in the communication, which could not have been stated under the circumstances by any other than the spirit of our cousin friend."<sup>1</sup>

It would, of course, have been more satisfactory if Mrs. Ferguson's version of the incident had also been forthcoming, and if it could have been made quite clear that she, in her normal state, had no knowledge of the dead man's affairs. But even as it stands the narrative is of considerable interest, and is certainly one of the most detailed and best-authenticated cases of the time. Ferguson gives other

<sup>1</sup> *Spirit Communion: a Record of Communications from the Spirit Sphere*, etc., pp. 41-8. By J. B. Ferguson. Nashville, 1854.

cases of the kind, some with other mediums, but less striking and insufficiently detailed.<sup>1</sup>

One other class of phenomena which is claimed as furnishing evidence of supernatural knowledge remains to be considered. We find occasionally in the literature of the period accounts of speaking "with tongues," and forced vociferation, which recall the histories of possession amongst various religious sects. What has been already said in a former chapter<sup>2</sup> on the Ursuline Nuns of Loudun, the Tremblers of the Cevennes, and other earlier cases, will help to explain the American outpourings. But the differences are sufficiently marked to justify a detailed examination.

The manifestations amongst the American Spiritualists from 1848 and onward were pitched in a much lower key. There were, as a rule, no convulsions, rigidity, or insensibility, such as we find amongst some of the more extreme cases, even in Irving's congregation. But there seems no reason to doubt that the phenomena, when not deliberately counterfeited by professional mediums, were of the same type; that the utterance was unpremeditated and involuntary, and the subject generally in a state of trance or ecstasy. Moreover, the outpourings were often accompanied by dancing and rhythmic gestures which represented, no doubt, the more violent movements of the Nuns of Loudun and the Convulsionaries of St. Medard, and appear occasionally, as in the earlier outbreaks, to have been contagious.

The following account illustrates at once the epidemic nature of the influence, and the tendency of the utterance to assume the form of an "unknown" tongue, at least a tongue presumably unknown to both medium and audience:—

#### "SPIRITS IN KEOKUK.

"From a letter dated Keokuk, Iowa, March 7th, 1854, signed William Wittinmyer, we are informed that two mediums were developed at circles held on the 28th and 30th of January. One of them was influenced to speak Latin and translate the same into English, to sing in the Swiss language and speak in an Indian tongue, and also to delineate various Indian characteristics. The Indian spirit claimed to be a Chippewa. The other medium was made to deliver an oration on the bad treatment the Indians had received from the white people, after which the spirits, through the two mediums, held an earnest and lengthy oral interview, closing

<sup>1</sup> See also Dr. Dexter's testimony, in his *Preface to Spiritualism* (Edmonds and Dexter), and Rev. A. E. Newton's account of a conversation with his deceased father through a medium, quoted by Hare, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> Book I. chap. i.

with a majestic anthem, improvising words first in some Indian dialect, then in the English language, praising God for sending messengers to proclaim glad tidings of great joy to the children of men."<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous accounts of similar séances in the literature of the time, but there is rarely any evidence that the "languages" spoken were anything but a succession of meaningless sounds. The next extract, however, introduces a new feature—the writing in tongues.

"The friend who briefly narrates his spiritual experience in the following letter is a clergyman of expanded views and liberal culture :—

"KEY WEST, *May* 10, 1853.

"FRIENDS PARTRIDGE AND BRITTAN,—One week ago I commenced writing in my room, alone, with an ease and facility, if possible, far above my usual voluntary writing. Since the first effort I have conversed in writing with a number of spirits of different degrees of intelligence. I have been a medium for the Greek, Latin, French, and Spanish languages. The last-mentioned I am entirely ignorant of. With the other three I have heretofore had some acquaintance.—A. GAGE."<sup>2</sup>

Judge Edmonds is the chief source of information on both forms of manifestation. Of his own knowledge he enumerates seven instances, two of them being his daughter and his niece, of whose performances he gives, in a letter dated October 27th, 1857, the following account :—

"On another occasion some Polish gentlemen, entire strangers to her, sought an interview with Laura [Miss Edmonds], and during it she several times spoke in their language words and sentences which she did not understand, but they did; and a good deal of the conversation on their part was in Polish, and they received answers, sometimes in English and sometimes in Polish. The English she understood, but the other she did not, though they seemed to understand it perfectly.

"This can be verified only by Laura's statement, for no one was present but her and the two gentlemen, and they did not give their names.

"The incident with the Greek gentleman was this: One evening, when some twelve or fifteen persons were in my parlor, Mr. E. D. Green, an artist of this city, was shown in, accompanied by a gentleman whom he introduced as Mr. Evangelides, of Greece. He

<sup>1</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 253.

spoke broken English, but Greek fluently. Ere long, a spirit spoke to him through Laura, in English, and said so many things to him that he identified him as a friend who had died at his house a few years before, but of whom none of us had ever heard.

"Occasionally, through Laura, the spirit would speak a word or a sentence in Greek, until Mr. E. inquired if he could be understood if he spoke in Greek. The residue of the conversation, for more than an hour, was, on his part, entirely in Greek, and on hers sometimes in Greek and sometimes in English. At times Laura would not understand what was the idea conveyed, either by her or him. At other times she would understand him, though he spoke in Greek, and herself when uttering Greek words.

". . . My niece, of whom I have spoken, has often sung Italian, improvising both words and tune, yet she is entirely unacquainted with the language. Of this, I suppose, there are a hundred instances.

"One day my daughter and niece came into my library and began a conversation with me in Spanish, one speaking a part of a sentence and the other the residue. They were influenced, as I found, by the spirit of a person whom I had known when in Central America, and reference was made to many things which had occurred to me there, of which I knew they were as ignorant as they were of Spanish.

"To this only we three can testify.

"Laura has spoken to me in Indian, in the Chippewa and Monomonic tongues. I knew the language, because I had been two years in the Indian country."<sup>1</sup>

Judge Edmonds, it will be observed, does not say how far his own acquaintance with Spanish or Indian went, nor does he in any instance give examples of the sentences actually spoken, nor any proof of his statement that the two young ladies knew nothing of the languages which they used, nor the dates of any of the incidents, nor any corroboration from the mediums themselves or any other person to support his own unaided memory. We learn, however, from another passage<sup>2</sup> that the conversation with the Greek had taken place some time in 1854, about three years before this, the only detailed account of it which I have seen, was written.

His testimony to a corresponding manifestation with two professional mediums possesses a much higher evidential value, for a contemporary account was preserved in his diary.

"November 3rd, 1852. There was a special meeting of the Circle of Hope last evening, to meet some of our friends from Albany. . . .

<sup>1</sup> See *Letters and Tracts*, pp. 110-12.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritualism*, by Edmonds and Dexter, vol. ii. p. 45.

Mr. Ambler was soon thrown into the magnetic state, etc. . . . After he came out of the trance state Mrs. Shepherd was affected, and spoke in several languages. She occasionally spoke English. . . . And she continued for an hour or two thus to speak in some foreign language. It seemed to us to be Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. . . . Mrs. Mettler was then thrown into a trance state, and she was developed for the first time in her life to speak in diverse tongues. She spoke in German, and what seemed to be Indian.

"And they two, *i.e.* Mrs. Shepherd and Mrs. Mettler, then for some time conversed together in these foreign languages.

"Occasionally they spoke in English, and sometimes in broken English."<sup>1</sup>

Edmonds does not say whether he himself knew German, and the identification of the other foreign languages is, it will be seen, left ambiguous.

But besides testifying in his own person, Edmonds, early in 1859, appealed in the *Banner of Light* for evidence of this power, and received nineteen replies, giving in all, on the personal knowledge of the writers, no less than thirty-four cases of persons who occasionally spoke or wrote in the "tongues." Out of these thirty-four cases there are two—and only two—instances in which sentences in a foreign (*i.e.* a *recognised* foreign) language were *written*. In both cases the circumstances were attested by several witnesses, the evidence is recent, and the writings—French, German, Latin, Greek, Gaelic, Chinese, etc.—were preserved and are still open to inspection. The mediums were both professional, *viz.* A. D. Ruggles, who had acted as medium for Professor Hare, and J. V. Mansfield, who, from his skill in reading and answering sealed letters, left in his custody for that purpose, had earned the title of the "Spirit Postmaster."

The evidence, it will be seen, in these two cases is in most respects unimpeachable; the only point on which the most stiffnecked unbeliever could desire more rigorous proof is on the medium's complete ignorance of the languages written, a point on which the medium himself is of course the only competent witness.

Amongst private mediums there are eight cases recorded (six in one circle), also recent and on fairly good evidence, of sentences being written in languages unknown to the mediums. But these languages were also unknown to the sitters or to anyone else, and had either not been identified at all, or had been identified, on the authority of the spirits

<sup>1</sup> *Letter and Tracts*, p. 219.

themselves, as dialects spoken in the South Sea Islands or other remote regions.

When we turn to the question of speaking, as distinguished from writing, we find the same characteristics. There is excellent evidence for Mr. Ruggles speaking in French (a language which, according to his own statement, he did not understand); and fairly good evidence for other professional mediums—Mrs. Warner, Mrs. Thompson, Mr. Hersley—speaking in German, French, Indian, and other languages. But the fifteen cases in which mediums who were apparently non-professional are alleged to have spoken in French, German, Italian, Chinese, Indian, or other *recognised* foreign language, include no recent account of the phenomenon. In four of the accounts the date of the occurrence is not given; in the remainder the time ranges from "about a year" to some four years previously. The gift of tongues had not ceased amongst professional mediums when Judge Edmonds issued his appeal, nor amongst private mediums so far as relates to speaking or writing in *unknown* tongues; and it is difficult to resist the suggestion that the absence of any records less than a twelvemonth old amongst private mediums of speech in *foreign* languages was not a mere accident, but that past experiences of this kind "could only win a glory from their being far," and that had Edmonds issued his appeal for evidence in the spring of 1860 instead of the spring of 1859, the year 1858 would have proved as fruitful as any of its immediate predecessors.

Moreover, the evidence, alike for the medium's ignorance in the normal state of the language alleged to have been spoken, and for the identification of the language itself, is extremely defective. Many of the instances are vouched for by persons ignorant of the language, on the authority of other persons, themselves imperfectly acquainted with it, whose first-hand testimony is not given. Two young men are said to have spoken a language which was "recognised by my father and brother as the Chinese, they having been acquainted with many of them in California, but could not speak the language."<sup>1</sup> Other mediums are said to have spoken Italian—"We learned that from a gentleman present, who understood the Italian language partially (I have forgotten the gentleman's name)."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Sizer Barnum's Indian songs were recognised by an aged widow lady who "had lived when young near or among a tribe of Indians in the State of New York."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Page 222.

<sup>2</sup> Page 225.

<sup>3</sup> Page 244.

It is curious to note that in many cases the proof of the language being "Indian," etc., is based upon the "interpretation" through the mouth, now of the same, now of another medium, of an unintelligible utterance previously given.<sup>1</sup>

If we turn to the literature of the movement at large, we shall find abundant evidence for similar phenomena, but all pointing in the same direction. Thus a writer in the *North American Review*, April, 1855, relates that a medium of his acquaintance, a lady of "transparent ingenuousness," produced three poems purporting to have been written by the spirit of John Milton. One of these poems was headed "A Latin Sonnet"; it was not a sonnet, nor was it written in Latin, or in any other language; but it had throughout a Latin sound, and the terminations were all Latin. The explanation, no doubt, is to be found, as the reviewer suggests, in the fact that the lady's father had for years prepared young boys for college, and she herself had probably in her youth often heard Latin read aloud. Again, we read that Mr. E. McBride, of Iowa, a converted infidel, received a treatise on the millennium from the spirit of the Rev. W. C. Davis, written in an "unknown tongue," and wrote to the editor of the *Spiritual Telegraph* to ask him where he could get it translated. The editor comments that probably thousands of pages of this kind of spiritual cryptography had been produced in the past two or three years.<sup>2</sup> Tallmadge had seen a lady translating the Old Testament into hieroglyphics, which, the spirits told her, represented the original language in which it was written.<sup>3</sup> Some of these spirit languages were so condensed that *e.g.* the phrase Ki-e-lou-cou-ze-ta required no less than forty-five words to furnish an adequate translation in English.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes, it may be surmised, though the evidence is insufficient to substantiate such an inference, these later ecstasies may have spoken with fluency in a language with which in their normal state they were imperfectly acquainted, as seems to have been the case with the Tremblers of the

<sup>1</sup> See *Letters and Tracts*, pp. 215-64.

<sup>2</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> *Healing of the Nations*, pp. 59, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Mattison's *Spirit-Rapping Unveiled*, p. 73. For other instances of speaking or writing in tongues, see Nichols, *Supramundane Facts*, pp. 56, 57; Mattison, *op. cit.*, p. 76; Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, vol. i. p. 87; Mrs. Hardinge Britten, *Modern American Spiritualism*, p. 388; *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. pp. 37, 253, 332; vol. iii. 7, 13, 62, 203; vol. iv. p. 409; vol. vi. pp. 56, 191; Asa Mahan, *Modern Mysteries*, etc., pp. 296 *et seq.*

Cevennes. But, as a rule, the phenomena appear to have been comparable rather to the speaking with tongues in Edward Irving's congregation—a spontaneous outpouring of articulate but meaningless sounds, at one time producing on the imagination of some hearers the effect of rapid utterance in some language with which they had a rudimentary acquaintance, at another authenticated as the genuine utterance of an unknown tongue by the subsequent interpretation vouchsafed under spirit guidance. The only new element introduced—a complication from which previous outpourings were happily free—is the deliberate fraud of the professional medium.

## CHAPTER V

### TRANCE WRITING AND SPEAKING

**I**F we turn now from counterfeit clairvoyance and speaking with tongues to utterances of a more coherent and normal type, such as were poured forth in abundance at this period at every Spiritualist meeting, we shall find that, in private circles at any rate, it was less the substance of the communications than the manner of their occurrence which impressed the earlier investigators. Whether or not the messages testified to matters outside the medium's knowledge, whether the words were commonplace or sublime, were questions of secondary interest; that the human agent spoke and wrote through a power not his own was patent to all, and was a fact of crucial importance. And here it may be well to emphasise once more a distinction often lost sight of, but nevertheless essential to the right understanding of the Spiritualist position. So far as we have seen, there is no reason to doubt that the whole of the so-called physical phenomena were due to fraud, if not always preconcerted and fully conscious fraud. We have seen also in at least one notorious case before 1848—the Seeress of Prevorst—that such physical phenomena were associated with examples of clairvoyance and premonition themselves also apparently fraudulent. But taken in the mass there seems as little reason to doubt that the mental phenomena of the trance and of automatism generally were genuine. There were, of course, spurious manifestations of this kind; but the mediums who feigned trance-speaking were probably seldom content to exclude spirit-rapping and other marvels from their repertory. And, indeed, as we have just seen, cases of clairvoyance, mental telegraphy, and speaking with tongues, which are in themselves suspect, are generally connected with persons who have made themselves responsible also for physical manifestations. But the bulk of

so-called spirit communications, both now and later, were free from the taint of this association. The physical phenomena, indeed, throughout the history of the movement, have been generally the privilege of professional mediums, occasionally of young children, or other persons whose birth, temperament, or circumstances rendered them specially open to the temptation, not necessarily of a pecuniary kind, to enhance their importance in their social environment by fraudulent methods. Physical mediumship amongst adults of good education and recognised social position was fully as rare at the beginning of the movement as it has been throughout its course. On the other hand, many of the best-known of those who have practised inspirational speaking or writing, even professionally, such as Mrs. Hardinge Britten, Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan-Richmond, Mr. J. J. Morse, have had as little to do with the trickery of the séance-room as any modern University Extension Lecturer.

The commonest form assumed by the automatic impulse (for the manifestations were not necessarily confined to the trance), at any rate amongst educated subjects, was that of speaking or writing in the mother tongue. The descriptions of their own experiences given by various automatists agree that the impulse to speak or write was involuntary, and that, for the most part, the human agent was not conscious of the nature of the message delivered through his organism. In the case of A. J. Davis, and of the mesmeric or "magnetic" subjects generally, this characteristic was, as we have seen, referred to the action of the subject's own intelligence working under altered conditions. But after 1848 it became natural to interpret all such involuntary manifestations of intelligence in the light of the Poltergeist performances, and to refer them to a common cause, the agency of spirits; and the interpretation favoured by those around the automatist inevitably reacted, as we have already seen in the history of Animal Magnetism in France, Germany, and England, on the content of the automatic utterance.

In some cases the impulse to speak did not affect the external organs, but manifested itself merely as an inner voice or mental impression. It was in this manner, as we have seen, that A. J. Davis' later pronouncements were inspired: "I am impressed" is his favourite formula in the *Great Harmonia*. Josiah Gridley was also a medium of this kind. He had, indeed, as we have seen, been the subject of such impressions or angelic interpositions, as he occasionally calls them, throughout his life; and after he had attended

séances and witnessed automatic utterance in others, his own internal monitor appears to have developed and systematised its instructions. But the inspiration appears not to have been, as a rule, verbal. Thus he writes, as a preface to a short dissertation, "At this time Christ's position in the Universe was as clearly impressed on my inner being as the rays of a midday sun were ever impressed upon my outer being . . . the best I can do at present towards clothing them (*sc.* the truths impressed) the reader will find in what follows."<sup>1</sup> And again, in the course of an explanatory post-script to his work, "It is due to the reader of this work to say, that while the sentiment has been given me in every instance by the spirits, I have often assisted these friends to clothe their sentiments in simple but suitable language."

But this no doubt represents a rudimentary stage of automatic action, hardly perhaps to be distinguished from normal reverie. In some of the more noteworthy instances of more developed automatism there seems no reason to doubt the medium's own account of the matter, that the utterance, whether verbal or written, was involuntary, and for the most part unconscious. Thus Dr. Dexter gives the following account of his own development as a writing automatist. He had attended many séances, and had seen his own little daughter of nine years old controlled to write, apparently under spirit influence. He was not yet, however, convinced of the Spiritualist belief until his own hand was made the instrument of similar communications. The process began late one night when he was sitting alone in his office and felt the right hand and arm fixed tightly to the arm of the chair on which it rested. Afterwards the whole limb trembled violently, and two raps were heard on the wall of the room. Similar experiences recurred again and again, until at length he determined to yield to the influence:—

"When in pursuance of this design I attended circles, my hand was seized and made to write. At first the sentences were short, and contained a single idea, but as I became developed they wrote out many pages, embracing various ideas and subjects. . . . Every meeting, however, at which I was present something new was always developed, and the handwriting of the spirits manifesting assumed peculiar and distinct character, thus identifying the individual who wrote through my hand. The earlier attempts were hardly able to decipher, but after some practice the writing was rapid, bold, and easily read. From the first essay of the spirits

<sup>1</sup> *Astounding Facts*, etc., p. 162.

to influence my hand to write, it was the medium by which many, both friends and strangers, communicated with the circle; but when the design was apparent that they had developed me for a special object, my hand was controlled by two spirits, whose names will be found recorded in this book as Swedenborg (*sic*) and Bacon.

"During the whole time, from their earliest endeavour to write, they have used my hand as the instrument to convey their own thoughts, without any appreciation on my part of either ideas or subject.

"I know nothing of what is written until after it is read to me, and frequently, when asked to read what has been communicated, I have found it utterly impossible to decipher it. Not only is the thought concealed, but after it has been read to me I lose all recollection of the subject, until again my memory is refreshed by the reading."<sup>1</sup>

Now that his powers were fully developed, he continues, the influence often seized him when he was alone, and he would even be awakened from sleep and compelled to write out long communications before retiring to rest again.

Somewhat similar was Mrs. Hardinge Britten's initiation into the mysteries of mediumship. She had attended, as a sceptic, one or two public séances, had been interested in what she had witnessed, and in the stock prediction that she would develop into a remarkable medium. Thereafter she held a few private circles, and, at her next visit to a professional medium, she went off into a trance, impersonated the spirit of an old gentleman, and gave tests on her own account.<sup>2</sup>

But the phenomena of automatic utterance, whether within or without the trance, are sufficiently familiar at the present time to render it unnecessary to labour the point further.

The automatic utterances purported for the most part to be communications from deceased friends or near relatives of the sitters or of some person present, such as are common at Spiritualist séances even at the present day. More rarely the "control" gave himself out to be a stranger, who had been drawn to the circle either to receive help and consolation or to give it—an ignorant newsboy, a repentant drunkard, a bright child-spirit, a murdered man seeking for vengeance, or some uneasy ghost wishing to communicate with friends on earth. Numerous examples of both these types of communication will be found in the works of Edmonds, Dexter, Putnam, Hare, Tallmadge, and other writers from whom I

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualism*, Edmonds and Dexter, vol. i. p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> See her *History*, pp. 136-40.

have already quoted. Of their evidential aspect enough has already been said.

But frequently the names attached to the communications claimed to be those of the mighty dead. Hare summoned a convocation of spirit worthies, including Washington, Byron, Isaac Newton, and Benjamin Franklin.<sup>1</sup> Of all the august names which figure in the "inspirational" literature of the period, none, it should be remarked, occurs more frequently, or is made sponsor for more outrageous nonsense, than that of Franklin. Whatever sins of omission may be laid to his charge on the Bailly Commission sixty or seventy years before, the penalty was surely paid in full. Again, Spear's revelations were signed, amongst others, by Franklin, Jefferson, Seneca, Apollos Munn, Plato, and Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> Davis held converse with Franklin, Solon, Swedenborg, St. Paul, and St. John.<sup>3</sup> Harris and Scott, as will appear later, were the chosen instruments of a circle of apostles and prophets at Auburn.

But these extravagances were no doubt most conspicuous in the earliest years of the movement. The common sense of the majority of Spiritualists soon revolted against the attempt on the part of certain mediums to win recognition for themselves and their utterances by the use of great names. There were, indeed, from the very beginning some, more level-headed than the rest, to warn their fellow-believers against placing implicit reliance on any of the spirit teachings. Of Sunderland we have already spoken. Brittan, too, consistently appears to have shown a critical spirit, and from a discussion at the New York Conference, in the early part of 1854—started apparently by the intervention of a boy of fifteen and a girl not much older, who had spoken under control at a previous conference—it appears that many leading Spiritualists adopted a similar attitude, and recognised that so-called spirit utterances should be judged on their merits.<sup>4</sup>

Of automatic trance-speaking at this time, even to large audiences, we have innumerable accounts; but as reports were not, as a rule, preserved, we have rarely any means of judging of the value of the utterance beyond the effect alleged to have been produced on the audience. Thus a boy of twelve is said to have preached sermons "characterised by a depth of thought that would do credit to the most eminent divines."<sup>5</sup> Miss Vanduzer, controlled by the spirit of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *The Educator*, pp. 46, 297.

<sup>3</sup> *The Spirit World*, vol. ii. p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. pp. 146-9, 196, 200.    <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 387.

Lorenzo Dow, delivered discourses in Wampsville (N. Y.) and its neighbourhood "to from five hundred to two thousand earnest listeners."<sup>1</sup> The Eureka circle at West Troy were, we read, "sitting at present for a course of lectures from the spirit of Dr. Franklin on the laws of progression." The next course, by the same lecturer, was to treat of the solar system.<sup>2</sup>

But of the more important automatic writings of the period many were published.

One of the earliest of these books was *The Pilgrimage of Thomas Paine and others to the Seventh Circle*, by the Rev. C. Hammond, Medium, published at New York in 1852. In his Preface Hammond expressly disclaims any personal credit for the work. "I had no will to write it, or exercised any other control, than to let my hand be moved by an invisible influence, and write as it would." Often, he explains, he could not tell what word he was writing until it was completed, and very rarely knew the whole sentence beforehand. The book, which contains over two hundred and fifty pages octavo, was produced with extreme rapidity. Hammond began to write at the end of December, 1851, the manuscript was completed on the 1st of February following, and the book published on the 5th of March.

*The Pilgrimage* purports to be a recital by Thomas Paine of his spiritual experiences. He begins by describing his death-bed, and how in his dying hours he was visited by his beloved wife, who revealed herself to him as a spirit and explained to him something of the spirit world. After his death he is present at his own funeral, hears the minister read the service over the grave, and overhears later a conversation, in which the minister expresses his fears that "poor Tom Paine" is eternally lost.

He is then cheered and instructed by conversation with his wife and mother in the spirit world, and is made to see "his former wisdom isolated and torn into fragments." He meets Washington, Richard Rush, the inevitable Franklin, and others, and is introduced to William Penn. Penn argues with him through many pages, convinces him of errors in his earth life, and finally converts him to a knowledge of the truth. He is then led by Penn towards a light exceeding the brightness of a thousand suns, through an archway built of stones of the most excellent workmanship, and clear as crystal, into a magnificent temple. The temple was all inlaid with gold, and within it Paine saw

<sup>1</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. ii. p. 461.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 341.

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"a mind standing with elevated wisdom at his head, and at his feet were sitting students of Nature, who received instruction from him. In his right hand he held a book, and in his left a banner. The book was opened and the banner unfurled. 'This is not made with hands,' said he, 'but came from Mount Horeb, where the everlasting covenant was given to the children of the Most High. Advance, Stranger, and receive the blessing which thou hast refused in thy unbelief.' Paine thereupon came forward and received the book, and the mind then sat down."

Thereafter Paine goes with his guide to a poor cottage near London, where the tenant lies dying. "Near by lived the lord of the heritage, who rode in livery and fared sumptuously." The spirit guide impressed this nobleman to visit the dying man, a labourer on his estate. When in the cottage the spirits succeeded in effecting the nobleman's conversion by rattling the catch of the window. Again, William Penn

"conducted me to a wall. There was no door of entrance. It was made of Scorn. I could see through the wall, for there were a great many portholes. I saw a wide circle of minds peeping through those holes, as though suspicious of our encroachments. When we had passed round the fortress, I heard the centurion say, 'To arms! to arms!'"

There followed a long discussion between Penn and the centurion, from which we gather that the centurion and the folk in the castle are typical of Christians who hold blindly to the letter of the Bible and persecute those who differ from them. Paine is afterwards bidden to enter the castle and instruct a deacon therein in the principles of true religion; and at the end of the chapter he succeeds in converting him. Once more he goes to the castle with four-and-twenty elders, and a thousand times ten thousand are converted and received into the temple. Finally, he is rapt up to the Seventh Circle, or Court of Beauty.

"The whole circle ascended, and were introduced into a mansion resting on twenty-four pillars, which were polished smooth as glass, and over which stood the most wonderful mansion that my eyes had ever beheld. On entering the mansion I saw a white throne, and in front thereof were written the words, 'Purity, Perfection, and Bliss.' Over the throne was written, 'Nature unfolded by revelation,' under it the words, 'Justice, Liberty, Peace.' On the right was a representation of a little child leading a lion, and a wolf nursing a lamb. On the left was a wounded serpent, with a spike driven through his head and clinched in a rock. Beneath our feet were

pillars of Wisdom, while over our heads the beauty of sweet minstrels appeared."

Then one of them that dwelt in the Court of Beauty expounded the meaning of the pillars, and the things that were round about the throne.

The imagery, it will be seen, is obviously derived partly from the Apocalypse, partly from the *Pilgrim's Progress* and other religious works; whilst in the substance of the revelation there is nothing to indicate any other source than the medium's own mental stores. It does not even appear that he was acquainted either with the history or the opinions of the spirit purporting to inspire him.

In the following year was published Edmonds' and Dexter's *Spiritualism*, which consists mainly of spirit messages written through the hand of Dr. Dexter and others.

This is Swedenborg's annunciation, delivered April 4th, 1853, through Dr. Dexter:—

"In the name of God I am Sweedenborg (*sic*).

"Does a man know a star because he seeth the light thereof? Sayeth he, The moon burneth because she casteth a shadow? Does not the water bathe the shore of both worlds, and is not ocean's bosom broad enough for the ships of all nations? And yet a star is but one in a galaxy of glory in the heavens, and the moon's light is borrowed from a brighter orb than her own mountains. She reflects only the light that she borrows. Can you contemplate a whole creation because you see the light of one star or one moon? Can you determine the extent of the ocean because you behold one of its waves? Thus you can as little judge of Spirit Manifestations as you can of the star, the moon, or the ocean. Wait and watch, for ere long what is dark will be made light, and what is difficult made easy. Do you love your wife or child, and see in them attributes which confer happiness? Can you look on earth in her beauty, her hills and dales, trees and flowers, and not feel as if it was made for your enjoyment? Have you ever examined truly your own hearts? Do you really desire their purity? Are your thoughts the mirrors of your souls? Do you sincerely live that your death may be glorious? Let each one ask himself these questions to-night, and when I meet you again you shall hear the truths which it is my mission to teach.<sup>1</sup>

A few weeks later, in the course of a long discourse from Bacon, the following passage occurs:—

"I feel that your thoughts have been occupied in digesting the great truths taught last night by Sweedenborg. I am writing through

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. i. p. 101.

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the hand of Dr. Dexter, and to many persons, looking on and beholding the use of the same expressions as you adopt on earth, they would remark on its foolishness and absurdity as a spirit manifestation. But look at the ideas we inculcate, regard the thoughts we express. And if in the whole history of written thought there is anything that can approach it, either in the magnitude of the ideas or the profundity of the thoughts, then I am heartily willing it should be said to be a farce."<sup>1</sup>

But Bacon himself could on occasion rise to a lofty strain, as witness the following extract :—

“How glorious that man’s destiny ! He leaves behind the errors of time, and boldly pushing forward through the untried future, he plants his standard on the very outward wall of eternity, and here he makes his stand ; here he calls around him all the aid that position furnishes, and he leaves the traces of his progress in his errors, the doings, the actions sacrificed to truth, which he scatters in the pathway which has led to this goal.—BACON.”<sup>2</sup>

It was such passages as these which moved Tallmadge to write to Judge Edmonds that, after reading all the specimens of ancient and modern eloquence, and after listening to some of the greatest orators of the day, he could say without hesitation, “I have never read nor heard anything to equal the communications from Bacon and Swedenborg. For beauty of style and sublimity of thought their equal never proceeded from mortal man.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the most remarkable writing mediums at this time was Charles Linton. He was a young man of good intelligence, but limited education, who for some years had earned his living as a blacksmith. At twenty-two years of age he became a clerk in a store in Philadelphia, and afterwards bookkeeper. He then became developed as a writing medium. Many communications were written through his hand which purported to be from Daniel Webster.<sup>4</sup> At another time Governor Tallmadge and Mr. Fenno, an actor, held a conversation with the spirit of Shakespeare, writing through the medium’s hand. Tallmadge, in endorsing Fenno’s account of the séance, states that some of the ablest

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. i. p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iii. p. 311.

<sup>4</sup> Some of these are quoted in the Appendix to Edmonds’ and Dexter’s *Spiritualism*, vol. i. It is interesting to note that J. Bovee Dods says of them that they bore a “respectable impress of the exalted intellect” of the deceased statesman (*Spirit Manifestations Examined*, p. 129).

critics have pronounced the communications perfectly Shakespearian. Two extracts are subjoined:—

“To act requireth two things—a brain and an eye; the scene will do almost all the rest.

“The eye calleth up and *holdeth* the magic spell, which in the audience centres.

“Thy brain the gestures makes—the stand, the position; and grace doth take therefrom its own existence.

“The eye speaks volumes; silly mouthers may mince and hawk, but with thy piercing eye thou’lt dumb them *all*.”<sup>1</sup>

And again, in response to some remarks from Fenno about the management of the voice, and the difficulty of portraying passion without ranting:—

“The ocean waves rise and fall; the mountains wave in earthly strength; the plains undulate in airy waves; and the light, the life of all things, partakes of the inmost principles producing these outside results; hence, to speak well and gracefully, you must not beat the sea flat with a hurricane, or with an earthquake rend the mountains, or tear the plain into a level void; but imitate the waves of the ocean, rise from a dead calm to grand sublimity, and subside again with the gentle ease of the mighty fluid. You catch the breeze gently, and a lovely strain will vibrate through your throat; your spirit catches the tone, and in unison vibrates. Onward and upward you rush, and as the waves rise in grandeur, the bark of opposition is handled, as the boundless ocean handles the unmoored vessel.”<sup>2</sup>

But some time in 1853 Linton was bidden by the spirits to prepare for the inditing of a great work, and in the course of the next four months there was written through his hand a long dissertation, forming a volume of over 370 pages octavo (considerably over 100,000 words). The writing, as we are told by Tallmadge, who was frequently present, was performed rapidly and in a clear hand, different from the medium’s ordinary writing, and the manuscript presented hardly any erasure or alteration. The medium was not entranced during the writing, and would indeed occasionally converse with Tallmadge, interrupting his writing for the purpose. But according to his own account of the matter, Linton had no idea beforehand of the ground-plan of the book, and frequently did not see even a word ahead of that which he was writing; he wrote what was given him from moment to

<sup>1</sup> *The Healing of the Nations*, p. 504, by Charles Linton. New York, 1858. The italic marks, Tallmadge tells us, are the spirit’s own.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 506, 507.

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moment to write. The book is a religious rhapsody ; an outpouring, without definite logical plan or strict coherence, of a devout and intelligent, but not highly educated mind ; the ideas and imagery seem obviously drawn almost exclusively from the Bible and various religious writings. The following extracts will give a fair idea of the contents of the book :—<sup>1</sup>

"71. Thy imperfection does not regulate God's perfection.

"72. Thy unfaithfulness will never check his liberality.

"73. If thou hadst never existed, God's power or his love and light had never been less. Having existence, if thou dost not comprehend them surely the fault is thine own.

"74. A little time is given thee on earth, and in that time thou dost see all things perishing, changing, and unto thy sight passing away. Then why shouldst thou labour about and among them ?

"75. The earth is regulated by time, thou by eternity.

"76. That is the creature of a day, thou the ornament of a God-given eternity. That is thy feeding-place, designed to give thee strength and knowledge. Eternity is the home whence the knowledge cometh, and in which thou wilt learn in purity that which emanates from the eternal fountain of Light.

"77. Thou art a seed dropped in earth by God's own hand.

"78. Thou art nourished by His own holy attributes.

"79. His pure Light quickens thee, feeds thee with thought, forms the harmony of thy mind ; His love, as a gentle dew, falls upon thy morning and evening wanderings, and in the shade of the sunny noon He fans thee as a mother doth her sleeping babe."

The book, which was published in 1855 under the title of *The Healing of the Nations*, represents inspirational writing at its best. Another book of the same type was produced at about the same time through the mediumship of John Murray Spear, of whom we have already spoken in chapter ii.<sup>2</sup> On the 1st of April, 1853, Mr. Spear, who had for about two years been interested in Spiritualism, and had, indeed, already written some *Messages from the Spirit Life*, under the inspiration of John Murray, found his hand involuntarily moved to write a document setting forth that a band of spirits, called the "Association of Beneficents," had chosen him as their mouthpiece for certain revelations to mankind. A few months later Spear and

<sup>1</sup> *Healing of the Nations*, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> *The Educator, being Suggestions, theoretical and practical, designed to promote Man-Culture and Integral Reform, with a view to the ultimate establishment of a Divine Social State on Earth*, etc. Boston, 1857.

another medium, in inspirational strophe and antistrophe, announced that there were six other associations with similar ends, who designed to use for the teaching of mankind the same earthly instruments. They were called severally the "Association of Electric-izers," the "Association of Element-izers," the "Association of Healthful-izers," and so on. Thereafter, at different periods, Spear was delivered in the trance state of dissertations on the structure and laws of society, the duties of humanity, the process of creation, the nature of elementary substances, of electricity, of the laws of health, etc., which were sometimes written by his hand, sometimes spoken and taken down by an amanuensis. They were afterwards edited by the Rev. A. E. Newton, and published as Volume I. of the *Educator*. The work bears a certain general resemblance to the *Divine Revelations* of Andrew Jackson Davis, and, like it, teaches Socialism as the highest form of human society, even sketching out a plan for a model colony which would realise the divine idea upon earth. In its cosmological section, however, it is less pretentious than the earlier work, and is almost entirely innocent, not merely of scientific terminology, but of the most elementary scientific knowledge. There is, indeed, an almost mediæval quality in these untrammelled speculations on the phenomena of the physical universe.

The various spirit associations, speaking through the mouth of Spear, declared the sun to be the eye of God, and to consist of vitalised electricity; it further acts as a focus through which rays from the Grand Diamonics, which is another term for "the Grand Central Source of all Life, all Light, all Wisdom, all Knowledge," are directed on to the earth. These rays, which we know as *light*, consist ultimately of fine, angular, diamond-shaped particles, being indeed of the same substance as the diamond itself. These particles of light penetrate the interior of the earth, mingle with certain fine sands, and there "copulate, cohere, multiply, expand, grow, and take the form of gold."<sup>1</sup> Or, again, here is a passage which might have been written by Paracelsus or Eirenæus Philalethes :—

"Like all things else, polishing is wrought by a fixed, simple and natural law. It is the action of the finer on the coarser. Each thing has within itself a certain amount and quality of caloric. It

<sup>1</sup> This is a familiar idea amongst the alchemists. See, for instance, Fludd, *The Mosaicall Philosophy*, p. 221 : "The Etheriall Sperm or Astralicall influences are of a far subtiler condition than is the vehicle of visible light. Yea, verily,

may be in crude or coarse conditions in one substance, and in finer or less crude conditions in another. Bring these two together; the finer acts upon the coarser, by friction the coarser caloric escapes and the finer takes its place, and so the coarser substance is brought into finer or more polished conditions. The substance called emery has within it a very fine caloric, and hence its usefulness as a polisher."<sup>1</sup>

Turning to biology, Spear gives directions for magnetising water, so as to impart medicinal virtues to it; he explains tuberculosis as due to the accumulation in the lungs of certain minute, floating, barbed particles, which are also responsible for the moss on stones, the down [? mould] on certain vegetables, and so on. Under the section "Microscopics," it is explained that the hairs, being tubular, are in reality organs of perception, hence their location round the eye and ear. But whilst the hairs round the eye see things in front, the hairs at the back of the head see what has passed—*i.e.* they act as organs of memory—"and those females who intertwine or twist the posterior conductors [the hair at the back of the head] thereby ignorantly render themselves less able to recall or recollect."<sup>2</sup>

Of inspired poetry there was at this time an abundant supply. Much indeed of what is so called consists of inferior and ungrammatical prose cut up into lengths, without either rhyme or rhythm. But some of the "inspired" productions were distinguished by a certain sonorousness and melody. Most notable, perhaps, were the poems of the Rev. T. L. Harris, the former associate of the Poughkeepsie seer.

Harris had written poetry before; and one Spiritualist critic concedes that nothing in his "inspired" poetry transcends his possible natural powers. It is on the conditions under which the poems were delivered and ostensibly composed that the claim of superhuman origin is based. During fourteen consecutive days in November and December, 1853, T. L. Harris in the trance state dictated an entire poem, containing between 3,000 and 4,000 lines, entitled "An Epic of the Starry Heaven," which purported to have been composed by a circle of mediæval spirits having Dante amongst their number. The dictation of the poem occupied thirty hours and a half.<sup>3</sup> A few weeks later, on the 1st January, 1854, the

they are so thin, so mobile, so penetrating, and so lively . . . that they continually penetrate even unto the center or universal bosom of the earth, where they generate metals of sundry kinds, so the antient philosophers do justify."

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 555.

<sup>2</sup> Page 291.

<sup>3</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iii. p. 293; vol. iv. p. 151.

conception of a new poem began : " At the hour of noon the archetypal ideas were internally wrought by spiritual agency into the inmost mind of the medium, he at the time having passed into a spiritual or interior condition. From that time till the 4th of August, fed by continued influxes of celestial life, these archetypal ideas internally unfolded within his interior or spiritual self," and were then dictated by the entranced medium at intervals, again during fourteen consecutive days. Harris himself professed entire ignorance in his waking condition of the poem and all connected with its utterance. This second poem, which contains over 5,000 lines, in varying metres, is called *A Lyric of the Morning Land*. The poem consists almost entirely of a succession of lyrics, strung on a slender thread of connecting narrative, also rhymed. A few extracts are subjoined :—

"THE POET'S SONG OF OUTER LIFE.

I.

"We are shadows, we are shadows,  
Fading with the night of time,  
Till the poppy wreaths we twine  
Overcome us in the meadows.  
Shrouded in our robes of white,  
Phantoms of a fled delight,  
Pallid ghosts of memory,  
To our children henceforth we.

II.

"As the stream to ocean glideth,  
To its burial in the waves,  
We are hurried to our graves ;  
Death alone eterne abideth,  
Sitting on his throne of graves ;  
And the dreary wind that raves,  
Blows us from life's shaken tree ;  
Wind-swept shadows henceforth we."

Here are the opening stanzas from the "Song of Saturn" :—

I.

"I am the Patriarch Star ; I stand  
And view, entranced, that Wondrous Land,  
That Worlds ascend to when they rise  
From outward space to inward skies.  
I am the eldest child of Space,  
And gaze into the Sun's bright face,  
And in the Sun, prophetic, see  
My own approaching destiny.

## II.

“Soon shall I cease, a planet fair,  
 To glow in Nature's azure air ;  
 Soon shall I circling cease to swim  
 Within the bounds that circle in  
 The Solar System. I shall pass  
 Beyond the sea of fire and glass,  
 And all my Angel-Nations rise  
 Into diviner harmonies.”

And here are extracts from the latter part of the poem describing the bliss of the after-state :—

“Great Milton dwelleth here ; he sees with eyes  
 Grown brighter from Earth's desolate eclipse ;  
 And Dante and his Angel-bride ; from skies  
 That outward burn he turns to her sweet lips.  
 Correggio here, the poet-painter, dips  
 His pencil in celestial light, and throws  
 Visions from God's unveiled Apocalypse  
 O'er all the burning walls. In splendid rows  
 The Demigods of Song enjoy the Heart's repose.

These glorious ones are seated twain ; beside  
 Each Lyric Angel glows his Seraph-bride ;  
 And they who on the Earth, most desolate,  
 Died with slow fires of wrong, sit most in state,  
 And they rejoice, being free from mortal stain ;  
 And evermore within that sphered fane  
 The multitudinous anthems peal and roll ;  
 And evermore some New-ascended Soul  
 Joins their triumphant choir ; and far below  
 Lies the veiled sepulchre of mortal woe.  
 And evermore Celestial Angels twine  
 For them fresh garlands ; and they drink the wine  
 Of Poesy, and with diviner art  
 They chant their lyric hymns.”<sup>1</sup>

From the foregoing extracts a fair—perhaps even an unduly favourable—estimate may be formed of these “inspirational” writings. If we allow the claim put forward that these various writings were, so far as the ordinary consciousness of the medium was concerned, absolutely extemporaneous, it must be conceded that they are highly remarkable productions. Not, indeed, that any of them appear either in thought or expression to be beyond the possible range of the medium's capacities, working under favourable conditions. So much, as we have seen, is admitted in the case of T. L. Harris. But the improvisation of some

<sup>1</sup> *A Lyric of the Morning Land*. New York, 1855. Glasgow, John Thomson, 1869. See also *Telegraph Papers*, vol. vi. p. 291.

5,000 lines roughly of the same quality as those set down above—even if we assume that the work was polished at leisure—would certainly be a remarkable feat in any circumstances. Part of the explanation, at any rate in the case of comparatively finished work like that of Davis, Linton, and Harris, is no doubt to be found in the sentence already quoted from the last-named medium; the ideas were probably latent or fructifying for some time before they found external expression, and that fructifying process was, it is likely, carried on somewhere in the twilight of consciousness.

The actual utterances, again, are distinguished by certain characteristics which may be said to be typical of automatic utterance in general. To begin with, we note the extraordinary fluency of the speaker. Whatever we may think of the value of their remarks, there can be no question that the little boys and girls at this period who preached for an hour at a time to crowded congregations, or uneducated youths like Davis and Linton who indited long treatises, could not in their normal condition have spoken or written at such length, or with such copiousness of vocabulary. We note, moreover, in some of the utterances of this time, as for instance in "Bacon's" messages through Dr. Dexter, in Linton's book, and in Harris' poems, a tendency to sonorous and grandiloquent language, such as we have had occasion to note amongst the Irvingites. We shall meet with many more specimens hereafter, in discussing the later phases of Spiritualism.

Much of this sounding stuff no doubt consists pretty obviously of distorted echoes from earlier writings—the Bible, Shelley, and popular poets and preachers of the day being probably the chief sources. But there were few instances of actual, even unconscious, plagiarism. Some charges of this kind had, as already shown, been substantiated against A. J. Davis;<sup>1</sup> some stanzas in Harris' inspired poems have been traced to foreign sources;<sup>2</sup> and there are three or four examples to be found of "inspired" poems given at séances which were afterwards discovered to have been previously written by Longfellow, James Wallis East-

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, Book I. chap. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gerald Massey points out that in one volume alone of Harris' poems, *Hymns of Spiritual Devotion* (New York, 1857), there are couplets or stanzas obviously suggested by corresponding lines in the works of Watts, Heber, Mrs. Browning, Thomas Moore, and others. But Mr. Massey does not, I think, make good his charge of deliberate plagiarism. (*Concerning Spiritualism*, pp. 19, 20. London, 1874?).

burn, etc.<sup>1</sup> But it is not necessary to presume fraud even in such cases, and most of the inspired writings bear internal evidence of their genuineness.

For what, after all, is the special characteristic of the automatic utterances? In the most favourable specimens we note that, however full and rapid the stream, it is a trifle turbid—"Cum flueret lutulentus, erat quod tollere velles": the expression has run away with the thought. And at a slightly lower level we can hardly detect any connected scheme at all; it is a sequence of detached images, the raw material of thought, a heap of bricks waiting for the builder. This characteristic was pointed out a generation earlier by Bertrand, who showed that, in the trance, whilst the memory and imagination of the ecstatic are stimulated to abnormal activity, the critical faculties are more or less in abeyance.<sup>2</sup>

This defect in coherency is sufficiently conspicuous in Davis' work; to furnish a logical account of the teaching in Linton's *Healing of the Nations*, or to unfold the steps of the argument in any of Spear's inspired dissertations, would require a double portion of inspiration in the expositor. During these automatic performances, in other words, the medium seems to be in a state allied to that found at certain stages of intoxication, when the evolution of mental images is more rapid than in ordinary life, whilst the judgment and reasoning faculties are drowsy.

The various other phases of the automatic impulse need no more than a brief reference. In some cases, as notably with Judge Edmonds, and occasionally with T. L. Harris and Mrs. Ferguson, the medium was vouchsafed allegorical visions, which he would describe to those around him.<sup>3</sup> There were many who drew automatically; the drawings representing flowers, fruit, celestial figures and landscapes, geometrical or symbolic designs. Others were given visions of spirit persons, and directed to portray the features on canvas. Allen Putnam devotes a considerable part of his book, *Natty, a Spirit*, to describing how he was led by spirit guidance to select an artist, and how the artist in trance was directed by a power not his own in painting the portrait of Natty.<sup>4</sup> The first volume of Edmonds' and Dexter's *Spiritualism* contains as a frontispiece a steel engraving of a symbolic picture

<sup>1</sup> See Rogers, *Philosophy of Mysterious Agents*, pp. 169, 170; *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. pp. 120, 205, 300; Mattison's *Spirit-Rapping*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Traité du Somnambulisme*.

<sup>3</sup> See *Spiritualism*, by Edmonds and Dexter, vol. i. pp. 268, 289, 300, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Boston, 1856.

representing a terrace in a formal garden surrounded with plants of a tropical appearance; on either side of a flight of steps, which lead down to a lake encircled with mountains and embellished with castles and a swan-prowed boat, are two pedestals supporting each an angel, whose outstretched arms converge on a figure, crowned with a sun-like halo, who floats in mid-air a little above them, and himself points the way to the skies. It is called "Invitation to Spirit Land."

The artist was a young man named Josiah Wolcott, who had been brought up to the trade of chair-painting, had subsequently risen to do the ornamental part of coach-painting, and had finally seen visions and been commanded by the spirits to paint what he saw, and show the world the glories of the spirit sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Automatism—or spirit control—showed itself in various other forms. Thus Tallmadge tells us that his daughter of thirteen, who knew not a note of music and had never touched a piano in her life, was controlled to play Beethoven's Grand Waltz, and various popular airs.<sup>2</sup> We read of a physician who, "under influence," was made to mount the stump in a public street and crow like a cock.<sup>3</sup> And the impulse to dance, frequently, as in earlier religious revivals, seized the entranced persons, to the number sometimes of fifty at a time. The dances performed in this way were sometimes "recognised" by the onlookers as of Indian origin; sometimes they purported to have a symbolic significance, which would be afterwards expounded by one of the mediums.<sup>4</sup>

Again, there were numerous cases of healing mediums. Sometimes the mediums were in the normal condition; sometimes they professed to be in the trance, and to receive directions from a spirit-doctor as to the drugs and herbs to be used, and the methods to be followed in the cure. In not a few cases the healer would receive a "call" to go to a certain street and a certain house in a distant town and ask for a certain person who required his healing ministrations. In some of these instances, as in the various cases related by John Murray Spear, the impulse was, no doubt, a genuine one, and the medium himself not consciously aware of the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 480 *et seq.* For other instances of spirit-drawing see *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. pp. 401-3; vol. v. 181; Adin Ballou, *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, p. 97; Mrs. Hardinge Britten's *History*, p. 265, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Healing of the Nations*, Introduction, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. H. Britten, *History*, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. pp. 352-6; vol. v. pp. 24, 91; Mrs. H. Britten's *History*, p. 389.

object of his mission, or of any link of connection with the sick person.<sup>1</sup> There are several examples of similar guiding monitions related on good authority of the early "Friends" in this country. But obviously it would be extremely hazardous to found on such evidence a presumption, I do not say of spirit guidance, but even of supernormal knowledge. In other cases recorded at this period—*e.g.* with the notorious Mrs. French—it seems likely that the impulse was imaginary, and the whole incident fictitious.

In fine, none of the cases recorded in this or the preceding chapter afford even a *prima facie* ground for supposing supernormal faculties of any kind. Such instances of clairvoyance, speaking with tongues, and trance writing and speaking as cannot readily be attributed to the known powers of automatism find an adequate explanation in fraud and unconscious exaggeration.

<sup>1</sup> Adin Ballou, *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, pp. 93-7; *Messages from the Superior State*, edited by S. C. Hewitt, pp. 28, etc. Boston, 1852.

## CHAPTER VI

### GENERAL SURVEY OF THE MOVEMENT

SO far as the evidence before us enables us to form a judgment, we have found little reason to infer any supernormal element in the beginnings of Modern Spiritualism. The earliest physical phenomena were apparently of the ordinary Poltergeist type, but springing up in an unusually favourable environment, they were gradually improved and systematised by the Fox children and by their numerous imitators. Even the raps which formed so prominent a feature in the outbreak at Hydesville and its subsequent developments can be paralleled from many earlier records. The distinguishing characteristic of the new movement was its permanency; and this, again, was no doubt due largely to the extraordinarily favourable reception which the youthful impostors encountered and to their long immunity from detection. Some credit must also be assigned to the "mediums" themselves for their skill in inventing and perfecting one or more methods of rapping, and for that practised facility in noting and interpreting slight gestures, hesitations, changes of voice, and other indications, which formed, no doubt, the secret of their ability to answer mental questions.

As the movement grew, the physical phenomena, in response, it may be surmised, to the insatiable demands of its patrons, grew more elaborate and more audacious. But their essential character appears to have remained unchanged. It is clear that the records quoted in chapter iii.—and as already said, I have studied to present the evidence at its best—do not afford even a faint presumption of the interference of any unfamiliar mode of energy. The facts recorded suggest fraud; they are such as are known to have been produced fraudulently both before and since this epoch; and neither the precautions alleged to have been taken, the qualifications of the observers, nor the circumstances of the

experiments, were such as to afford an effectual safeguard against the ingenuity of practised tricksters.

This view of the matter finds strong confirmation in the analysis of the mental phenomena given in the last two chapters. On the one hand, we find that evidence, such as we can regard as *prima facie* worthy of consideration, for the exercise, by persons whose good faith may fairly be presumed, of any supernormal faculty, is almost entirely wanting, a want which is the more surprising because we have found traces of such faculties in the past, and possess in recent experimental work and in the trance utterances of Mrs. Piper and others a considerable body of evidence for their operations at the present time. On the other hand, hireling mediums of this period furnished many instances of mental telegraphy, speaking with tongues, and the like, where the evidence would be quite unexceptionable, if we could assume the honesty of the chief actors and their witnesses.

As against the view that the physical phenomena and the instances of mental telegraphy and speaking with tongues furnished by professional mediums were in all cases due to fraud, the rarity at this time of any demonstration of fraud may be urged. It is no doubt true that trickery was seldom detected. There are one or two cases, however, in which mediums professing to bring "apports" of various objects into séance-rooms were convicted of fraud. In one such case it was claimed that a knife and a ribbon had been carried by spirit agency across the Atlantic, but the imposture was detected a few months later, and denounced in the *Spiritual Telegraph*;<sup>1</sup> and there may have been other cases of exposure which were hushed up. But it is probable from the scantiness of references by hostile critics that exposures at this time were extremely rare.

It is obvious, however, that the conditions were unfavourable to the detection of fraud. The exposures with which the later annals of Spiritualism are filled have almost always been concerned with such complicated and audacious manifestations as "materialisation," or spirit photography. The earlier phenomena did not readily lend themselves to such methods of investigation. Where no apparatus is used, and the performance is shrouded in darkness, it is extremely difficult to prove trickery, however certain the investigator may be, on a wide comparison of instances, that trickery is responsible for the manifestations. It would have been

<sup>1</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. vi. p. 131.

practically impossible, for instance, to convict Gordon or Hume of fraud in their levitation performances. If the gas had suddenly been turned up, and the medium found standing on a chair or table when he should have been floating in the air, it would have been as easy for him to suggest as for the spectators to believe that the spirits had let him drop because the action of the light prevented the completion of their task. Or, again, if Fowler had been observed copying passages from the Hebrew Bible on his own account, it may be surmised that an explanation that he was acting under spirit-control would have met with ready acceptance. Indeed, the foundations of that famous system of Spiritualist apologetics, the doctrine of spirit-control, were already being laid. The Poughkeepsie seer, as we have seen in chapter i. of the present book, first introduced it to account for some of the Stratford performances. And the members of the Springfield Harmonial Circle, in January, 1851, gave a testimonial to the medium Gordon which contains the following passage:—

“It may be stated, however, as a circumstance which seems to have been the cause of some misapprehension, that the individual referred to is highly susceptible to the magnetic power of spirits, and that, under the influence of an impression which he is unable to resist, he occasionally endeavours to perform the very action which he *perceives to be in the mind of the spirit*. Of this peculiarity we were made fully aware at the commencement of our investigations, and throughout the whole have been unable to discover any evidence of deception, or even secretiveness, with regard to the assistance which he sometimes undesignedly renders the spirits, in being acted upon by their influence.”<sup>1</sup>

In such circumstances the task of exposing trickery would have been a singularly thankless one. But, in fact, the explanation of the immunity of the medium is to be sought rather in the general conditions of the mental environment than in any skill on his part, whether in apologetics or in sleight-of-hand. That part of the American public which concerned itself with the manifestations at all was possessed by the belief that, whatever their explanation, they were genuine. This belief became, in fact, an epidemic delusion hardly less imperative than the ideas suggested by the hypnotist to his subject. It did not occur to the earlier investigator, prepossessed as he was by this belief, to be constantly on his guard against fraud. He did not turn

<sup>1</sup> *The Spirit World*, vol. ii. p. 21.

up the light while Gordon was being levitated, or look under the table when the spirits were writing, or seize the spirit hands presented to him. Fraud was to him, at worst, an occasional incident of the manifestations.

Again, the pecuniary factor was not so prominent at these early séances as it has since become. The Fox girls are said to have taken no money for their performances at first, until indeed the "spirits" insisted on their doing so; and groups of admirers from time to time subscribed, so that popular mediums, the Foxes or others, might give gratuitous sittings to inquirers.<sup>1</sup> It is stated by Partridge and others that Koons would take neither money nor recompense of any other kind for the performances in his spirit-room.<sup>2</sup> Ballou mentions the case of some physical mediums in poor circumstances who invariably refused to take money from those who attended their séances.<sup>3</sup> The same thing is recorded in the *Spirit World*<sup>4</sup> of a rapping medium. But in this case the medium was a child, who accepted ten cents for himself, whilst his father, who refused the larger sums offered, was probably ignorant of the deception practised. It is significant that in the first volume, at any rate, of the *Spiritual Telegraph* (1853) there are but few advertisements of mediums, and those exclusively of medical clairvoyants, who charged a fee for diagnosing and prescribing.

It is probable that the unseemliness of selling spiritual gifts at a price was recognised at the outset, as it has more or less been recognised ever since. It is stated on good authority that in more recent times D. D. Home (Hume) habitually, and Eusapia Paladino at least occasionally, refused to accept money payments for their séances. But it is certain that most mediums both then and now took regular fees, and probably all have received a sufficient payment in coin or in kind.<sup>5</sup> In any case, as will appear later, unpaid mediumship is not necessarily honest; there are other than pecuniary inducements to fraud—even to systematic and long-continued fraud. There is nothing, then, in the surrounding circumstances to weaken the presumption of fraud derived from an examination of the phenomena themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Hardinge Britten, *History*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, pp. 83-7.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. iii. p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the *North American Review*, April, 1855: "The frequently mercenary character of this necromancy goes far towards negating the idea of its spiritual origin. In almost every city in New England are Pythonesses (not always persons of fair reputation), who, for the price of fifty cents and upwards, will command the presence and responses of the most exalted spirits that ever dwelt on earth."

The explanation of the ready credence which greeted these supposed proofs of spirit intervention, notwithstanding that to our judgment it seems clear that where not merely inconclusive they were deliberately fraudulent, lies partly, as we have seen, in the apparent marvel of answers to mental questions through the raps, partly in the fact that the indubitable genuineness of the automatic manifestations in private persons predisposed the inquirers to accept as genuine in the professional medium what purported to be phenomena of the same class, but in a higher stage of development.

But the explanation of the facile acceptance and rapid spread of the new marvels is chiefly to be sought, as we have endeavoured to indicate in chapter ii., in the special conditions of the nation and the times; in the general diffusion of education combined with an absence of authoritative standards of thought and the want of critical training; in the democratic genius of the American people; in their liability to be carried away by various humanitarian enthusiasms; in the geographical conditions incident to a rapidly expanding civilisation. But especially, as we have seen, this tendency to belief was fostered by the still recent growth of popular interest in Mesmerism and in the various theories of a physical effluence—odyle, etherium, or vital electricity—which were associated with it, and had already been employed to explain the manifestations of various “electric” girls and other impostors, as well as the probably innocent hallucinations of Reichenbach’s sensitives. No doubt, too, the introduction throughout the continent of the electric telegraph, an invention still so recent that the popular mind had not become familiarised with it, and still regarded its operations with something of childlike wonder, helped to quicken expectation and generally to induce a mental condition favourable to belief in other phenomena, which after all were to the uninstructed not more mysterious. As we have seen, it was in electricity that Spiritualists sought the physical basis of their phenomena.

But whatever the explanation, of the facts there can be no doubt. The people who wrote and lectured about the spiritualistic manifestations had been almost to a man pre-possessed with a belief in their genuineness. The evidence upon which they supposed this belief to rest played much the same part in its structure as the element of external sensation, according to some French writers, in a hallucination; it was less a justification than an opportunity. Hardly

less remarkable than the existence of this epidemic delusion is the fact that outside the obsessed circle so few persons of any intellectual standing thought the matter sufficiently important to inquire into, still less to write about, and that by those writers who did express their entire disbelief in the phenomena the subject was treated with a very inadequate conception of its importance. Page's pamphlet consists of a few hasty memoranda. Mattison's book is superficial, mediocre in quality, ill-informed, and warped by theological rancour. C. W. Elliott, the most capable of these early critics, devotes unfortunately two chapters only of his book to the modern manifestations, and deals only with the beginnings of the movement. With these and a few other unimportant exceptions, every writer who had qualified himself by actual observation to express an opinion believed in the phenomena, or the bulk of them, as genuine.

The odylo-mesmeric hypothesis as applied to Spiritualism is well formulated by E. C. Rogers, a medical electrician.<sup>1</sup> According to this authority, the alleged phenomena, both physical and mental, were in the main—for he does not attempt to discriminate—genuine. The explanation common to both classes was that the medium was a person in whom the conscious and personal control of the higher brain centres was for the moment in abeyance, leaving the organism open to be acted upon by the universal cosmic forces. Thus he explains as follows the occurrence of raps at Sunderland's house: "By means of a specific pathetism sensitive persons are thrown into a condition of the nervous system in which the brain, losing the controlling power of the responsible agent, falls under the law of mundane dynamics, is acted upon and acts by the material agency of the world."<sup>2</sup> So clairvoyance, again, is explained as the result of a peculiar condition of the nervous system, in which the outward material world is brought into a special and intimate relation with the human organism. The whole tribe of Animal Magnetists and Mesmerists, the drummer of Tedworth, the Seeress of Prevorst, the electric girls, and the Poltergeists are cited in support of the theory; and a flavour of modernity is imparted by quotations from Carpenter on cerebral automatism, and by an exposition of Faraday's recent discovery of the magnetic properties of oxygen. The book is, in fact, nothing more than an elaborately futile attempt

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Mysterious Agents*. Boston, 1853. *A discussion on the automatic Powers of the Brain (being an answer to the criticism of Rev. C. Beecher)*. Same year.

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophy etc.*, p. 304.

to restate in modern scientific terminology Mesmer's theory of a universal cosmic fluid.

Another theorist of the same type, but with less scientific pretensions, was J. Bovee Dods, who had been known for some years previously as a lecturer and writer on Mesmerism, and had in 1846 been interested in the trance revelations of A. J. Davis. In 1854 Dods published a book in which he essayed to give a complete explanation of the Spiritualist phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Dods' hypothesis is essentially the same as Rogers', though he is careful to explain that he does not believe in odic force. Like Rogers, he is satisfied that the phenomena in general are genuine, and depend for their manifestation upon the subconscious working of the medium's organism. The genuine medium, he explains (and he expressly includes in this category the Fox girls), is always honest. The movements of tables and chairs which occur in her presence are not consciously caused by her; they result from "a redundancy of electricity congregated upon the involuntary nerves"; the raps are caused by "an electro-magnetic discharge from the fingers and toes of the medium." But the force has its limitations. Generally the more violent physical movements—rocking and tilting of tables and chairs, and so on—are due to involuntary and unconscious movements on the part of the mediums. But tables may also be moved "by electro-magnetically charging the table from a living battery of many human hands, and thus attracting or repelling it without contact"; the process is really "as simple as the raising of a balloon," though perhaps more arduous; "the millions of pores in the table are filled with electro-magnetism from human brains, which is inconceivably lighter than the gas that inflates the balloon."<sup>2</sup> But the process will enable a piece of furniture to be levitated only after prolonged contact with the human body has allowed saturation to take place, and it will not be equally successful with all substances. Dods is justly critical of Edmonds' description of a dinner-bell moving round the circle unassisted. The judge had clearly not realised the insuperable difficulties in the way of such a feat, for, as Dods explains, "bell-metal is so dense, and its pores so minute . . . that its gravity cannot be overcome by charging it with *nervo-vital* force from a thousand brains."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Spirit Manifestations Examined and Explained*, etc., by John Bovee Dods. New York, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164. Dods, it should be explained, a few years later became an adherent of the Spiritualist doctrine.

Even the North American Reviewer cannot but admit the genuineness of some of the phenomena, both physical and mental, and is constrained to propound a similar theory. It is probably, he thinks, the right hemisphere of the brain which, in the automatic or trance state, acts independently of its usual controlling centres in the left hemisphere. The spinal column, he suggests, is a battery in which the vertebræ play the part of the metallic plates and the soft matter of the spinal chord acts as acid. The right hemisphere, becoming in certain states overcharged with the electric force so produced, explodes and produces raps, lights, and physical movements. Rogers' hypothesis of the interference of the mundane forces reappears in the reviewer's suggestion that, as the electrical equilibrium of the whole surroundings may be disturbed by these explosions, the medium's organism can thus in effect draw (unconsciously) upon a huge reservoir of external energy for the production of physical movements upon a large scale.<sup>1</sup>

Other writers suggested that the legs of the tables were filled with electricity before each séance,<sup>2</sup> or that mediums resided near telegraph lines, and so became charged with electricity to such a degree that they spontaneously exploded in raps.<sup>3</sup> Hare's attention was first called to the manifestations by a correspondent who consulted him on the adequacy of the electric explanation of the phenomena.

In the Press, again, it is surprising to note how hospitably the phenomena were received. The smaller provincial journals naturally gave up much of their space to the manifestations as being excellent "copy." But many even of the daily papers in the principal towns, as the movement grew in importance, felt themselves unable to dismiss the whole subject as imposture, and suggested that, if not the agency of spirits, at any rate the working of some new material laws were demonstrated by the mysterious occurrences. The North American Reviewer begins his article by explaining that he had no liking for the task in hand, and had deferred it in the hope that the movement would die of itself. But so far from dying out it was growing in importance, and now included in its ranks some men of high culture and many persons of good repute and sound common sense. He adds:—

<sup>1</sup> *North American Review*, April, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iii. p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> *Spirit World*, vol. ii. p. 107.

"We do not think the following paragraph from the address of the New England Spiritualists' Association an overstatement: 'It is computed that nearly two millions of people in our nation, with hundreds of thousands of people in other lands, are already believers in Spiritualism. No less than twelve or fourteen periodicals are devoted to the publication of its phenomena and the dissemination of its principles. . . . Every day, and much more than daily, lectures are given in the presence of audiences quite respectable as to both number and character; circles are held by day and by night in nearly every city, town, and village throughout our country.'"

Amongst the clergy of the various religious denominations the tendency on the whole seems to have been towards belief in the phenomena as being actually of spiritual origin. Many ministers from the more advanced denominations had, indeed, as already shown, accepted the new revelation in its entirety. Others, like the Rev. Charles Beecher, whilst pleading for a serious and dispassionate investigation and a careful trial of the claims put forward by the spirits, were inclined to suspect diabolism.<sup>1</sup> So the Swedenborgians generally, whilst believing in the genuineness of the manifestations, held it unprofitable or even dangerous to meddle with them. Thus, Henry James,<sup>2</sup> in an essay on the spirit-rappings, after stigmatising the assumed spirits as "ghostly busy-bodies," writes: "On the whole I am inclined to regard the so-called spirits rather as so many vermin revealing themselves in the tumble-down walls of our old theological hostelry, than as any very saintly or sweet persons, whose acquaintance it were edifying or even comfortable to make."<sup>3</sup>

Other Swedenborgians, however, took a prominent part in the early propaganda. But by the more orthodox sects generally the new movement was either condemned as mere folly and chicanery, or regarded as of probably diabolic origin; and there were cases in which ministers were expelled from their churches, teachers from their schools, and communicants from their congregations, for meddling with the unholy thing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Review of the Spiritualist Manifestations.* London, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> The father of the well-known novelist, and of Mr. William James, Professor of Psychology at Harvard.

<sup>3</sup> *Lectures and Miscellanies*, p. 418. New York, 1852. See also Bush on "Pseudo-Spiritualism," in *New Church Miscellanies* (New York, 1855); *The Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism*, by W. B. Hayden (Boston, 1855); and *The Spirit World*, vol. ii. p. 115-17, for an exposition of the Swedenborgian views.

<sup>4</sup> See the extracts from various religious papers quoted by Ballou in his work, *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, chap. ix.

This view of the matter was, in the time and circumstances and from the standpoint of the Christian believer, not altogether unnatural. For unquestionably the movement was, in certain phases, extravagant, blasphemous, and dangerous to accepted standards of morality. Perhaps the most damaging accusation brought against the Spiritualists at this time was that of the propaganda of free love. There were some grounds for the charge. From their close association with various contemporary Socialisms, so much might, perhaps, have been anticipated. For Socialism in its extreme form has generally included in its scheme for the reconstruction of society a reform of the institution of marriage; a reform which has taken the shape, sometimes, of lifelong celibacy, as amongst the Shakers, sometimes of a wider freedom, as amongst the Oneida Communists. There were in the early years of Spiritualism two or three societies which apparently taught and practised a similar freedom, of which the most notable was the Kiantone Community, which numbered amongst its prominent members John Murray Spear.<sup>1</sup> A few Spiritualist writers and lecturers advocated, or were understood to advocate, like views.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, charges of loose sexual relations were brought against A. J. Davis, Warren Chase, and others;<sup>3</sup> and the fact that many prominent mediums were married several times in the course of a few years appears to have been due to a certain laxity of the marriage tie, rather than to any exceptional rate of mortality.

Finally, if additional evidence is needed that the charge was not wholly baseless, we have the testimony of men like Adin Ballou and Joel Tiffany. Ballou, in the autumn of 1854, published a solemn warning to Spiritualists against the Free Love Movement, of which the signs were already manifest to him in certain quarters, pointing out that sexual aberrations of this kind had in the past again and again been associated with Spiritual movements like their own.<sup>4</sup> And Tiffany, in a course of lectures on Spiritualism delivered before the New York Conference in February, 1856, thought it

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Hardinge Britten, *History*, pp. 233, 234.

<sup>2</sup> Mattison, *Spirit-Rapping*, pp. 101-4; Mahan, *Modern Mysteries*, etc., pp. 285, 286; *Telegraph Papers*, vol. vi. p. 336; and T. L. Nichols, in *Marriage*, quoted by Davis, *Great Harmonia*, vol. iv. pp. 410-14.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Magic Staff*, pp. 397, etc., and *Life Line of the Lone One*, pp. 145-155. Both Davis and Chase refer to the circumstances and offer plausible explanations of their conduct. Whilst, however, the episodes remain obscure, it would seem that, at worst, they were guilty of weakness or indiscretion, not of a calculated revolt against accepted and acceptable moral standards.

<sup>4</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. vi. pp. 297, 298.

necessary specially to distinguish the Spiritualist ideal of a permanent union founded on love from the debased travesty of so-called Free Love: "To say of the impulse calling for such union that it desires change, and consequent variety, is blasphemously false and absurd. The basis of conjugal love is as deep and immutable as are the foundations of immortality and eternal life."<sup>1</sup>

Spiritualism, indeed, necessarily attracted within its sphere the "cranks," the social theorists and reformers, the rebels against convention and the exiles from society. And as free love was in the air at the time, naturally the ranks of the Spiritualists were to some extent recruited from the adherents of that doctrine. But whatever the aberrations of individuals, or here and there of small cliques of Spiritualists, it would be impossible to substantiate the charge against Spiritualists as a body. In fact, the charge mainly rested upon a misconception. Free love, in the sense of perfect liberty for contracting temporary unions to be dissolved at will, was probably promulgated as an ideal by very few writers, and by none who can fairly be called representative Spiritualists. But there had been in America before 1848, as already shown, a wide-spreading impulse of social reform, which in one direction found expression in free discussion and criticism of marriage, of the position of woman, of sexual relations generally and of their bearing on the future of the race. The Spiritualists of the radical school had for the most part been brought up in an environment favourable to these ideas, and they were inevitably reflected in the Spiritualist propaganda. But whatever may have been the effect here and there on undisciplined individuals, it was a singular misconception which accused the teachers of the new ideas of a design to subvert the existing social order in the interests of sensual licence. The ideal put forward was even puritanic in some of its aspects. It was, indeed, the wrongs of women and children which for many advocates of so-called "free love" formed the ground and the inspiration of their teachings. The following resolution, moved by A. J. Davis and his wife Mary at a Spiritualist Congress held in September, 1856, expressed this aspect of the question. After reciting the claim of women to co-equal civil and political advantages with men, the resolution ends: "And that, in the marriage relation, she shall be fully secured in her natural rights to property, to the legal custody of her children, and to the entire control

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualism Explained*, p. 205, by Joel Tiffany. New York, 1856.

of her own person, that thereby fewer and better children may be born, and humanity be improved and elevated."<sup>1</sup>

To these purely mundane arguments Davis, Harris, and other Spiritualists added the doctrine, as old perhaps as mysticism itself, of spiritual counterparts. The infant was born married; somewhere or other in the wide world was the counterpart half of his nature, waiting to be united to him. From this doctrine it followed that, while the true marriage was necessarily indissoluble and eternal, being in fact not a union, but a reunion, it was lawful and even expedient that other unions should be dissolved as soon as the mutual incompatibility became manifest and intolerable. "Transient marriages bring divorces. Divorces are natural until the harmonial plane is reached; there only an eternal union is natural."<sup>2</sup>

The spirit teachings of J. M. Spear are to a similar effect. Here is an excerpt from "a prayer for a marriage occasion": "Entering intelligently into the new relations, comprehending the divine matehood, may they be faithful to each other in all the relations of life; and should they, from any cause, come to feel that they are no longer husband and wife, amicably may they withdraw from one another."<sup>3</sup> And Brittan writes: "To constitute a true spiritual marriage two congenial souls must be irresistibly attracted and perfectly conjoined . . . by the spiritual natural law of affinity"; and when the marriage falls short of this ideal, if the married pair "cannot possibly agree to live together, they should do the next best thing, which may be to separate by mutual consent."<sup>4</sup>

In brief, the Spiritualists of the time, whilst regarding occasional divorces as a regrettable necessity, resulting from imperfect conditions, advocated the permanent union of one man with one woman as the ideal state. Their teachings, no doubt, especially because of that unfortunate doctrine of the "spiritual counterpart," may have done more than the teachers contemplated to encourage divorce; but I can find nothing to substantiate the charge that these men deliberately advocated the forming of temporary unions, still less that they connived at licence. It is obvious, indeed, to those who study the matter that their ideals were higher,

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Davis, *Events in the Life of a Seer*, p. 208. See also Warren Chase, *Life Line and the Spiritual Rostrum*, *passim*, for an enlargement of this theme.

<sup>2</sup> *Great Harmonia*, vol. iv. p. 418. See also vol. ii., *The True Marriage*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Educator*, p. 669. <sup>4</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. vi. pp. 241, 245.

and founded on a wider and juster view of the facts of life than appears to have been the case with some of their accusers.

There were, however, extravagances of doctrine or practice advocated "under spirit guidance" by individual Spiritualists which gave rise to much scandal. For such eccentric individuals could always reckon on a certain following amongst the ranks of their fellow-believers. As instances of these aberrations we may take the Mountain Cove Community and the New Motor.

#### THE MOUNTAIN COVE COMMUNITY.

The town of Auburn, New York State, had been from the first an active centre of spiritual propaganda. So early as 1850 there were, according to E. W. Capron, between fifty and a hundred mediums there. An "apostolic" circle had also been formed under the direction of a well-known medium, Mrs. Benedict, which claimed to receive through the raps communications from St. Paul, the prophet Daniel, and other high personages. "St. Paul" had also been instrumental in driving away an evil spirit which had obsessed a young girl for the space of a day and a half. In 1850, by direction of the same apostle Paul, given through the raps at the circle, James Scott, minister at Brooklyn of the sect of Seventh-Day Baptists, removed to Auburn; he was shortly followed by the Rev. T. L. Harris, and they soon gathered round them a group of disciples and founded a paper, *Disclosures from the Interior and Superior Care for Mortals*, whose columns are filled with messages signed "John the Divine," "Daniel the Prophet," etc., and with poetry inspired by the spirits of Shelley, Coleridge, and others.

Later, Harris being then in New York, the word came that a community should be founded, and that the faithful should yield themselves and their possessions implicitly to the guidance of the perfect medium, James Scott; and Scott himself, with about a hundred others, did in effect in the autumn of 1851 settle themselves on some land in Mountain Cove, Fayette co., Virginia, which had been spiritually indicated. The inspiration had now assumed a loftier source, as will be seen from the following quotation:—

"I read, written in letters of fire: Dost thou believe? and what dost thou believe? Who, thinkest thou, called thee here? Who,

believest thou, appeareth to control? Who inspireth? Not an angel, for he is led; not a seraph, for he is controlled; *not created existence*, for that is inspired. Who, then, thinkest thou, called thee to the Mountain? *Who but a God inspireth?* Believest thou the indication of these questions? Who is prepared for the coming of the Son of Man? Who is it that hath consecrated and yielded themselves, severing therefrom every attachment to earth? Who have submitted their dictation and design entirely to him who ordereth this manifestation from the regions of intelligence perfected? Who doth not exercise external judgment, will, and design? Who doth not violate that law by which perfect redemption shall be accomplished in fallen man? *I Am That I Am inquireth now of thee! and prepare to answer thou me!* . . . None other than God, thy Redeemer, calleth for thee. None other than *He who hath the keys of death and hell addresseth you through one of your number!*"

At about the same time the inspired utterance through the mouth of Scott called upon the true believers to surrender all their worldly goods, and to hold them at the disposal of the spiritual guide, as follows:—

"God . . . hath aforetime committed to your charge, as His Stewards, the means designed to be employed while conducting the external in the manifestation into its consummation. And lo, now He cometh and calleth upon you, and requireth the charge committed, with its improvement. Whoso hath, and now consecrateth to this great work, to him shall be given . . . to him . . . who is wanting in disposition to render back to the author of all blessing, from him the Spirit departeth, and shall be taken even that which he hath."

There were, however, as we learn from T. S. Hiatt, who himself joined the infant community in December, 1851, dissensions and money losses at the outset, and perhaps some revolt of the natural man against the command to divest himself of his worldly goods; and the community within a few months was in danger of breaking up. But in the early summer of the following year Harris again joined them, bringing with him more persons of property, and the scheme was resuscitated. Another manifesto from the controlling intelligence was now issued through the organism of the faithful medium:—

"Dear Brethren,—The especially appointed and commissioned spirits, through whom superior wisdom has approached and instructed mortals, dictate unto you the present epistle in the light of understanding, in the purpose of council, and in the desire of

harmonious interprocedure of love. They review their works, declare their directed purposes, and seek to guide your feet in the way of peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The Circle of Apostles and Prophets do finally declare that in the eighth month of the year 1851, common diurnal time, the Word of the Lord came unto them, commanding disclosure of His most holy will concerning the establishment of a terrestrial centre for the unfolding of His heavenly kingdom, and a refuge for His obedient people . . . .

"In obedience to our instructions, we guided James, the medium, into the place appointed, and have established upon this mountain the standard of the cross, as a sign for the gathering of the obedient people.

"In further fulfilment of our charge, we have guided Thomas, the medium, to the appointed place, and have disclosed unto his mind full evidence of his associate medium's faithfulness in all the work given unto him to do; and that also all discord within the boundaries of the place appointed is caused by the presence of the un sanctified, and subsides with their removal therefrom.

"Having thus guided the vehicles of communication to the place directed by His most holy will, and united them thereupon, the Spirit, who deviseth and establisheth the Redeeming Procedure, issueth commandment unto His messengers to resume the disclosure of His truth without delay, that His name may thereby be glorified, His people instructed and comforted, and His compassionate and lovingkindness, in accordance with the purpose in the consummation of His procedure, be manifest unto the earth and the inhabitants thereof.

"Dictated at Mountain Cove,

"Fifth Month, 1852."

The dissensions and pecuniary difficulties, however, still continued; some of the community left, others were banished by command; and the movement seems to have died out early in 1853, Harris then returning to his ordinary work of lecturing, writing inspirational poems, etc., for a time. The impulse for community founding, however, was strong in him, and some years later found more complete and permanent expression.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The history of the Mountain Cove Community is taken from the account given by Capron, *Modern Spiritualism*, chap. vi. See also Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, pp. 568-74; Mrs. Hardinge Britten, *History*, pp. 207-17; *The Spirit World*, vol. ii. pp. 86, 122, 141, 169; vol. iii. pp. 29, 105.

## THE NEW MOTOR.

In April, 1854, S. C. Hewitt, the editor of the *New Era*, announced in the columns of that paper that the "Association of Electricizers"<sup>1</sup> had given directions through the organism of Brother Spear for the construction of a machine which was to embody the principle of a new motive power. Later we learn that the machine was to be so constructed as to draw upon the great reservoir of the magnetic life of Nature, and to be "self-generative." All so-called electrical machines hitherto constructed by merely human agency derived their power, it was pointed out, from sources which were artificial and easily exhausted. But the new motive power—like the human body, with which it was compared by its founders—was to be a living organism, quickened by an indwelling spiritual principle. The analogy with the human body was developed in an almost incredible manner. Whilst yet the new motive power stood in its wooden shed at High Rock, near Lynn (Mass.), an inert mass of zinc and copper, it was announced in a beautiful vision to Mrs. —, a respectable married lady, who numbered herself amongst Spear's disciples, that to her it was appointed to be "the Mary of a New Dispensation." The word later came to her through the mouth of Brother Spear that she should go to High Rock, to where the New Motor stood. There she endured pangs as of parturition for two hours; "her own perception was clear and distinct that through those agonising throes the most interior and refined elements of her spiritual being were imparted to and absorbed by" the machine. At the end of two hours there were indications of life in the metallic framework, "at first perceptible only to her keenly sensitive touch, but visible ultimately in movement and pulsation to the eyes of all." Then followed for some weeks on the part of Mrs. — "a process analogous to that of nursing," by which it was claimed that the life of "the new-born child," the "Physical Saviour of the race," was cherished and sustained. Thereupon the enthusiastic disciples hailed the New Motor as "the Art of all Arts, the Science of all Sciences, the New Messiah, God's Last Best Gift to Man." A. J. Davis went down in May, 1854, to see the wonder. He was "impressed" to report that Spear was undoubtedly honest, and the design of the mechanism undoubtedly the work of spirits, on the ground apparently that it couldn't have been produced by Spear

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 275.

out of his own head. Further, he was impressed to declare that "the positive and negative—the male and female—laws of Nature were very truthfully divulged and prescribed theoretically"; yet that in practice the thing had not moved, and obviously could not move, and that if it did move it couldn't so much as turn a coffee-mill. The seer's conclusion on the whole matter was that some mechanically minded spirits, of good intentions and "correct philosophy," but "deficient in the practical knowledge of the means to consummate its actualisation," were conducting experiments at friend Spear's expense, to the extent of some two thousand dollars, and that, in the interest of all parties, the less said about the matter the better. Others of the more level-headed Spiritualists reported to the same effect.

The end of the New Motor, as we learn from a letter written by J. M. Spear, came a few months later. The machine had been moved to Randolph (N.Y.), that it might have the advantage of more terrestrial electricity. One night the neighbours arose, broke into the shed, and smashed up the machinery. Spear finds comfort in the reflection that Garrison was mobbed and Birney's printing-press had been thrown into the river.<sup>1</sup>

But the main body of Spiritualists had as little sympathy with such movements as those which culminated at Mountain Cove or High Rock as they had with the propaganda of free love. It was not merely that they were repelled by their extravagance and absurdity; they resented not less the claims to exclusive inspiration put forward; for the special characteristic of the Spiritualist movement from the beginning has been its democratic character. There has been neither recognised leader nor authoritative statement of creed. This characteristic, again, gave breadth, tolerance, and expansiveness to the movement, which made it unique amongst religious revivals, and rendered it possible for the new belief to combine with almost any pre-existing system of doctrine. As a matter of fact, many persons appear to have found a belief in Spiritualism not incompatible with dogmatic Christianity. As already shown, for instance, in chapter v., the spirit communications published by J. A. Gridley explicitly defended, against the attacks of A. J. Davis, the genuineness of the biblical miracles and the verity of the Christian doctrines; and Spiritualists in general

<sup>1</sup> For the history of the New Motor, see Capron, *Modern Spiritualism*, pp. 220 *et seq.*; *The Educator*, pp. 238-57; and *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. p. 489, vol. v. pp. 39, 182, 342, vol. vi. p. 397.

showed no hostility to the Christian faith. The new ideas were in themselves so engrossing that the devotees rarely came into active and conscious collision with older systems of belief. A partial exception is no doubt to be found in the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis. Davis set himself to explain the futility of the Christian scheme in the light of the New Revelation; he maintained that Jesus was a man inspired from the same universal source as himself, and that his wisdom had in some respects been greatly overrated; that the Christian miracles were instances of the operation of the same natural laws now responsible for the Spiritualistic phenomena; and he takes occasion to point out that the evidence for some of the biblical marvels which did not readily lend themselves to this interpretation was faulty and insufficient.<sup>1</sup> Further, he taught that—all evil being but good in the making—there is no hell and no personal devil, and that in the temptation, therefore, Jesus was assailed merely by the promptings of his own lower nature.<sup>2</sup>

But the tone of hostility towards Christianity adopted by A. J. Davis was frequently deprecated by his contemporaries, and found few imitators. Writers like Sunderland, Edmonds, Hare, and Brittan, whilst not admitting the uniquely divine nature of Jesus, or the exclusive inspiration of the Bible, seem to have regarded the Spiritualist utterances as supplementing and fulfilling the earlier revelation.<sup>3</sup> The essentially democratic character of the movement, however, renders it a task of some difficulty to define its creed. Creed, no doubt, in the sense in which the word is understood by the Christian Churches, it had none. But, nevertheless, certain factors can be recognised which went to make up a general body of more or less defined belief. The older mesmeric doctrines were represented abundantly; there was a strong Swedenborgian element, whose chief spokesmen were such men as Joel Tiffany, W. S. Courtney, and W. M. Fernald; there was an element of newer mysticism, represented mainly by Davis, and pre-eminently in his later years by Thomas Lake Harris. Of the universalist contingent, Brittan, the editor or co-editor successively of the *Univercælum*, the *Shekinah*, and the *Spiritual Telegraph*, was the most conspicuous exponent.

<sup>1</sup> *Events in the Life of a Seer*, pp. 235 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Great Harmonia*, vol. ii. p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> See Sunderland, in *Spirit World*, vol. ii. p. 45; Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, vol. i. pp. 209, 216, 384; Hare, *Experimental Investigation*, p. 427; Brittan, in *Telegraph Papers*, vol. ii., p. 454.

The chief negative aspects, as judged from a Christian standpoint, of the resulting body of beliefs are thus summed up by Beecher:—

“Rejecting the Bible as *authority*, claiming for all men inspiration in common with Christ and the Apostles, and of the same kind; regarding sin as immaturity of development, eschewing all received ideas of a fall of angels and men from original holiness, of total depravity, atonement, regeneration, pardon, etc., the system is in its last analysis, though but half-developed, a polytheistic pantheism, disguising under the name of spirit a subtle but genuine materialism.”<sup>1</sup>

The one positive tenet common to all Spiritualists was the possibility of communion with the spirits of deceased men and women. But associated with this belief almost universally was the conception of the other life as one of limitations and conditions not unlike the present; a world of orderly and continuous progression. This conception implicitly carried with it the negation of the distinctive Christian doctrines, as commonly understood—the scheme of redemption, of heaven and hell, and of a last judgment. The vision of the other life was developed and embellished by each believer according to his individual prepossessions and environment. But the anæmic optimism of Davis pervaded the whole. And there was a widespread belief, having its roots deep in older mysticisms, in a succession of concentric zones or spheres arranged in groups of seven, which were commonly conceived as having a definite location in space, insomuch that Hare tells us that he learnt from the spirits that the bands seen through a telescope over the equatorial regions of Jupiter are actually the spiritual spheres of that planet;<sup>2</sup> and Gridley gives the exact dimensions of the various terrestrial circles, the first being 5,000 miles and the sixth 30,000 from the earth's surface.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the common conception of spirit was of a more refined matter. Thus Hare was expressly taught by the “spirits” that there were peculiar elementary principles out of which spiritual bodies were constructed, which were analogous to, but not identical with, material elements; that the spirits have bodies, with a circulation and respiratory apparatus; that they breathe a gaseous or ethereal matter, which is also

<sup>1</sup> *Review of the Spiritual Manifestations.* London, 1853, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Experimental Investigation*, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> *Astounding Facts*, etc., p. 96.

inspired, together with atmospheric oxygen, by men, beasts, and fishes—the spiritual gas being especially necessary to the latter class of animals.<sup>1</sup> Ballou, in a summary of the theory of Spiritualists, tells us that matter and spirit are both eternally coexistent substances, the lowest grade of spirit being always more subtle, elastic, and penetrative than the most ethereal matter. This “subtle ethero-spiritual substance” he calls “Spiricity.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ashburner, in a letter quoted in the English edition of Ballou’s work, defines a train of thought as “currents of globules of highly refined matter.”<sup>3</sup> Capron and Barron, in their *History*,<sup>4</sup> speak of “the more refined substance to which we give the name of spirit.” And W. S. Courtney, one of the most thoughtful of the earlier writers, quotes from the *Univerczalum*—

“the following illustration of the only difference between matter and spirit. ‘If you fill a hogshead with cannon balls, there will be left large interstices between them, which can be filled with musket balls, still leaving interstices between the musket balls which can be filled with shot, those interstices again with sand, those again with water, those again with air, the air with light, the light with electricity, the electricity with magnetism, etc.’ We might pursue,” Courtney writes, “the interiorising process, and say the magnetism is pervaded by a principle of sensation, sensation by intelligence, intelligence by love, etc., thus showing the difference between spirit and matter to be only a difference in degree of development or refinement—the higher associating with, infilling, and actuating the lower, and holding it, as it were, in consistency.”<sup>5</sup>

But it is needless to multiply quotations and authorities. The unity of substance and the omnipotence of electricity—“salvation by electricity,” as James happily terms it—were the two keys which for the early Spiritualist unlocked the doors of all knowledge in heaven or on earth. Of the nature of God, or other transcendental mysteries, the spirits have nothing to say. The world they present to our view is a strictly material world, developing by processes of material evolution towards an unknown end. There is no mystery about their teaching. Spirit is only attenuated matter; the other world a counterpart of this; the living universe an endless series of beings like ourselves. Their view, in short,

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 116-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Spirit Manifestations*, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> Page 8.

<sup>5</sup> *The Spirit World*, vol. ii. p. 42.

represents the product of common sense, the common sense of the ordinary uninstructed man, acting upon the facts, or rather his interpretation of the facts, presented to him. Given his interpretation as correct, the inferences which he drew, the cosmological scheme which he constructed on the lines of his own parochial experience, follow inevitably. There is rarely any hint of deeper insight. The problems of Space and Time, of Knowing and Being, of Evil and Good, of Will and Law, are hardly even recognised. Common sense is not competent for these questions; and in so far as the Spiritualist scheme fails to take account of them, it falls short of being a Theology, or even an adequate Cosmology. But such as it is, though it makes no appeal to the higher imagination and ignores the deeper mysteries of life, it has for nearly two generations satisfied the intellectual needs and the emotional cravings of hundreds of thousands of votaries. And its followers can boast that throughout that period they have shown a sympathy for opinions differing from their own, and a tolerance for their opponents, unique in the history of sects called religious.

The annals of Spiritualism, up to 1855 at any rate, are filled almost exclusively with accounts of phenomena and opinions. Of history, in any other sense, there is little to record. The new sect certainly grew rapidly in numbers, though there are no statistics, and it is difficult to find an estimate which is even professedly based on anything but conjecture. Hammond speaks of two thousand writing mediums alone in 1852;<sup>1</sup> Partridge, writing in 1854, says that Spiritualists in America numbered over a million;<sup>2</sup> Tallmadge, a few weeks later, says two millions;<sup>3</sup> Tiffany, in 1855, writes, "they now number millions";<sup>4</sup> whilst a few years later, at a Catholic convention, it was stated, "on accurate and reliable information," that the Spiritualists numbered eleven millions.<sup>5</sup> But all these statements are mere guesses, inspired by the hopes or fears of their authors. Even the estimate adopted by the North American Reviewer, though at any rate disinterested, cannot safely be regarded as presenting an approximation to the truth.

But whatever their actual numbers, it is certain that the

<sup>1</sup> *The Pilgrimage of Thomas Paine* (Preface).

<sup>2</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iv. p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 531.

<sup>4</sup> *Spiritualism Explained*, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Hardinge Britten, *History*, p. 273.

new sect bulked largely in the Press; that its followers held conferences, services, and séances in almost every town of importance in the United States; that they supported many periodicals of their own, and organised themselves into many societies—Harmonial Brotherhood, Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, and the like; and that, generally, they carried on an active propaganda by their lectures, their published writings, and their séances.

For the most part this propaganda, save for the accusation of diabolism constantly levelled at them from the various pulpits, seems to have proceeded peacefully enough. In one or two instances, however, Spiritualism made its appearance before the law. One of the most noted cases at the time was that of Abby Warner. One Dr. Underhill (afterwards the husband of Leah Fox) had on Christmas Eve, 1852, in company with a medium named Abby Warner, attended service at the Episcopal Church in Massillon, Ohio. Soon after the service had commenced loud raps were heard. The officiating clergyman requested that the noise might cease; but the sounds shortly recommenced, and became louder than before. They apparently proceeded from the part of the building where Abby Warner was seated—and, indeed, it was rumoured that the spirits had directed Abby to go to church on purpose that the manifestations might be produced in so favourable a theatre. Abby was accordingly arrested, and tried on a charge of disturbing a religious meeting. On behalf of the defendant it was pleaded that though similar sounds occurred in her presence, they were not made by her conscious agency nor under her control. In the result the evidence proved insufficient to locate the sounds with exactness, or to fix the responsibility of their production, and the accused was discharged.<sup>1</sup> The Spiritualists, somewhat illogically, claimed the result as a triumph, and continued to take credit, on behalf of the spirits, for the manifestation. A year later Dr. Underhill brought an action for libel in connection with the case, but the jury disagreed.<sup>2</sup>

Of other legal proceedings the Eddy case was the most noteworthy. Insanity at this time was frequently charged as a result of belief in Spiritualism. And there was some justification for the charge. Andrew Jackson Davis and other Spiritualists admit that cases of insanity had

<sup>1</sup> *History*, by Mrs. Hardinge Britten, pp. 299, 300.

<sup>2</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iii. p. 361.

occurred in their ranks, and formidable statistics are quoted by some writers.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the matter is one of but little significance. Religious mania is a well-recognised type, and no doubt many persons lost their reason over spirit-rapping who might otherwise have gone mad over the doctrine of hell-fire. Something more than newspaper reports or unsifted statistics from asylums is needed to establish a general tendency on the part of Spiritualists to lunacy. One case of the kind, however, excited much interest. A man of some wealth named Ira B. Eddy, of Chicago, started, apparently under spiritual direction, a bank in that city in conjunction with some other persons. His brother, D. C. Eddy, fearing that Ira would dissipate his substance, took the case into court, and, on the plea that Ira was incapable of managing his own affairs, was appointed conservator of the estates. Some of the partners appear to have resisted the order of the court, and legal proceedings followed. Later, D. C. Eddy, in a somewhat high-handed manner, had his brother removed forcibly in the charge of some medical men to a private asylum in another State, where he was incarcerated for a week. The postmaster and other prominent citizens of Chicago protested against this arbitrary proceeding; the question was tried, and, as his incarceration appears to have been illegal and no evidence was forthcoming that his detention in the Asylum was justified in the interest of society, Ira Eddy was released, and the matter ended.<sup>2</sup>

There are other indications of the distrust and dislike not unnaturally inspired in various quarters by the new movement. Thus so early as June, 1851, the New Hampshire House of Representatives adopted a resolution, "that the Committee on the Judiciary inquire into the expediency of making provision by law for protecting the people of the State against imposition and injury by persons pretending to hold intercourse with departed spirits, and report by bill or otherwise."<sup>3</sup> This particular resolution appears to have borne no fruit; but some nine years later the Legislature of Alabama passed an Act prohibiting public spiritualistic manifestations under a penalty of five hundred dollars.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Davis, *The Present Age*, pp. 245-6, 252; *Spirit World*, vol. iii. pp. 15, 55; *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. pp. 38, 159, vol. v. pp. 100, 186, 410; and Mattison, *Spirit-Rappings Unveiled*, pp. 158, 162. Mattison gives returns from various asylums showing ninety alleged cases.

<sup>2</sup> Mattison, *op. cit.*, p. 155; *Telegraph Papers*, vol. i. p. 437, vol. ii. p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Spirit World*, vol. iii. p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Hardinge Britten, *History*, p. 416.

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Spiritualism once in these early years came prominently before the Legislature of the United States, by means of a Memorial to Congress. The Memorial begins by representing "that certain physical and mental phenomena, of questionable origin and mysterious import, have of late occurred in this country and in almost all parts of Europe, and that the same are now so prevalent, especially in the northern, middle, and western sections of the Union, as to engross a large share of the public attention." After briefly describing the various phenomena, and stating that two general hypotheses obtained with regard to their cause, viz. the spiritualistic and what may be called the odylo-magnetic, the Memorial continues :—

"While your memorialists cannot agree upon this question, they beg leave, most respectfully, to assure your Honorable Body they nevertheless most cordially concur in the opinion that *the alleged phenomena do really occur*, and that their mysterious origin, peculiar nature, and important bearing upon the interests of mankind demand for them a patient, thorough, and scientific investigation.

"It cannot reasonably be denied that the various phenomena to which the Memorial refers are likely to produce important and lasting results, permanently affecting the physical condition, mental development, and moral character of a large number of the American people. It is obvious that these occult powers do influence the essential principles of health and life, of thought and action, and hence they may be destined to modify the conditions of our being, the faith and philosophy of the age, and the government of the World."

Finally the Memorial prayed for the appointment of a scientific commission of investigation. The Memorial, which bore over 13,000 signatures, was presented to Congress in April, 1854. The introducer, one General Shields, did not conceive it to be any part of his duty to attempt to move Congress to accede to the prayer of the petitioners, and, after some rather cheap jests at its expense, the Memorial was ordered to lie on the table.

In the same month Spiritualism met with another rebuff. Hare, at a meeting of the American Scientific Association in Washington, read to the Convention an invitation from the Spiritualists of Washington to attend a lecture to be given by T. L. Harris. The invitation was laid upon the table.<sup>1</sup>

It remains only to add that the propaganda, even at this

<sup>1</sup> *Telegraph Papers*, vol. v. p. 112.

early period, was not confined to the American continent. At least two missionaries, Mrs. Hayden, wife of the sometime editor of the *Star-Spangled Banner*, and D. D. Hume visited England before 1855 and helped to spread the new doctrines there. Of them and their doings we shall speak more later.

END OF VOL. I.

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# MODERN SPIRITUALISM

A HISTORY AND A CRITICISM

BY

FRANK PODMORE

AUTHOR OF "STUDIES IN PSYCHICAL RESEARCH," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

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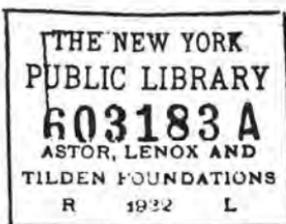


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MODERN SPIRITUALISM

BOOK III

SPIRITUALISM IN ENGLAND



# SPIRITUALISM IN ENGLAND

## CHAPTER I

### TABLE-TURNING AND TABLE-TALKING, 1853

AS we have already seen, the mesmeric movement in England ran for many years almost entirely on rationalist lines.<sup>1</sup> *The Zoist*, indeed, remained as the chief organ of the movement up to 1856, and the purely naturalistic views therein advocated found general favour. Rumours of the trance utterances of A. J. Davis and of Cahagnet's somnambules had, however, reached this country, and at least one English somnambule, Emma, the subject of Dr. Haddock, had seen visions of a future life and of spiritual things not unlike those recorded of Adele Maginot.<sup>2</sup> Neither Haddock himself, nor Gregory, who discusses the visions and compares them with those recorded by Cahagnet,<sup>3</sup> is prepared to accept the clairvoyant utterances as authentic revelations; but neither, on the other hand, is willing to dismiss them as unquestionably subjective. That Haddock's own mind was not made up on the subject he frankly confesses; and the mere fact that he thinks it worth while to devote several pages of his book to the account of these ecstatic visions clearly indicates that he set some value on such records. But, at any rate, if some of the English Mesmerists in the early fifties held it an open question whether such clairvoyant utterances had any reference to objective realities, there was as yet no school or sect, as in America and Germany, to adopt without hesitation the spiritualistic interpretation of these and kindred phenomena. It was not, indeed, until 1853 that the new doctrine obtained

<sup>1</sup> See Book I. chap. viii.

<sup>2</sup> See *Somnolism and Psychism*, 2nd edition (1851), pp. 181-8, 232, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters on Animal Magnetism*, 1851, pp. 223-7.

any real foothold in this country. In October, 1852, one Stone, a lecturer on the recently discovered art of "electrobiology"—a process for inducing hypnotism by gazing at metallic discs, which had been imported into Europe from America in the previous year—brought with him from the United States the first Spiritualist medium, Mrs. Hayden. Mrs. Hayden was a lady of some education, the wife of W. R. Hayden, sometime editor of the *Star Spangled Banner*. Mr. Hayden accompanied her on her mission. A few weeks later another medium, Mrs. Roberts, accompanied by her husband, "Dr." Roberts, came to London also from the United States. Both mediums advertised their professional services;<sup>1</sup> and the former lady achieved no small social success, having her rooms crowded with visitors, at a minimum fee of half a guinea each, and being in great demand for evening parties and private sittings.

The manifestations at these professional séances consisted mainly of answers to questions, frequently put mentally, by means of the raps. The procedure was the same as that already described as prevailing in America.<sup>2</sup> The questioner took a printed alphabet and ran his pen or finger down it, until a rap indicated a letter; the proceeding was then repeated until a word or a sentence was obtained. Occasionally the answers were given by tilting of the table; there were also sometimes rotation and other movements of the table. Involuntary writing was rarely resorted to, no doubt because answers to mental questions could not be readily given by this means. Of other phenomena at this period we have little trace; the alleged movement of tables without contact rests exclusively, so far as I can discover, on second-hand or anonymous evidence.<sup>3</sup>

Of Mrs. Hayden's performances we have many accounts in the periodical literature of the time. In the London Press, generally, as might have been anticipated, the per-

<sup>1</sup> Here is Mrs. Roberts' advertisement on the front page of the *Times* for April 16th, 1853: "Spiritual Manifestations and Communications from departed friends, which so much gratify serious enlightened minds, exemplified daily at . . ." It should be added that later in the year, as we learn from a letter written by Hayden to the New York *Spiritual Telegraph*, the *Times* refused to insert such advertisements.

<sup>2</sup> See Book II. chap. i.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., *Zoist*, vol. xi. p. 323, where the Rev. G. Sandby gives an account of table-moving without contact, related to him by a clergyman, whose children were the mediums. The anonymous author of *A Practical Investigation into the Truth of Clairvoyance* (London, 1854), mentions that he had obtained involuntary writing through Mrs. Hayden's mediumship, and had also witnessed at her rooms movements of the table without contact. But no details are given, and the writer was obviously quite uncritical.

performances of the professional medium met with little favour. *Household Words* was first in the field, with an article ridiculing the whole matter.<sup>1</sup> In the following year *Blackwood's Magazine*,<sup>2</sup> the *National Miscellany*,<sup>3</sup> and other papers took a similar line; whilst G. H. Lewes, in the *Leader*,<sup>4</sup> showed how the trick was done, and related that by carefully emphasised hesitation at the appropriate letters he had held a conversation with one of the Eumenides, receiving much information, not to be found in any classical dictionary, about his interlocutor's domestic relations; and had induced the table to confess, in reply to his mental questions, that Mrs. Hayden was an impostor, and that the ghost of Hamlet's father had seventeen noses.

In the April number of the *Zoist* is an article by an anonymous correspondent, describing his experiences at Mrs. Hayden's. He noted that when the alphabet was placed under the table, so as to hide it from the view of the medium, the "spirits" were unable to give correct answers, and satisfied himself that there was no other intelligence at work than that of the medium herself. The raps he supposed to be produced by striking the edge of the boot-sole against a chair-leg. In a later number<sup>5</sup> Elliotson himself, who had attended two or three sittings, has an article on "The Departed Spirits," in which he endorses his contributor's views, and relates further failures when the alphabet was concealed during the experiment.<sup>6</sup>

But apart from Mrs. Hayden's fashionable clients, there were many persons, and some not inferior in critical acumen probably to the writers just cited, who found themselves unable to explain all that they had witnessed by such simple methods. An article appeared in *Chambers's Journal*,<sup>7</sup> in which the writer, understood to be Robert Chambers himself, describes a visit to Mrs. Hayden. He obtained the usual answers under the usual conditions, but adds, "I have seen the alphabet used successfully behind the medium's back, when only visitors were present." Chambers paid visits to two other mediums, Mrs. Roberts and a young woman, the subject of a mesmeric "doctor," E. Hardinge, and witnessed table-turning and automatic writing. He obviously feels

<sup>1</sup> *Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost*, November 20th, 1852.

<sup>2</sup> May, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> May 5th, 1853.

<sup>4</sup> March 12th, 1853.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. xi., July, 1853, p. 191, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Amongst those who visited Mrs. Hayden were several well-known scientific men, including Professor Huxley (see *Life and Letters*, vol. i. p. 419).

<sup>7</sup> May 21st, 1853.

some difficulty in formulating an opinion on their performances; but on the whole inclines to think that the phenomena are natural and by no means remarkable, and the mediums self-deceived. In a note written a few weeks later,<sup>1</sup> however, he expresses a more decided opinion. In the interval the phenomena had occurred in his own family circle, where he believed trickery out of the question. The table had moved round and had tilted out answers to questions on matters known only to himself: "I am satisfied, as before," he writes, "that the phenomena are natural, but to take them in I think we shall have to widen somewhat our ideas of the extent and character of what is natural."

Again, in the *Critic*,<sup>2</sup> in a long letter signed "M.A., Cantab."—which may probably be interpreted as A. W. Hobson, of St. John's College, Cambridge—the writer expresses his conviction that the explanations put forward by Lewes and others are clearly inadequate. This opinion, however, appears to be founded on the fact that correct answers were obtained when the alphabet was held in such a position that Mrs. Hayden could not see the letters; but it is not stated whether she could have seen the hand or the pen used to point at the letters, or whether Mr. Hayden, as was commonly the case, was present in the room.

But probably the weightiest testimony is that given by Professor de Morgan. In a letter dated July, 1853, he thus describes his experiences:—<sup>3</sup>

"Mrs. Hayden, the American *medium*, came to my house, and we had a sitting of more than two hours. She had not been there many minutes before some slight ticking raps were heard *in* the table apparently. The raps answered by the alphabet (pointing to the letters on a card), one after the other (a rap or two coming at the letter), to the name of a sister of my wife, who died seventeen years ago. After some questioning, she (I speak the spirit hypothesis, though I have no theory on the subject) was asked whether I might ask a question. 'Yes,' affirmative rap. I said, 'May I ask it mentally?' 'Yes.' 'May Mrs. Hayden hold up both her hands while I do it?' 'Yes.' Mrs. H. did so, and *in my mind*, without speaking, I put a question, and suggested that the answer should be in one word, which I thought of. I then took the card<sup>4</sup> and *got*

<sup>1</sup> *Chambers's Journal*, June 11th, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> May 16th, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of Augustus de Morgan*, pp. 221, 222. London, 1882.

<sup>4</sup> In an account published in 1863, in the Preface to *From Matter to Spirit*, page xli., Mr. de Morgan states that in this experiment he put a book upright before the alphabet, and that Mrs. Hayden, seated six feet from the book, "could see neither my hand nor my eyes, nor at what rate I was going through the letters." It does not appear whether this later account is based on contemporary notes.

*that word* letter by letter—CHESS. The question was whether she remembered a letter she once wrote to me, and what was the subject? Presently came *my father* (*ob.* 1816), and after some conversation I went on as follows:—

“Do you remember a periodical I have in my head?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Do you remember the epithets therein applied to yourself?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Will you give me the initials of them by the card?’ ‘Yes.’ I then began pointing to the alphabet, with a book to conceal the card, Mrs. H. being at the opposite side of a round table (large) and a bright lamp between us. I pointed letter by letter till I came to F, which I thought should be the first initial. No rapping. The people around me said, ‘You have passed it; there was a rapping at the beginning.’ I went back and heard the rapping distinctly at C. This puzzled me, but in a moment I saw what it was. The sentence was begun by the rapping agency earlier than I intended. I allowed C to pass, and then got D T F O C, being the initials of the consecutive words which I remembered to have been applied to my father in an old review published in 1817, which no one in the room had ever heard of but myself. C D T F O C was all right, and when I got so far I gave it up, perfectly satisfied that something or somebody, or some spirit, was reading *my thoughts*. This and the like went on for nearly three hours, during a great part of which Mrs. H. was busy reading the *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which she had never seen before. . . .”

Of those who were convinced of the agency of spirits we shall speak later. But there were other persons of some weight, such as Dr. Daniel, Sir J. Lillie, Sir Charles Style, Dr. Westland Marston, who, although unwilling to commit themselves to any definite theory, yet held the phenomena worthy of serious investigation.<sup>1</sup>

It was not, however, the manifestations of professional mediumship, necessarily limited in their area, which attracted most attention at this time. An epidemic of table-turning had broken out on the Continent in the autumn of 1852, and spread, though tardily, to this country in the early months of 1853. It was found that not only would tables and hats rotate and execute movements of various kinds without the apparent volition or control of those taking part in the experiments, but that answers to questions—and even on occasion information not apparently known to any of those present—could be obtained by this method, a tilt of the table being substituted for the professional medium’s rap. Mrs. Hayden’s performances had been confined to those who

<sup>1</sup> See *Facts and Fantasies*, by H. Spicer (pp. 14–16). London, 1853; and *Mesmerism proved True*, by the Rev. C. H. Townshend. London, 1854.

could pay her price for a sitting, and had been little heard of in the provinces. But table-turning was within the reach of all, and seems to have been practised as assiduously by all classes of society in Bath, Manchester, or Edinburgh, as in London itself.

The table-turning mania reached such dimensions that in June of this year several scientific men, who had for the most part left the professional medium to perform unmolested, thought it desirable to intervene. A committee of four medical men held some sésances, the results of which they communicated to the *Medical Times and Gazette*.<sup>1</sup> Briefly they found, as the result of several trials, that when no expectations were formed of any probable result, and the attention of those sitting round the table was diverted by conversation or otherwise, the table did not move at all. Again, no results followed when half the sitters expected the rotation to take place in one direction and half in another. But when expectation was allowed free play, and especially if the direction of the probable movement was indicated beforehand, the table began to rotate after a few minutes, although no one of the sitters was conscious of exercising any effort at all. The conclusion formed was that the motion was due to muscular action, mostly exercised unconsciously.

In the early part of the same month a *conversazione* was held in the Manchester Athenæum, under the presidency of the Rev. H. Jones, for the purpose of table-turning. Seven tables were employed, of which four were made to turn. The most successful operators were a party of four ladies; and Braid, who was present, suggested that the popular theory of electricity might be tested by placing a circle of brass wire on the surface of the table, and letting the four ladies who had just been so successful in causing the table to rotate when their fingers rested on it hold each a loop of the wire connected with the coil on the table. The experiment was tried, and naturally the table remained at rest. The ladies then discarded the wire, and again placed the tips of their fingers on the wood, when the table moved as before.<sup>2</sup> In an appendix to his *Hypnotic Therapeutics*, dated a few weeks later, Braid refers to this experiment and the other proceedings at the *conversazione*, and points the moral that the movement, when there is no reason to suspect the good faith of the operators, is probably due to unconscious (*ideomotor*) action. He adds that at all the

<sup>1</sup> June 11th, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> From the *Manchester Guardian*, quoted in the *Times*, 13th June, 1853.

experiments at which he had assisted someone had always announced beforehand the direction in which the table might be expected to move, and had thus helped to bring the unconscious expectations of the sitters into unison.

But the most important contribution to the subject was made by Faraday.<sup>1</sup> Faraday, like other thoughtful men, was aghast at the hold which the table-turning mania had gained on all classes of society, and at the loose thinking and presumptuous ignorance which the popular explanations revealed. Amongst the various theories commonly offered to account for the movements of the table he mentions spirits, electricity, magnetism, "attraction" of some kind, and the rotation of the earth! By the use of some ingenious apparatus Faraday showed conclusively that the movements were due to muscular action, and to that alone, exercised in most cases without the consciousness or volition of the sitters. Perhaps the most effective of his test apparatus was the following. He prepared two small flat boards, a few inches square, placed several glass rollers about the thickness of an ordinary pencil between them, and fastened the whole together with a couple of indiarubber bands in such a manner that the upper board would slide under lateral pressure to a limited extent over the lower one. A light index, consisting of a haystalk or a piece of paper, was fastened to the apparatus so as to betray the least movement of the upper board on the lower one. It was found that, in all cases, the upper board moved before the lower board, which rested on the table, showing that the fingers of the operator moved the table, and not—as the sitters themselves supposed—the table the fingers. But the most striking proof that the movement was due to a muscular effort of which the performer was quite unconscious is that when the sitters learned the meaning of the index and kept their attention fixed upon it, no movement followed; "when the parties saw the index, it remained very steady; when it was hidden from them, or they looked away from it, it wavered about, though they believed that they always pressed directly downward."

Later in the same year the whole subject was dealt with by Dr. Carpenter, in the *Quarterly Review*, and the same explanation—the unconscious exercise by the experimenter, under the influence of a dominant idea, of the muscular

<sup>1</sup> See his letter on "Table-turning" originally published in the *Times* of June 30th, 1853, reproduced with some additional matter in the *Athenæum* of July 2nd.

effort necessary to bring about the desired result—was applied not merely to table-turning, but to many of the phenomena of odylic force and electro-biology, including Mr. Rutter's magnetometer and Dr. Mayo's odometer.<sup>1</sup>

But the idea of discerning a mysterious force in this drawing-room diversion was too easy and too fascinating to be so lightly dismissed. The point of view of the average muddle-headed man is amusingly illustrated in an anonymous pamphlet published in the autumn of this year, entitled *Table-turning and Table-talking considered in connection with the dictates of reason and common sense*.<sup>2</sup> The writer finds himself constrained to record his dissent from Faraday's explanation. "It is not," he contends, "with learned theories we wish to have to do . . . we would simply bring common sense to bear on these strange matters." He then proceeds to point out—to Faraday—that "there is a subtle matter which pervades all nature," known in some of its manifestations as electricity. It is true we know very little about it; but for all that, or perhaps because of that, it seems to the writer not unreasonable to suggest that electricity makes the table move. A more apt illustration of the arrogance of sheer ignorance, on which Faraday had animadverted, could hardly be found. But it was with most persons, perhaps, less arrogance than indolence which led to the rejection of Faraday's explanation. It involved a much less mental effort to ascribe the whole business to a mysterious "force," and thus relieve the mind of the task of grappling with the problem in detail, than to exercise the faculties in the attempt to understand other people's experiments in the region of concrete weights and measurements. So the writer in the *National Miscellany*, already referred to, who had scoffed at Mrs. Hayden's performances, is satisfied that the phenomenon of table-moving is "very curious, and at present unexplained; it is supposed to have some connection with magnetism, or electricity, or galvanism . . . or with Reichenbach's odyle." The most popular pamphlet on the subject, which claims to have gone through one hundred and ten editions in the course of the year, is entitled *Table-turning by Animal Magnetism demonstrated*,<sup>3</sup> and founds its theory apparently on a series of experiments conducted by a Mr. Bates, of the Nautical Academy, who found that the movements of the table were facilitated when it was insulated by

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, Sept., 1853. See also *A few sober words of Table-talk about the Spirits*, etc., by John Prichard, F.R.C.S. Leamington, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Bath, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> London, 1853. Anonymous.

glass tumblers or sheets of gutta-percha. Again, Mr. Charles Koch, M.A., Ph.D.,<sup>1</sup> explains the movements by supposing that the circle of experimenters constitutes a life-electric battery, from whom the table becomes charged with vital or "electro-odycal" force, and is thus made as obedient to the will as a member of the human body.<sup>2</sup>

It need not be supposed that Elliotson and his colleagues were backward in welcoming this striking confirmation of their theories. The number of the *Zoist* following that in which the exposure of Mrs. Hayden occurred contains articles from the Rev. G. Sandby, Rev. C. H. Townshend, and Elliotson himself on the table-turning manifestations. Sandby writes from Paris to say that the whole city is excited over the dancing of the tables. He had himself investigated, and considered that "the alleged facts are established beyond a doubt, and that the controversy is at an end."<sup>3</sup> He points out that the motion of the table is constantly produced after a very brief interval, so that unconscious expectation can hardly be supposed to have time to operate; moreover, not only is there no consciousness of muscular exertion, however great the weight moved, and however violent the movement, but the mind is actively on the alert to guard against such an objection. Further, he points out that all agree in describing the curious sensations in the fingers, arms, and occasionally the head, produced by table-turning. Sandby himself had experienced unusual sensations in the tips of his fingers. He concludes, therefore, that "this action of the table, induced by continued contact with a chain of human fingers, is nothing but simple Mesmerism, developing itself in an unexpected phase."<sup>4</sup>

Townshend follows to the same effect. He also had felt unusual sensations after table-turning, tingling in the tips of the fingers, and a peculiar fatigue as if he had been engaged in mesmerising. He is satisfied that the phenomena cannot be wholly explained by muscular action. In his book, *Mesmerism proved True*, published a few months later, he expands his views on the analogy of the table-turning

<sup>1</sup> *Table-moving and Table-talking reduced to natural causes.* Bath and London. No date. ? 1853.

<sup>2</sup> It is curious to find Mr. Maskelyne rowing in this galley. In an interview published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (April 20th, 1885), the correctness of which he afterwards acknowledged, he states that on one occasion, without the presence of a medium, he and a few friends produced movements of a table which he was satisfied could not be accounted for by muscular action alone. He explicitly rejects Faraday's explanation, and inclines to believe in some psychic or nerve force.

<sup>3</sup> *Zoist*, vol. xi. p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Page 179.

phenomena with those of Mesmerism, and even suggests that the rappings may be explained by "some irregular disengagement of Zoogen from the System" of the medium.<sup>1</sup> J. W. Jackson, in the pages of the *Zoist*, offers a similar explanation of the raps, suggesting that they are probably "neuro-electric or odic phenomena."<sup>2</sup>

Elliotson, though more cautious in forming his opinion, is inclined to agree with those expressed by his friends. He had himself met with little success in his attempts to investigate the phenomena; but from what he had heard from others, and especially from the anomalous physical sensations described, and from the conviction entertained by the most honest experimenters that the movements were not of their making, he infers that "there probably is true movement of the tables independent of muscular force."<sup>3</sup> He still, however, apparently adheres to his earlier opinion that the professional rapping mediums were fraudulent.

There is obviously no great difference in the mental attitude of those who thus adopted the phenomena because they lent support to the theory of Animal Magnetism and those who welcomed them as illustrating their own peculiar views of spiritual agency. Both alike exemplified the prepotent influence of dominant ideas in shaping belief. And if the Spiritualist interpretation had less ostentation of scientific method, and its exponents were at times less temperate in their advocacy, they had at least the advantage of expounding a theory which was sufficiently elastic to include the whole of the facts to be explained. This, indeed, is the line of argument which appears to have commended itself to Dr. Charles Cowan, who points out that all "the modern scientific solutions"—and in these scientific solutions he includes the various electric, magnetic, and odylic theories just described—are inadequate to the facts. There is one cause to which all the phenomena point. "Satanic Agency . . . is at least equal to the production of the effects," whilst by the testimony of Scripture it is clearly indicated as a *vera causa*.<sup>4</sup>

The spiritualistic interpretation, indeed, found its strongest advocates in an unexpected quarter. There was a little group of evangelical clergymen, some of them already distinguished for their intemperate attacks on Romanist doctrines, who hastened to discern in the innocent antics

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> *Zoist*, vol. xi. p. 427.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. xi. p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> *Thoughts on Satanic Influence, or Modern Spiritualism considered*, London, 1854.

of the table signs of the coming of Antichrist. On the 16th of June the Rev. N. S. Godfrey, of Leeds, with his wife and his curate, held a meeting for table-turning in the presence of the national schoolmaster and others. After various unsuccessful attempts to induce the table to confess that it was moved by diabolic agency, Mr. Godfrey continues:—

“I was now prepared for a further experiment of a far more solemn character. I whispered to the Schoolmaster to bring a small Bible, and to lay it on the table when I should tell him. I then caused the table to revolve rapidly and gave the signal. *The Bible was gently laid on the table, and it instantly stopped!* We were horror-struck.”

After supper, the experiment was resumed, and the following test was tried: “If there be not a devil, knock twice; to our horror the leg slowly rose and knocked twice.” It need hardly be said that these appalling disclosures were made public without delay.<sup>1</sup>

Thereafter Mr. Godfrey held two or three more sittings, the results of which are detailed in a later pamphlet.<sup>2</sup> On the 4th of July the table admitted, in answer to leading questions, that it was moved by the spirit of a dead man, a lost soul, sent from hell by the devil, for the express purpose of deceiving the circle there assembled, and doomed to return to hell when the nightly task was accomplished. In answer to further questions it was explained that the spirit who had manifested at the previous sitting was not a human spirit, but a fallen angel. On July 18th there came one who claimed to be the spirit of a parishioner (whose name was given, and subsequently verified in the parish register), dead some months previously and buried by Mr. Godfrey himself. This spirit confessed that he had only once before been in the schoolroom (where the séance was held), and then not to attend Sunday-school, but for the carnal delights of a tea-meeting. In earth life he had generally attended the Wesleyan chapel, but now deeply regretted he had not paid more heed to Mr. Godfrey's counsel.

Later in the year the Rev. E. Gillson, of Bath, again after one sitting, published the results of his experience.<sup>3</sup> After

<sup>1</sup> *Table-moving tested, and proved to be the result of Satanic Agency.* London and Leeds, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> *Table-turning, the Devil's Modern Masterpiece.*

<sup>3</sup> *Table-talking: disclosures of Satanic Wonders and Prophetic Signs.* Bath, 1853.

ascertaining that his interlocutor was a departed spirit, who expected in the course of ten years to be bound with Satan and all his crew and cast into the abyss, Mr. Gillson proceeds with his catechism as follows :—

“I then asked, ‘Where are Satan’s headquarters? Are they in England?’ There was a slight movement.

“‘Are they in France?’ A violent movement.

“‘Are they in Spain?’ Similar agitation.

“‘Are they at Rome?’ The table seemed literally frantic.”

Another clergyman of the same school, the Rev. R. W. Dibdin, is inclined to adopt a slightly different interpretation. The spirits at work, he contends, are not those of departed men or women, but of devils.<sup>1</sup> The revelations which he received in answer to leading questions were all of the same general type. The devils all confessed the Pope as the true head of the Church; recommended prayer to the Virgin Mary; taught that Socinius was a good man, and Luther the reverse; that salvation is by faith and works, not by faith alone, and so on.

But whether spirits of men or devils, all these clergymen were agreed that the motive power and the aim were alike diabolic. The inconceivable Godfrey even hazards the conjecture, “Can it be that this is the beginning of Satan’s last struggle, that *on the imposition of hands* the table is endued with power *from the Devil*, as the Lord’s servants, *on the imposition of hands*, were, *in the Apostles’ days*, endued with power *from on high*? I merely ask, ‘Can it be?’”<sup>2</sup>

And in a later work<sup>3</sup> he elaborates the theory that the table-tilting and other marvels are the signs foretold in the Bible which should usher in the reign of Antichrist, and finds in the various economic and social ideals commonly associated with Spiritualism in America strong confirmation of his suspicions. “To prepare the way,” he writes, “for that false millennium, nation is to be induced to rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . . to unite mankind in a universal Brotherhood, and establish a kingdom in the name of Love and Justice.”<sup>4</sup>

A brother clergyman, the Rev. F. Close (afterwards Dean of Carlisle), gave the true explanation of this extraordinary

<sup>1</sup> *Lecture on Table-turning* (delivered Nov. 8th, 1853). Reprinted, London, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> *The Devil’s Modern Masterpiece*, p. 51. The italics are Godfrey’s own.

<sup>3</sup> *The Theology of Table-turning, Spirit-rapping, etc.*, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 111-12.

readiness to accept these trivial performances and to explain them as diabolic. He points out that these clergymen belonged to a school which for generations past had been pre-occupied with the biblical prophecies, and looking incessantly for the signs of their fulfilment.<sup>1</sup> As one of them puts it: "I regard these things myself as signs of the time. *I have for several years expected some decided manifestation of Satanic power.*"<sup>2</sup> It is to this constant looking for signs and wonders that Close attributes various previous secessions from the orthodox Churches, especially those of the Plymouth Brethren and the Irvingites. That it was responsible for the attitude of these evangelical clergymen can hardly be doubted. One of the most naive expressions of this attitude is to be found in a pamphlet by a layman of the same school, one R. C. Morgan, published apparently about this time, which, like many other publications of the kind, reached a circulation of several thousands of copies.<sup>3</sup> Morgan begins by saying that he does not propose to inquire whether the manifestations are genuine or not, or even whether they are natural or not. He contents himself with asking two questions: "Are physical manifestations of Satanic power *possible*? If *possible*, is it *probable* that in the nineteenth century such manifestations should appear?" And he finds no difficulty in giving an emphatic affirmative to both questions. One illustration of his method of argument must suffice. He quotes, as one of the signs to be looked for in the last days, the following passage from Nahum:—<sup>4</sup>

"The chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings."

He then tells his readers, "The next time you see a railway train . . . ask yourself if this is not 'the day of his preparation'"; and points out in a note that railway sleepers are generally made of fir, and that the carriages of a train constantly "jostle" one another in coming to a standstill.

Before taking leave of Mr. Godfrey and his colleagues I must give one more quotation. The phenomena, that

<sup>1</sup> *The Testers Tested; or Table-moving . . . not diabolical.* London, 1853.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. W. Vincent, in a Sermon on "Satanic Influence," quoted by Close, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *An Inquiry into Table Miracles.* Bath and London. No date.

<sup>4</sup> ii. 3, 4.

ingenious writer points out, "appear to be whatever the investigator supposes them to be,"<sup>1</sup> a generalisation which he uses in disparagement of the attempts made by Faraday and others to reduce the phenomena to physical laws. Contemporary critics, however, applied the same principle to his own experiments, and pointed out that *Gulliver's Travels* and *Hoyle on Whist* were as efficacious as more sacred books in staying the gyrations of the table, if employed with fitting solemnity.<sup>2</sup>

Beside absurdities such as these, the ordinary Spiritualist interpretation might almost seem the verdict of sober common-sense. But though, as already said, there were many who, like Robert Chambers and de Morgan, had been profoundly impressed by what they had seen at Mrs. Hayden's, the seed then sown did not in most cases bear fruit until some years later, and Spiritualism found at this period few avowed advocates. One of the earliest converts was Sir Charles Isham. Another was Dr. Ashburner, who addressed a long letter in defence of the Spiritualist position to Mr. G. J. Holyoake, the well-known Secularist, which appeared in the *Reasoner* in June, 1853.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the writer's account of his personal experience, to be quoted immediately, the letter is chiefly interesting for an attempt to base a materialistic explanation of spirits on the hypothetical phenomena of odic force and Animal Magnetism. "I do not contend," he writes, "for immaterial essences, for my limited capacities allow me to conceive the most highly refined essence to be only a form of material being." A train of thought is, he explains, composed of currents of globules; and the human will, also made of globules, can be seen by clairvoyants streaming visibly from the brain. Ashburner went to Mrs. Hayden, he tells us, strongly prepossessed against the subject. He watched Mrs. Hayden attentively, however, whilst a friend was receiving a communication, and could detect no sign of trickery. But it is obvious that he failed to realise the crucial points of the experiment, and his account of the precautions taken does not carry conviction. When his own turn came—

"Having successively placed myself in various chairs, in order that I might narrowly watch Mrs. Hayden in all her proceedings, I at last seated myself, relatively to her, in such a position as to feel

<sup>1</sup> *The Devil's Modern Masterpiece*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Townshend, *Mesmerism proved True*, p. 192; Koch, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> This letter, or the greater part of it, is reprinted in Dr. Ashburner's *Philosophy of Animal Magnetism*, pp. 304-320. London, 1867.

convinced that I could not be deceived ; and, in fact, I was at last obliged to conclude that it was weakness or folly to suspect her of any fraud or trickery. . . .

“In order to obtain an experience of the phenomena in the fairest manner, I asked Mrs. Hayden to inform me whether it was requisite to think of one particular spirit with whom I wished to converse. ‘Yes.’ ‘Well, I am now thinking of one.’ It was the spirit of my father whom I wished to enlighten me. No raps on the table. I had anticipated an immediate reply, but there was for a while none. Mrs. Hayden asked if there was any spirit present who knows Dr. Ashburner. Immediately, close to my elbow, on the table there were two distinct successions of gentle rapping sounds. The next question was, ‘Was the spirit he wished to converse with present?’ ‘No.’ ‘Was there any one present who would endeavour to bring it?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Are the spirits who rap near Dr. Ashburner friends of whom he is thinking?’ ‘No.’ ‘Will they give their names?’ ‘Yes.’ These replies were signified by rappings to questions put, some audibly, some mentally. Mrs. Hayden suggested that I should take up the alphabet, which was printed on a card. I took the card into my hand and pointed at each individual letter with the end of a porcupine quill—my friend Mr. Hoyland, the gentleman of the house, kindly undertaking to put down on paper for me the letters distinguished by the raps. When I arrived at a letter which the spirit desired to indicate, a rapping took place ; but at all the other letters there was a complete silence. In this manner I obtained the letters successively ANN HURRY, the name of one of the most beautiful and accomplished, as well as pious and excellent persons I had ever known. I had not seen her since 1812. She married two years after, and died in 1815. My father and most of the members of the family had been on terms of the greatest intimacy with several branches of the Hurry family, and I had, in youth and childhood, known Ann and her cousins as companions and playfellows. By the aid of the telegraphic signals I have endeavoured to describe I conversed for some time with the charming companion of my early years ; I learned very interesting particulars relating to her happy abode in the spirit world. My curiosity had been excited by the different sounds produced by rappings that I heard close to those made by my friend Ann. I asked for the name of the spirit they represented. The name which came out by the letters indicated on the alphabet was ELIZABETH MAURICE, another companion of the childhood of myself and my brother and sister—another almost angelic being while on earth, but now with her cousin Ann, an inhabitant of the third sphere of Paradise. The authoress of the ‘Invalid’s Book’ and some other works testifying to a pure, gentle, and refined taste conversed with me awhile ; and at last a louder and more decided signal was made to me from the middle of the table. The name I obtained by the telegraphic raps was that of

my father. I asked him to communicate to me the date on which he quitted this world for the spirit home, and the raps indicated '7th September, 1798.' I asked him where the event took place, and I obtained the answer, 'At Bombay.' I asked his age at the time, with many other questions, the replies to which were all quite correct. I kept up mentally a long conversation with him on subjects deeply interesting. . . ."

The séance ended with a communication from Dr. Ashburner's father, which is quoted in full. At subsequent séances communications are alleged to have been given indicating a knowledge of Ashburner's movements and private affairs, and full conviction shortly followed.

Another convert of the same uncritical temper was Robert Owen, the veteran Socialist, at this time in his eighty-third year. Owen had several sittings with Mrs. Hayden and various private mediums, at which he received communications alleged to come, amongst others, from the Duke of Kent, who had been one of the earliest and most influential supporters of his social schemes. The man who in middle life had not hesitated to risk the ruin of all his hopes by proclaiming from a public platform, when he held that honesty required such an avowal, his conviction of the futility and mischievousness of all the religions of the world, was not likely in his old age to be backward in proclaiming his adherence to a new gospel. The advent of a spiritual kingdom, based upon justice and brotherhood, was a prospect which had filled the pious Godfrey with horror. But Owen, throughout his fourscore years, had been looking with the simple faith of a child for the coming of just such a millennium, and now at the last he saw in this new movement promise of a fulfilment ampler than he had dared to dream. He hastened to publish, in the columns of his organ, the *Rational Quarterly Review*, a formal profession of his new faith, and of the grounds on which it rested.<sup>1</sup> And in the following year (1854) he brought out the first part of *The New Existence of Man upon Earth*, the scope of which is sufficiently indicated by its opening sentences:—

"God now commands all nations, through the new manifestations of Spirits from superior Spheres, to prepare for universal peace, that

<sup>1</sup> He also produced, as a separate pamphlet, in the autumn of this year, a manifesto entitled *The Future of the Human Race; or a great, glorious, and peaceful Revolution, to be effected through the agency of departed spirits of good and superior men and women*. In an appendix to this pamphlet he gave detailed accounts of some sittings with mediums, in continuation of those already published in the *Rational Review*.

man may commence on earth a new existence, for which the late extraordinary progress in material, mental, and spiritual knowledge has been the forerunner. . . . The spirits of just men made perfect will accomplish this high task for humanity."

Scattered throughout the country, moreover, there appear to have been other converts of less note, though, as no Spiritualist periodical came into existence until two years later, it is difficult to obtain full information at this period as to the spread of the movement.<sup>1</sup> At Keighley there was published in the autumn of this year a small pamphlet, *Table-moving extraordinary, or a Sermon and a quantity of poetry given, letter by letter, by table-rapping*. The circle consisted of thirteen persons, apparently all men, all of whom sign the account. They received communications by the raps from various persons known to them in life, and specially from one John Mason, of Embsay, near Skipton, described as "a most respectable individual," who, when alive, had occasionally preached in the New Church, or Swedenborgian chapel, at Keighley. This John Mason, by means of the table, gave the circle a sermon, taking as his text Revelation xxii. 12. The sermon, though mercifully short (it occupies less than four pages duodecimo), since it was rapped out letter by letter must have occupied more time in delivery than its intrinsic merits, when considered in cold print, would seem to warrant. At other sittings some poetry was dictated by the spirit of Robert Burns, but in a dialect unknown to Scotland.

It will be noted that the private medium in this case—John Hardacre by name—had not advanced so far as to receive communications through automatic writing. But though writing "under control" had not yet become so prominent a feature of the manifestations as it was destined to become later, it was not unknown even at this early period. We hear, from a Spiritualist source, it is true, of a little girl of four at Ealing who had become a writing medium, and had even written Latin, though, of course, ignorant of that language.<sup>2</sup> Robert Chambers, in the article already referred to, mentions at his visit to Dr. and Mrs. Roberts a slate and pencil lying on the table, though they were not apparently brought into use on that occasion.

<sup>1</sup> In May, 1853, there appeared the first (and last) number of *The Spirit World*, proprietor, W. R. Hayden. This is the only periodical of which I can find any mention at this time.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from W. R. Hayden, dated Sept. 23rd, 1853, published in *Telegraph Papers*, vol. ii. p. 466 (New York).

At his visit to a third medium, however, a "sickly young woman" of English birth, he obtained answers to his questions in writing which was alleged to be automatic. The commencement of the proceedings was not, indeed, of good omen. Chambers asked the gentleman who controlled the séance and acted as magnetiser, a mesmeric "doctor" named Hardinge, whether he might not ask a mental question—a common practice when rapping only was concerned. Permission was granted; but the "spirit" controlling the medium at once wrote through her hand, "I told you before, I do not like a mental question; ask it aloud." When this condition was complied with written communications of a sermonlike consistency flowed freely. This same Dr. Hardinge, in the early part of the following year, delivered a course of lectures at the Literary and Scientific Institution, Portman Square, which were published shortly afterwards.<sup>1</sup> From these lectures, which are largely of an autobiographical character, we learn that Hardinge had been for some years a lecturer on Mesmerism and Electrobiology, and that he undertook to cure epilepsy, hysteria, and all nervous diseases. Dr. and Mrs. Roberts, the American mediums, in the winter of 1852-3, introduced themselves to him at a course of lectures he was then giving on Electrobiology. After witnessing their phenomena, he soon became convinced, was taught by spirits of the seventh sphere that epilepsy was demoniac possession, and enabled by their instructions to cure it. Eventually a member of his own household—the young woman referred to by Dr. Chambers, who later appears on the stage as Mrs. Hardinge—was controlled by the spirits of various dead friends, who wrote through her hand. Several lengthy communications of the usual type are quoted in the lectures. At the time when Robert Chambers paid his first visit Hardinge had with him another medium, a young man suffering from demoniac possession, called Julius Hartegilligan. The demon in this case appears to have prevailed against Hardinge's influence, for a few weeks later Julius Hartegilligan made his appearance at Cheltenham, habited in a white linen robe girdled with scarlet, and equipped with a crimson mantle and a purple cap, in the character of the Jewish Messiah, and thereafter disappeared from the history of Spiritualism.<sup>2</sup>

Hardinge himself appears to have been sincere, and

<sup>1</sup> *A Course of Lectures, etc.* London, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *Cheltenham Free Press* of July 30th, quoted in the *Family Herald*, Sept. 3rd, 1853.

Chambers' brief notice of him corroborates, as far as it goes, the impression derived from his published lectures, that he looked upon Spiritualism less as a means of making money than as a source of religious consolation and of guidance in his profession as a mesmeric healer.

Apart from the fact that his book gives us a glimpse of one of the earliest professional writing mediums in this country, it is of interest because it would appear that it was largely through Hardinge and his medium that Chambers' attention was drawn to the subject. Hardinge records a visit paid to Chambers' house, Chilcotes, Hampstead, at which the usual phenomena were obtained, on the 29th April, 1853, immediately after the writing of the article which appeared in *Chambers's Journal* for May.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Hayden returned to America in the autumn of 1853, and the amusement of table-turning, which had already lost the attraction of novelty, ceased at about the same period to attract the attention of society and the Press. So little, indeed, was heard of it after 1853 that in July of the following year the *Scottish Review*, in the course of a notice of Dibdin's book, writes of it as "the epidemic which has recently prevailed in our country, and which has now, we trust, so nearly run its course that we may treat it as a matter of history."

<sup>1</sup> Chambers never lost his interest in Spiritualism, though his position as a publisher appears to have prevented him from taking a prominent part in the movement. In later years, and down to his death, in 1871, he witnessed many marvels through the mediumship of D. D. Home. He contributed, indeed, an anonymous Preface to Home's book, *Incidents in my Life*, and at the trial *Lyon v. Home* he made an affidavit in the defendant's favour.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INCUBATION PERIOD, 1854-1859

**B**UT the triumph of the *Scottish Reviewer* was premature. There were, indeed, few outward signs of the movement for the next five or six years. At the outset almost the only publications which dealt with the subject were the periodical instalments of Robert Owen's *New Existence of Man upon Earth*. And Owen's interest in Spiritualism was, after all, only of a secondary kind. True to the traditions of a lifetime, he valued the alleged communications with spirits mainly as providing an additional means for the advancement of mankind here on earth. The "spirits" who communicated with him, as he is himself careful to point out, consisted chiefly of persons who had been prominent during the last fifty years in seeking, by their actions or their writings, to promote the general improvement of society, and with nearly all these—Jefferson, Franklin, Shelley, Chalmers, Channing, and not least, the Duke of Kent—Owen had been personally acquainted. The questions which he submitted to these spirits dealt, not with problems of spiritual cosmology, or the occupations of the seven spheres, but with matters of immediate practical importance. When and how should he publish this or that work? To whom should copies be sent? Who should be invited to speak at the forthcoming World's Convention? Who to assist generally in the promotion of the millennium? "Are the Queen, Prince Albert, the King of the Belgians, the Emperor of the French, and the Emperor of Austria the proper persons to form a conservative party to introduce the New Dispensation?"<sup>1</sup>

Even at the World's Convention of May, 1855, "to inaugurate the commencement of the millennium," the subject of Spiritualism was not introduced. A band of American spirits, through the mouth of J. Murray Spear, had, indeed, sent an address to be read at the Convention.

<sup>1</sup> *New Existence*, Part VI. (1855) p. xvii.

The address was entrusted to a famous medium, P. B. Randolph, who presented it to Owen, together with his own credentials, on the day before the meeting. Owing to the stress of business the papers remained unread until after the Convention, and Owen, though at first disposed to regret the incident, recognised later that the introduction of such a subject in such a manner might have prejudiced the success of the cause which he held most at heart.<sup>1</sup>

At a similar Convention, however, held on the same day, the 14th of May, in the following year, entitled "The First Meeting of the Congress of the Reformers of the World," detailed plans for Homes of Harmony emanating from the same spiritual source appear to have been submitted to the audience. These Homes of Harmony illustrated a new order of architecture, based upon circular or curved lines, such as govern the conformation of trees, planets, and the human body itself. From the engravings given in the *Millennial Gazette* they appear to have borne some resemblance to the first rude attempts at a honeycomb made by some kinds of undeveloped bees.<sup>2</sup>

At no time, therefore, could Owen have been reckoned a typical Spiritualist; and his influence on the movement, whatever it may have been, was cut short by his death a year or two later.

During these six years, from 1854 to 1859, in marked contrast to the extraordinary literary activity which characterised the early American movement, there were but few publications of any kind from avowedly Spiritualist sources; and the subject, with one or two exceptions, attracted little notice in the outside Press. The few books of importance, which appeared for the most part during the years 1858 and 1859, will be noticed in the latter part of this chapter. The only paper devoted to the new movement which attained any kind of permanence was the *Spiritual Telegraph*, which was first published in Keighley in April, 1855, under the title of *The Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, and ran until the end of 1859. The paper changed its name in 1857 to the *British Spiritual Telegraph*, and during the last few months of its existence was published in London, under the editorship, or with the assistance, of William Howitt. There were also other more short-lived periodicals, of which the most successful was *The Spiritual Herald*, published in London under the auspices of some Swedenborgian Spiritualists.

<sup>1</sup> *New Existence*, Part VII. pp. 74 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Owen's *Millennial Gazette*, July, 1856.

The *Herald* lasted from February to July, 1856. The *Biological Review* and the *Spiritual Messenger* were also published in London in the winter of 1858-9, and lasted apparently each for a few months only. The first, edited by Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie, was an organ of Spiritualism, homœopathy, electro-dentistry, astrology, Mesmerism, phrenology, "and the Finer Physics generally." Its chief Spiritualist contributors were the editor and Jacob Dixon, a homœopathic doctor and Mesmerist. The *Spiritual Messenger* appears to have been the private speculation of one Carpenter, a Mesmerist who conducted meetings every Sunday at Greenwich, at which a trance medium discoursed, with a collection afterwards. The subject-matter of all these periodicals consisted largely of reports of trance discourses, generally with some name of the distinguished dead at the foot. But no small part of their pages was filled with excerpts from the *New York Spiritual Telegraph* and other American papers. And generally for the first few years the lack of native material to chronicle, as well as the lack of books written in this country, was compensated by liberal importations from America. The works of Davis, Harris, Edmonds, Tallmudge, J. Bovee Dods, Rogers, and many others were largely read and quoted, and no doubt did much to form opinion and prepare for the ultimate spread of the movement on this side.

But America sent a more substantial contribution in the persons of the various mediums who, during these first years, emulating the example of Mrs. Hayden, visited our island. The first and the most influential of these missionaries was Daniel Dunglas Hume, or Home, as he afterwards spelt the name. Home, whose acquaintance we have already made,<sup>1</sup> came to England in April, 1855, when he was just entering on his twenty-third year. According to his own account, he was born in Scotland, but had spent the greater part of his youth and early manhood in America, and had there practised physical mediumship for some four years prior to his coming to this country. One of his earliest public séances took place at Mrs. Hayden's house in March, 1851.<sup>2</sup> When he first

<sup>1</sup> See Book II. chap. iii. In America the name appears always to have been spelt *Hume*; and as *Hume* he was generally known to his English clients and friends during this first visit to our country. The spelling *Home* was, however, adopted by some even at this date, and later came into general use. To avoid confusion, therefore, I have thought it best uniformly to adopt this spelling, especially as the medium himself invariably employed it later in life. For further details on this change in the spelling of the name see below, Book IV. chap. iii.

<sup>2</sup> D. D. Home, *Incidents in my Life*, First Series, p. 9, second edition, 1864.

came to this country he stayed for a short time at Cox's Hotel, in Jermyn Street; later he went as a guest to the house of Mr. Rymer, a solicitor, at Ealing, and spent the greater part of the remainder of this year with that gentleman and his family, giving numerous sésances to Mr. Rymer's friends and neighbours and to various persons of distinction who sought admittance. He claims—and I know of nothing which indicates the contrary—that neither at this nor any later period did he charge any fee or accept any stipulated remuneration for his services as a medium.

The phenomena exhibited at these sésances were of the same general character as those at ordinary professional sésances in America at this time. Raps would be heard on the tables, the walls, and other parts of the room, and would give communications by means of the alphabet. The table would move violently, and frequently rise in the air; hand-bells, guitars, and concertinas placed under the table would be moved about, and, in the case of the last-named instrument—always a favourite with Home—a tune would be played; handkerchiefs, watches, and other articles would be taken from the sitters and moved about the room; touches, as of hands, would be felt on the knees of the sitters, and on their hands as they rested under the table. More rarely hands would be seen above the table, this last manifestation nearly always taking place in a subdued light. I can find no record at this time of the levitation of the medium (which had already taken place on several occasions in America) nor of the fire-ordeal and other more marvellous manifestations. At this date Home's performances seemed to have differed little from those of the ordinary professional medium in America: there is no single manifestation which was not the common property of the members of the guild. Nevertheless, the majority of those who witnessed the marvels offered to them appear to have been profoundly impressed; and in many cases the impression thus produced was permanent. Benjamin Coleman, J. S. Rymer, the Croslands, J. J. Garth Wilkinson, and many others, who later became prominent in the English movement, owed their first impulse to belief to their sésances with Home in 1855.

Amongst those who attended some of the early sésances were Lord Brougham and Sir David Brewster. Owing to a garbled account of what took place, quoted from an American source, having appeared in an English newspaper, the latter thought it necessary to write to the *Morning Advertiser* and furnish his own version of the occurrences, a version sub-

sequently endorsed by Lord Brougham. The impression left by Brewster's own letter and by the correspondence which followed is that he was at first genuinely puzzled by some of the things which he saw, and that the opinion which he formed at the moment was perhaps more favourable than he was able, on later reflection, to maintain, or willing publicly to admit. Home left England in the autumn of 1855, and did not return until the end of 1859.<sup>1</sup>

In 1856 it was announced that the celebrated American medium, P. B. Randolph, had been deputed by the Royal Circle of the Spiritual Heavens to repeat his visit to this country. Early in the following year he appeared at the Charing Cross Spirit Circle and delivered a trance address, which "for power of language and poetical feeling surpassed anything of the kind that the audience had ever heard."<sup>2</sup> He appears regularly to have attended the meetings of the Charing Cross Circle, sometimes giving trance addresses, which professed to be inspired by Sir Humphry Davy and others; sometimes taking part in dark séances, at which lights and shadowy forms were seen.<sup>3</sup>

In the following year Mr. Samuel Owen, a lecturer on Spiritualism, came from the United States and lectured in various halls in London and elsewhere. Owen also conducted "spirit-power" circles, and advertised that he was "prepared to attend families with excellent rapping and tipping mediums."<sup>4</sup>

Again, early in 1859 the Rev. T. L. Harris announced to his congregation in New York that he had now developed into the third apostolic, or missionary, degree, and was deputed to visit England and preach there. In effect he came over in May, 1859, and was introduced to a London audience on the 23rd of that month. He remained in England for some months, lecturing and conducting services in London and various provincial centres. He had apparently outgrown his earlier extravagances, already referred to,<sup>5</sup> and had not yet fully formulated his later and equally extravagant doctrines. His teachings at this time set forth in language of vague grandiloquence a mystical Christianity,

<sup>1</sup> Some account of Home's séances in England in 1855 will be found in Book IV. chaps. iii. and iv., which deal with the subject of his mediumship in general. For a detailed account of the sitting with Brewster see below, chap. ix. of the present book.

<sup>2</sup> *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii. pp. 132, 148, 166, vol. iv. p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. ii. pp. 93, 97, 151.

<sup>5</sup> See vol. i. p. 295 *seq.*

coloured by Swedenborgian and Spiritualist additions. It is not clear that he exercised any deep influence on the Spiritualist movement in this country.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from these American missionaries, professional mediums and lecturers on Spiritualism found hardly any representatives in England during this period. Physical mediumship in general was but little developed, and the class of professional mediums with whom we have become familiar in later times—persons who are willing to exhibit before anyone who is able to pay the prescribed fee—had hardly yet begun to be recognised. Almost the only indigenous medium of any pretensions was Mrs. Marshall, who, assisted by her niece and occasionally by her young son, gave from 1858 onwards regular sésances, which appear to have been open to all comers. Mrs. Marshall's performances were, indeed, markedly inferior to those of Home and the more prominent American mediums in the same line; but such as they were they appear to have satisfied her clients. The accounts given in the newspapers of the time, though meagre and wanting in precision, serve at least to give a general idea of the type of manifestations and of the effect produced upon those who witnessed them. A man who signs himself "T. I. A.," writing apparently in January or February, 1859, gives the following description of a sésance at which he had just been present:—<sup>2</sup>

"Having for some time past heard of the extraordinary 'Spirit manifestations' which are daily occurring at Mrs. Marshall's, I was induced last evening to pay her a visit, and I now send you an account of what I saw and heard, thinking the details may prove interesting to your subscribers. I was accompanied by my wife and my father, and there were two gentlemen besides ourselves present, together with Mrs. Marshall and her niece. After sitting at a table for a few moments, it was suggested that we should throw our pocket-handkerchiefs under the table. The medium (Miss M.) then took a piece of glass, a supply which we ourselves had brought, to ensure the certainty of no collusion; and having smeared it over with a composition of oil and whitening, she held it for a few seconds under the table, and upon removing it the words 'knot upon knot' were plainly written, though wrongly spelled. A second afterwards two of the handkerchiefs were thrown up from the floor, knotted, into the lap of a gentleman present who sat beside me, and the third was firmly tied up in a bunch under the table.

<sup>1</sup> See *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. pp. 96, 104, vol. iv. p. 11; and various lectures published as separate pamphlets in London, Warrington, and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. pp. 109, 110.

I myself saw the handkerchiefs thrown up, and collusion was impossible. My father then asked if the Spirits present were good. The answer rapped out was 'yes.' He then asked, 'Are not these communications from evil spirits?' The reply to this was written on one of the glass plates, held, as mentioned above, by the medium under the table. 'Do you think the devils would fight against themselves by bringing the gospel of Christ?' The next question was, 'Do you believe in Christ?' Answer written as before. 'Yes, you sinners.' A little after this it was intimated that a spirit friend of our own was present. My father then requested if it would write on the glass the Christian name of his mother, who left this world many years since. An assent was given, and upon one glass was written *Do*, on another *ro*, and upon another *thy*, thus intimating that the name, which no one present knew except my father, was Dorothy. Space would fail me to tell you every written communication we had, as they must have numbered fifty. We had manifestations of knocking and table-moving after this; the table was several times moved horizontally, a foot above the ground, and there suspended for some seconds, with merely the hands of the mediums resting upon it. In every instance of this kind it was lowered most gently, and not allowed to drop with its own force. The knocks would come wherever the medium placed her hands, and to convince my father of the power she placed her hands upon his hat which he had put on, and the raps were distinctly heard upon it, and my father felt the vibration of each tap. Such is a brief and meagre account of our visit."

The raps, the movements of the table, and the knotted handkerchief were manifestations of frequent occurrence at Home's séances; the writing on glass is of interest as presenting the rudimentary form of that slate-writing which, later, in the hands of Slade and Eglinton, played so important a part in the history of English Spiritualism.<sup>1</sup> The Marshalls, naturally enough, found imitators, but they were, for the most part, on a humbler scale, and were content to perform anonymously and in semi-private circles. Thus we read in a case recorded by "J. D." (Jacob Dixon) of a table standing at an angle of forty-five degrees without affecting the position of a tumbler half full of water, which had been placed upon it;<sup>2</sup> again, we hear of raps, the knotting of a handkerchief, and attempted levitation at the spirit-power circle, Charing Cross;<sup>3</sup> of spirit lights and 'apports' of

<sup>1</sup> For other accounts of Mrs. Marshall's séances see *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. pp. 27, 55, vol. iv. pp. 157-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. ii. p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 36.

flowers at a Keighley circle.<sup>1</sup> In giving a list of manifestations which he had himself witnessed, Mr. J. Jones, of Peckham, a prominent London Spiritualist,<sup>2</sup> mentions no phenomena beyond those already set down.<sup>3</sup>

The mediums in all the cases cited, as in nearly all instances at this time, were anonymous, their identity being revealed to the initiated at most by initials. Probably many of these persons ultimately became professional mediums, but at this time neither they nor their clients were willing, apparently, to take the risk of wider publicity. In many cases the medium shrank even from so much exposure as was involved in attending a regular circle, such as the Charing Cross or Keighley Circles, and would consent to perform only in the congenial environment of his immediate family or household. A good instance of this kind is afforded by the history of a youthful medium detailed for us at some length in the pages of the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*.<sup>4</sup> Jacob Dixon ("J. D.") was a homœopathic doctor practising in London, who had for many years studied the phenomena of ecstasy and clairvoyance, his attention having been first led to the subject through seeing a patient mesmerised by Elliotson. He had, as he tells us later, become convinced by his investigations of the possibility of communication with spirits. At the height of the excitement caused by Mrs. Hayden's visit Dixon happened to call one day on a friend named E., a professional phrenologist and healer. E. was at the moment holding a séance, the medium (and only other sitter) being a little errand boy, nine years old, employed by him. With the permission of the spirits, Dixon was invited to join the party. He received through raps communications from various friends and relatives, and was informed that his guardian spirits were Job, Enoch, Noah, and Bacon. Conviction came on the moment, and was deepened when at later sittings the raps undertook to prescribe for Dixon's patients, and also for himself. Moreover, an epidemic of cholera in the autumn of 1853 was predicted, to a day, two months before its occurrence.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. i. p. 26. See also *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 94; vol. iv. p. 180, etc. See also vol. iv. p. 118 for an account by Mr. S. Wilks, Hon. Secretary of the Hoxton Spiritualist Society, of the vanishing and sudden reappearance, under spirit power, of an earring belonging to his wife. But the phenomenon in this case took place in the domestic circle, with only those whom Madame Blavatsky called the 'domestic imbeciles' to witness it.

<sup>2</sup> Known to a later generation of Spiritualists as J. Enmore Jones.

<sup>3</sup> *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. ii. pp. 87, 88.

<sup>4</sup> Vols. iii. iv. (1856-7), articles by "J. D." "How I became convinced."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 135.

The manifestations consisted exclusively of raps; and Dixon remarked that there was some excuse for the suspicions—suspicions which he did not himself share—of the good faith of the medium entertained by some who were admitted to the circle, since the lower part of the boy's body was "much exercised" whilst the sounds were being made. Little opportunity was offered, however, to such sceptics, since the spirits rarely permitted anyone but E. and Dixon to share their ministrations, and hardly anyone beyond these two was permitted a second visit. In the course of the few months' sittings recorded by Dixon the raps indicated from time to time that a knife, rabbits, a goat, money (for his mother), and a gun were to be presented to the medium. All these commands were punctually fulfilled by E., except that Robert Owen, who had been an occasional visitor, forestalled him in purchasing the gun. It is but fair to state that the spirits also issued commands—when the punishment for a serious offence committed by Dan was left to their decision—that the boy should be whipped; and that later they prescribed schooling for him. It should be added that E. and all his household, including the medium himself and an elder sister, were originally vegetarians, but the raps ultimately prescribed a meat diet for all.

It will be noted that E. gave implicit obedience to the commands issued through the raps, a feature which we shall meet with frequently. In the history of English Spiritualism Dan and his master had many successors.<sup>1</sup>

Another instance of exclusiveness is furnished by "Jane," the servant of Mrs. de Morgan. "Jane" was a young woman who came to Mrs. de Morgan in 1854. Mrs. de Morgan had in the previous year paid some visits to Mrs. Hayden, and had since been deeply interested in the question of Spiritualism. It soon proved that "Jane" was a medium, her mediumship in the first instance taking the form of rapping and table-moving. But whilst "Jane" was generally successful in the company of her mistress, her powers in this respect were extremely uncertain, and with most persons she failed altogether. Moreover, her ability to produce raps ceased after about two years and a half, and was never renewed.<sup>2</sup>

But, after all, the characteristic manifestations of this period were not these sporadic, and to later critics singularly unconvincing, physical phenomena. That the performances of

<sup>1</sup> This medium, Daniel Offord, afterwards joined the Shakers (see *Spiritual Magazine*, 1872, p. 344).

<sup>2</sup> *From Matter to Spirit*, pp. 19-22.

Mrs. Hayden and D. D. Home had served to arouse widespread interest in the subject has been already shown. But it may be doubted whether the conviction of spiritual agency would have been produced, in any person whose judgment would be worth weighing, by the rapping of tables, spirit lights, and self-moving concertinas. At any rate, as a matter of historical fact, the effect of these physical marvels was, in nearly every instance, supplemented by manifestations of another kind, which in many cases were no doubt free from any reasonable suspicion of dishonesty. It is to the extraordinary outburst of subliminal or automatic activity—visions, trance-speaking, "inspired" writing and drawing—at this period that we must look for the real explanation of the rapid growth of Spiritualism in England during the next generation. By many professional mediums, as in the case of Home and Randolph, the two forms of manifestation were combined. Mrs. de Morgan's "Jane" subsequently developed the power of seeing visions. But for the most part seeing of visions, automatic writing and speaking, were not, as we have already had occasion to note in the case of American Spiritualists, combined with any form of physical mediumship, except the movement of tables, which of course does not necessarily involve deception. Writing mediums or speaking mediums sprang up at this time in almost every private Spiritualist circle. Owen, in his *New Existence of Man upon Earth*,<sup>1</sup> published many communications received by him from private inquirers during the period 1853-5. Thus Mr. Fred. Hockley, of Croydon, shortly after the publication by Owen of his confession of faith, wrote to say that he (Hockley) had studied the subject for some thirty years, through the medium latterly of a young girl and a mirror or crystal. He was now in constant communication by these means with the Crowned Angel of the Seventh Sphere; and was instructed by the "C. A."—for so he is styled throughout the correspondence—to write to Owen, and inform him that the person calling himself the Duke of Kent was an evil spirit, an impostor, and not a member of the Fourth Circle at all. Much correspondence ensued throughout the year 1854, the "C. A." being so anxious for Owen's conversion that at length he indited a letter commencing, "My dear Mr. Owen," to which Owen, as in courtesy bound, forwarded through Mr. Hockley a formal reply subscribed, "To the Crowned Angel of the Seventh Sphere."

<sup>1</sup> Parts vi. and vii.

In the same year, Mr. H. of Luton, a Quaker, sent to Owen an account of his circle, at which communications were commonly received in writing from Milton, Wesley, Shakespeare, and Franklin. The medium in this case was a boy between twelve and thirteen. A specimen of Miltonic prose and several fragments of Shakespearean tragedies, printed at the length of many octavo pages, reveal, it may be admitted, the workings of no intellect higher than that of the average schoolboy. But there is no reason to suspect the schoolboy of dishonesty. Here is an entire scene, stage directions and all, from the tragedy entitled *The Death of Brennus*:—

“Scene: The Seige (*sic*) of Crosuim.

*Brennus*: On, soldiers, on.

(After an obstinate siege of six months Crosuim is taken with an immense slaughter.)

Scene closes.”

Again, the P. family, writing in January, 1855, furnish communications on the Crimean War and other topics of the time from the Duke of Wellington, Nelson, the Marquis of Anglesea, Mehemet Ali, Robert Burns, and others.<sup>1</sup>

There was, again, a little group of Swedenborgians, of whom Elihu Rich was the spokesman, who met regularly to receive instruction through the trance discourses of a seeress named Annie. These trance utterances began at least as early as 1854. Here is an extract from a discourse delivered in June, 1854, on the war, as reported by an anonymous correspondent in the *Spiritual Herald*:—

“Good and truth are represented by England and France, who will fight against the lust of dominion grounded in the false represented by Russia; but it appears as yet that they make but little progress. *Your guide*,” said Annie, “has been to see some wise men in the spiritual world, who have told him that there are wars now in some of the other planets of our solar system. I can only remember one name, that is Saturn; the places at war there are called ‘Ohiea’ and ‘Alfea’; their war originated in a dispute about two words, *which* should be placed on the right side and *which* on the left. Our war *apparently* had no better reason; the cause *seemed* as trivial, for it appeared in the world of spirits as two men fighting for a cross on a piece of paper.

“This war corresponds to the arrangement of the societies in the Grand Man in the large blood-vessel descending from the heart, the Grand Man being composed of all societies from different planets.”

<sup>1</sup> *New Existence*, part vi. p. 93.

Here, again, is a characteristic extract from the seeress' description of a vision, given two years later:—

"The mountain is formed of one large ruby. There are a great many trees and flowers about it, divided into many parts. There are angels talking about the Word in some parts of the mountain; others riding upon white horses, which signifies the understanding of the Word; others washing their hands in a stream of water, which signifies purification of the external man. Some are gathering fruits—they are delights of wisdom from the Word; some gathering flowers—they are arranging truths they have received from the Lord, the flowers representing the truths.

"There is a beautiful angel coming through the clouds. The angel has brought the Word. He came in a chariot with four white horses. The chariot is pure gold. He is reading the Word:

"Stand still, ye works of Jehovah,

"For your Maker passeth by:

"Jehovah will breathe upon you to bless you,

"But keep his works clean.

"Breathe not for instruction,

"But consider your doings;

"For your Maker is just, wonderful, and mighty—

"Jehovah is his name."<sup>1</sup>

The pages of the *Herald* and the *Spiritual Telegraph* are filled with records of similar automatic utterances and writings; discourses from the spirits of John Edmondson or Alexander Hutchinson; "Pages of the Paraclete," a long dissertation on the past history of man and other matters, in the style of A. J. Davis or Linton; accounts of maps and drawings executed under spirit influence; of visions of angels holding scrolls. Nor were our English mediums less fortunate or more modest than their American contemporaries. Goldsmith, Addison, Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Stanley, and Sir Robert Peel are amongst the occasional communicators, whilst Benjamin Franklin, Shakespeare, and Shelley seem to have discoursed nightly. A Newcastle circle reported that on one night no less than five thousand one hundred and eleven spirits had attended them, of whom were twenty Kings and seven Queens of the lineage of David, King of Israel. David himself was present, and amongst the lesser lights were Homer, Cicero, Demosthenes, Luther, Cranmer, and John Knox.<sup>2</sup> At a later meeting Luther undertook to

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Herald*, pp. 193-4. For some further account of this seeress, whose name I have not been able to ascertain, see *Notes on Certain Forms of Spiritualism*, by "E. R." (Elihu Rich), 1858.

<sup>2</sup> *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. ii. p. 44.

teach the members Latin, King David promised elementary lessons in Hebrew, and Noah "gave some very interesting and curious details respecting the state of the antediluvian earth."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Shaw, of Bradford, reported that he had upwards of three hundred pages of unpublished spirit manuscripts;<sup>2</sup> and John Scott, of Belfast, gives a long list of discourses received from names great in the history of mankind.<sup>3</sup> Some of the communications received at this time, as a rule orally, were in "unknown tongues," the translation being furnished by the medium at the time.<sup>4</sup> But this particular manifestation does not seem to have been so frequent or to have attracted so much attention as in America.<sup>5</sup>

To the reader at the present day, familiar as he probably is with the idea of subconscious mental activity, the effect produced by trance utterances and automatic writing on the Spiritualist of forty or fifty years ago is hardly intelligible. It seems worth while, therefore, to examine more closely the process of reasoning by which conviction of spiritual agency was produced, in the typical case of a man whose attention was first drawn to the subject by witnessing and hearing of physical manifestations, and who finally yielded to the accumulated evidence of trance-speaking and "spirit"-writing.

The late Mr. Thomas Shorter, author of *Confessions of a Truth-Seeker*,<sup>6</sup> and some years later editor of the *Spiritual Magazine*, will serve as a case in point. Mr. Shorter was himself in many ways a good example of the best type of middle-class English Spiritualists, a type strongly resembling that exemplified in America by Judge Edmonds, Governor Tallmadge, and S. B. Brittan. In his youth he tells us he had been carried away from the strict evangelicalism of his childhood by the wave of Socialist and humanitarian sentiment which marked the middle period of the century. For a time he found, like others, sufficient satisfaction for his religious instincts in working for the good of his fellows and in contemplating the coming millennium. Later he felt the need of some, it may be, less concrete ideal, and his vague aspirations were sharpened, as he records, by an unforeseen and most painful bereavement. It was about this time that he first heard of the new Spiritualist movement. A mind so situated was little likely to be critical, and Shorter shows throughout his inquiries a simple trust in the honesty and goodwill of the mediums whom he consulted that was

<sup>1</sup> *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 8, vol. iv. p. 257.

<sup>5</sup> See above, Book II. chap. iv.

<sup>6</sup> London, 1859.

hardly surpassed by Robert Owen himself. He was much impressed at the outset by the messages conveyed through the tilting of a table, and by what he heard of the performances of D. D. Home. But it was on the evidence afforded by the mental phenomena that his faith finally rested. Apart from his childlike trust in the good faith of those with whom he had to deal, Shorter was by no means well equipped for an investigation into delicate matters of evidence. In questions of physical science and of philosophy his education was probably not in advance of the middle-class standard of the time, a standard which, as Faraday had shown, fell lamentably short of what was required. Shorter thought little of Faraday; but on the other hand, though unable to agree with his conclusions, he considered Dr. Rogers, the author of the pretentious and muddle-headed *Philosophy of Mysterious Agents*, "by far the ablest" opponent of Spiritualism.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, Shorter was unable to see the true significance of the automatic movements of the table, of trance-speaking, and involuntary writing. He was satisfied that all these actions took place frequently without the conscious participation of the so-called medium. He saw, or believed, that the intelligence shown in much of the trance-speaking was above any possessed by the medium, as he knew her in her waking hours. He saw, moreover, that the intelligence shown was not the result merely of an effort of memory, but that processes of reasoning and judgment went on without apparently the knowledge of the person who was used as a mouthpiece. The theory of unconscious cerebration, as he had apprehended it, was purely mechanical. He illustrates it by supposing an automatic chess-player. That mental acts could take place without being represented in the ordinary working consciousness of the actor was to him incredible. To admit the possibility would be, he contends, to sap the foundations of theology, to violate common sense, and to contradict the whole experience of mankind. If, then, intelligence was displayed which was not that of the person speaking; if, further, the intelligence displayed qualities higher than those of the medium; if occasionally it betrayed knowledge or showed skill not possessed by the medium; if, lastly, the intelligence persistently and passionately claimed to represent the spirit of a dead man—was it not reasonable, he would ask, to accept this intelligence at its own valuation?

Such were the ideas, more or less crudely expressed, ac-

<sup>1</sup> Some account of Rogers' book is given above, vol. i. p. 288.

ording to the understanding and education of the witness, which led to the acceptance of various automatic utterances as genuine revelations from the spirit world. Even so able a man as Dr. Garth Wilkinson, a homœopathic physician, well known for his *Life of Swedenborg*, was more or less under the influence of the same beliefs. He had himself published in 1857 an octavo volume of "impressional" poetry of some merit,<sup>1</sup> and in the same year, in a pamphlet proposing to treat lunacy on the homœopathic principle by mild doses of Spiritualism, he indicates his views of the involuntary writing and drawing. Of these automatic manifestations he speaks as "spirit-writing," "spirit-outflow," and defends this terminology on the ground that, whether proceeding from the subject's own deeper nature or from external sources, the guiding power was alike spiritual.<sup>2</sup>

Another instance is Mrs. de Morgan, wife of the well-known Professor of Mathematics already referred to. Her book, *From Matter to Spirit*, though not published until 1863, deals for the most part with experiences of this period from 1853, when she first went to Mrs. Hayden's, onwards. She soon discovered, as already mentioned, a medium in her own household in the person of a servant, "Jane." But, for Mrs. de Morgan also, the interest excited by rapping and movements of tables was quickly swallowed up in the marvels of automatic writing and speaking and the seeing of visions. Members of her own family and her friends were, as a rule, the mediums for these latter manifestations. Apart from the absolute sincerity and earnestness of purpose which mark the book, it cannot be said that the records are impressive. The proof that the drawings and writings were not merely random products of subterranean mental activities, and the visions but waking dreams of the medium, is made to depend upon tests which at the best must seem wholly inadequate. Sometimes similar drawings would be produced simultaneously by different mediums; sometimes two seers would see independently similar visions; sometimes the vision of one would correspond with the writing given through the hand of another; sometimes a seer would recognise in a photograph the face of some deceased person who had appeared to her in trance.<sup>3</sup> Even if incidents such as these had been of the nature of experiments, instead of, as a rule, mere observations by the way, and if

<sup>1</sup> *Improvisations from the Spirit*, by J. J. G. W. London, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> *The Homœopathic Principle applied to Insanity*, by J. J. Garth Wilkinson, M.D. London, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 36, 67, 68, 71, 81, etc.

they had been recorded with the utmost precision of time and circumstance, they could still hardly be held to justify the momentous conclusions drawn from them.

Mrs. de Morgan's book deals chiefly with symbolism and correspondences, and furnishes an adaptation of Swedenborg's philosophy to modern Spiritualism. But this aspect of the subject bulks still more largely in one or two other books of the time. Mrs. Newton Crosland—known as an authoress under the name of Camilla Toulmin—published in 1857 an account of her experiences, *Light in the Valley*. Both she and her husband had attended some of Home's circles, and had witnessed the usual phenomena. But Mrs. Crosland appears to have been little affected by the physical manifestations, and dismisses them in a few pages. It is on the various phases of automatic activity which displayed themselves in herself and in her friends that her interest is centred. Communications were received sometimes by writing, sometimes by drawing, sometimes by visions, direct or through the medium of a crystal. Of the writing, she tells us that she had enough to fill a substantial volume. Some of the writing was in the mother tongue. But much of it was written in one or other spirit language. Mrs. Crosland's circle included many writing mediums of both sexes, to whom were given by the spirits symbolic names, such as "The Rose," "Comfort," "Confidence," "Expansion." The last-named, an author of repute and a graduate of Oxford, produced a drawing of a wheel, and a description of its symbolism in one of the spirit languages, of which a facsimile is given in the book. After the writing was completed, a translation was furnished. It frequently happened, Mrs. Crosland tells us, that those who wrote the spirit language were unable to translate it, but that a translation would be furnished by another hand. No attempt seems to have been made to analyse the seemingly random curves and angles of which the so-called "spirit language" is composed, or to show that it had really any consistency or significance. Among things terrestrial, if we may judge from the specimens reproduced in the book, this spirit language was most like to a sphygmograph tracing. The following extract from a lengthy account given by the medium "Comfort" of her spiritual development suggests that its "interpretation" was at least sometimes ambiguous:—

"The first drawings were very rude indeed, like the uncertain tottering lines of a child, and also singularly resembling the designs of the very early Italian painters—heads of Christ, angels, and

curious female figures seated within spheres and hearts; and always these drawings were accompanied with strange ornaments of spiral and shell forms, with dots and scroll-like ciphers, which I thought odd at the time, but only months afterwards, when accidentally referring to them, discovered to be the first undeveloped attempts at writing one of the 'spirit languages.'<sup>1</sup>

But more remarkable even than the writings were the drawings to which the last extract refers. These drawings were invariably symbolic; and the symbolism, of a very intricate character, was commonly interpreted at the time by the communicating intelligence. Here, for instance, is the interpretation, given through the hand of "Rose," of one of the simplest of these drawings. The drawing itself, it should be explained, had been produced without conscious volition by the hand of a gentleman whose spirit name was "Confidence." It consisted mainly of a row of seven circles, with crosses inscribed, the picture being filled in with a crescent moon, a sun, a heart, wings, crescents, sphygmograph tracings, etc.

"*The Seven Days of Creation.* The seven spheres, each with a cross, represent the seven days of creation, each day with its crucifixion; each successively created Being a suffering Being.

"The largest cross, at the right hand, as looked at from the world, is the first crucifixion of God Himself in His outer individual human manifestation.

"The left cross, which is the later, and at the present time the least developed, is the mental manifestation, evolving from which is the woman's word, the outer, the inner, and the innermost. Then the cross disappears entirely, because there will then be progression without a cross. Now, in the present age, it is a progression in, and through, and with a cross.

"The whole creation is encompassed by an undeveloped triangle. The universal woman, which is represented by the large half-moon, is encompassed by the undeveloped triangle.

"The wings represent the influence of mind. We at the present time are in the sixth day, as typified by the wings attached to the sixth sphere.

"The sun with a face in it is a symbol of the whole nature of the Divine Powers uniting the undeveloped triangle to the more perfected triune of the heart. The winged heart has a cross in its upper and in its lower section, showing that the lowest as well as the highest organization must be polarized to God by crucifixion or suffering. The spheres in each section of the heart prove that the lowest as well as the highest natures must become spherical through suffering."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pages 127, 128.

<sup>2</sup> Pages 111, 112.

Many of these drawings were extraordinarily complex, and crowded with minute detail; moreover, the design would frequently be changed whilst the work proceeded, one feature being rubbed out and another substituted. Hence it followed that the mere external interpretation of the completed drawing became a matter of some difficulty, and left a certain freedom for individual choice. Thus, of one detail in a complicated picture we have the spirit interpretation in this wise: "To the externally minded it is a balloon, but to the internally minded it is a pair of lutes proceeding from a sphere of light and united by the martyr's palm."<sup>1</sup>

Besides these drawings there were many visions of spiritual things. There were also coloured auras to be seen round living persons, diverse according to their diverse characters: the Duke of Wellington was enveloped in an aura of sapphire blue. Moreover, each person had a spiritual emblem, a kind of crest, which he bore about with him visibly to the spiritual eye. Some of these spirit emblems — arrangements of feathers, circles, arrow-heads, stars, triangles, wings, etc. — are figured in the book; and the authoress suggests that in these psychic accompaniments of our personality we have the foundation of all orders and regalia, and of the science of earthly heraldry.

The book, in short, is imbued with the same kind of mystical Christianity which we have already seen in Mrs. de Morgan's work, but here its extravagances are less restrained, and a personal note is apparent in the insistence throughout the symbolic teachings on the lofty part assigned to woman in the New Moral Order.

From W. M. Wilkinson, brother of the Dr. Garth Wilkinson already mentioned, who, under the signature of "Verax," had given his testimony to Home in the *Morning Advertiser*, we have more records of spirit-writing and of symbolic drawings.<sup>2</sup> In August, 1856, Wilkinson had lost a son, a boy of eleven. A few weeks later his brother, about a year older, began to write, and afterwards to draw, automatically. Soon afterwards Mrs. Wilkinson also drew with great freedom and rapidity. The drawings sometimes represented buildings or scenes, but more commonly flowers. These flowers were, however, as a rule, of no known order. Wilkinson writes of one of them, "It is a beautiful and complex shape, and looks as if it might well have an existence in nature, and be no small addition to the floral world."

<sup>1</sup> Page 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Spirit Drawings: a Personal Narrative*, by W. M. Wilkinson. London, 1858.

The manifestations did not stop here. In a few weeks Wilkinson's hand was impelled to write the "interpretation" of drawings produced by his wife, messages from their dead son, and spiritual discourses. The contagion soon spread. Wilkinson mentions that of seventeen persons of his acquaintance who sat down to write automatically, fifteen were successful almost immediately. Again, in January, 1858, Mr. and Mrs. W. Howitt, who had already through Mrs. de Morgan, the Croslands, and others, witnessed something of the spirit manifestations, paid a visit to the Wilkinsons' house at Hampstead and inspected the drawings produced by Mrs. Wilkinson, all of which had been carefully preserved. A few days later William Howitt's hand began to move, and traced with a pencil rude figures on the paper. Thereafter he too began to write, and for some months received nightly long communications from the spirit world. Both he and Mrs. Howitt also produced symbolic drawings, flowery, architectural, geometric, or resembling oriental arabesques. Together with these drawings were written the spiritual interpretations of them.<sup>1</sup>

The class of persons who claimed by spiritual appointment to be evangelists, prophets, and reformers, of whom T. L. Harris, James Scott, and J. Murray Spear are prominent American examples, was not without its representatives at this time, though here they attracted less attention, and appear to have had few disciples. Of the Cheltenham Shiloh we have spoken in the preceding chapter. Another visionary of the same type, who was indeed at one time in correspondence with Julius Hartegilligan—or "Ecce Homo," as he then styled himself—was Frank Starr. Starr at the time of his first experience was a commercial traveller in Norwich, who had apparently dazed himself with long contemplation of the errors of the Roman Church, the near coming of the millennium, and the wretched state of the poor. One of his first publications was a pamphlet, *On the distressed condition of the Operatives of Norwich*.<sup>2</sup> In June, 1850, he had a vision; he entered a public-house near Greenwich on the first Sunday in the month in order to get some beer and bread and cheese. There he conversed for many hours on the employment of the poor and other matters with twelve men, whom he presently discovered to be angels. At the end of

<sup>1</sup> *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation*, by Mrs. Howitt-Watts, pp. 261-70. London, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Referred to in the *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iv. p. 172. I have not seen the original.

the interview their leader said, "Come, let us anoint him, and set him forth upon his high mission," and therewith placed his hands upon Starr's head . . . On his return to Norwich Starr's friends had him placed in an asylum where, according to his own account, he deliberately, by instruction of the spirits, feigned madness. He was further comforted during his confinement by visions, which, to his great astonishment, the doctors and his keeper were unable to share. On his release and recovery he published an account of his visions and his sojourn in the asylum, and later gave a series of lectures on his experiences.<sup>1</sup> The books are singularly rambling and incoherent, and there can, I imagine, be little doubt that they record, with some fidelity, the dreams of a mind temporarily unbalanced. His works are reviewed in the Spiritualist papers of the time, but he seems to have found no followers.<sup>2</sup>

A more coherent and more influential visionary was J. G. H. Brown, of Nottingham. Brown appears to have been a professional healer; at any rate, he advertised that he was enabled by spiritual power to cure all curable diseases, and was willing to prescribe by letter without a personal interview and without a fee. He was also in person, or by proxy, a seer of visions, and his published spiritual communications are numerous, including *Revelations on the Late War; Important Revelations from the Spirit of Emmanuel Swedenborg and Joseph Smith*;<sup>3</sup> and *A Message from the World of Spirits*; a series of pamphlets issued at monthly intervals and published in book form in 1857. From the last-named work we learn that Brown received many communications from angels and archangels, Gabriel, Michael, Uriel; also from the spirits of the Duke of Wellington, H.R.H. the Duke of Kent, Sir John Franklin, Oliver Cromwell, William Palmer (the Rugeley murderer), and many others. The book contains many revelations concerning the planets and their inhabitants, and is enriched with a map of the spirit spheres, showing the realms of eternal glory.

<sup>1</sup> *A Midsummer Morning's Dream and The Vision of Midsummer Morning's Dream*. Norwich, 1854. *Lectures on Twenty Years of a Traveller's Life*. London, 1867 (?).

<sup>2</sup> See *Spiritual Herald*, pp. 137-41. *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iv. pp. 75, 93, 171.

<sup>3</sup> The full title continues: "Shewing the sacred and Holy Doctrine as set forth by Swedenborg, whose errors are proved unimportant; the Doctrine of Joseph Smith being proved hypocritical and delusive, resulting through worldly ambition; as described in revelations from the spirits of both men, which are sanctioned and confirmed by the Great Angel Gabriel," by J. G. H. Brown, medium. London. No date. (?) 1856.

Further, we learn that in September, 1854, Brown and five friends then present, with seven others to be added to them, were chosen to establish the true principles and creed of the Universal Church of Christ. The medium, it need hardly be said, was the chief of these thirteen persons; in a later chapter he speaks of "this extraordinary book, written by express command of the Supreme Ruler of all things made through his Holy Angels to me, and addressed to the whole human race."<sup>1</sup>

In 1857 Brown founded a paper, *The Community's Journal and Standard of Truth*, devoted to the new evangel. The opening number contains an address to the members forming the community, with the exordium:—

"We, the Spiritual Circle established at Nottingham, having received instructions for the foundation of the Great Universal Organization, by enrolling Members who will pledge themselves to resist all worldly delusions, and to unite their energies solely for the welfare of their fellow-creatures, and the glory of God."

The precise aims of this new organisation are nowhere clearly set forth; but we gather that it was designed to restore the rights of the down-trodden working classes, to remove all tyranny and oppression, to secure justice, equality, and freedom, to amend the laws of marriage and rent, and generally to prepare the way for the millennium, by calling upon England, "tottering beneath the groans of her oppressed people," and on the tyrants and the unrighteous generally, to repent, and take heed because of the calamities which should fall upon the earth before the Second Coming and the Millennial Era. The Socialist ideas thus presented are not unlike Owen's, but the whole is embittered by a strong infusion of Hebraic prophecy, and no doubt by the jaundiced nature of the seer himself. Characteristically, Brown says that though Owen's work is moral and instructive, his spiritual teachings, since they are not at one with those of the Nottingham seer, cannot be depended on.<sup>2</sup> Having proved them for five years, Brown can vouch that his own spirits are celestial, and all others aerial merely, or worse.<sup>3</sup>

From this brief sketch it will have become apparent that English Spiritualism prior to 1860 differed widely in many respects not only from contemporary Spiritualism in

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> *A Message*, etc., p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Community's Journal*, p. 211.

America, but from the later movement in this country. As compared with the movement in America the differences are chiefly of degree. There is a general lack of life and colour on the English side; all phases of the American propaganda are represented, but as in a pale reflection. And there is a marked shrinking from publicity. British Spiritualists had not, as yet, the courage of their opinions. As already shown, books were few, periodicals still fewer, and for the most part short-lived; and their contents, when not quoted from American sources, are very generally anonymous. A like anonymity for the most part protected the native mediums.

Partly, no doubt, the slow progress of the English propaganda is to be attributed to accidental causes. As we have already seen, during the period of the Revolution and for some years afterwards the study of Animal Magnetism was almost at a standstill in France. So the preoccupation of the British public, during a great part of the period now under consideration, with its external concerns, first the Crimean War, and later the Indian Mutiny, may no doubt be partly responsible for a like result in this country.

But apart from this temporary preoccupation and from any differences of national temperament, the conditions of an old and long-settled country, with its authoritative standards of taste and belief, and its comparatively homogeneous public opinion, finding expression through a powerful Press, would in any case have operated to prevent the new belief spreading with the epidemic rapidity which we have witnessed in the United States. Certainly no one would at this time have ventured to estimate the number of British Spiritualists in millions. This view of the case is strengthened if we consider that it was in Yorkshire—a county which had previously given a welcome to the Society of Friends, to the Church of the New Jerusalem, and to various forms of Dissent—that Spiritualism first established itself;<sup>1</sup> and that generally the provinces seem to have shown themselves more receptive than the Metropolis. In London, for the greater part of the period under review, there was no Spiritualist paper and no stable

<sup>1</sup> Keighley, the chief provincial centre of English Spiritualism, had apparently been for some years notable for the activities of a little band of Secularists, and it was among these Secularists, of whom D. W. Weatherhead, the founder of the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, was the leader, that Spiritualism found its first converts (see *Westminster Review*, January, 1862, and *Spiritual Magazine*, 1875, p. 475.)

organisation. We hear, indeed, so early as January, 1857, of the Charing Cross Spirit-Power Circle, of which John Jones, of Peckham, was the chronicler.<sup>1</sup> In July of the same year this seems to have given place to the London Spiritualistic Union, with W. Turley, a lecturer and professional Spiritualist agent, as secretary.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Jones, however, formally separated himself from this body, and formed a "Circle of Spherical Harmony" on his own account.<sup>3</sup> In July, 1858, the London Spiritualistic Union gave place to the London Spiritualist Union, with Dr. Dixon as secretary.<sup>4</sup> But it was not until February, 1859, that a fairly representative committee was formed, including Ashburner, Dixon, Jones, Turley, and Shorter, with William M. Wilkinson as secretary.<sup>5</sup> A public library of Spiritualist works was also formed about the same time at Dixon's house.<sup>6</sup>

Again, for like reasons, there was little tendency in this country to make spirit revelations the foundation of a new creed. Not only amongst the little band of Swedenborgians and Christian mystics whose writings we have just been considering, but throughout the country, Spiritualism was regarded, with few exceptions, as supplementing rather than as supplanting the older revelation. Even those who, like Shorter, claimed to have been converted from unbelief by this means, appear as a rule to have been converted to Christianity.

As compared with later developments in this country, the salient characteristic is the attitude of the believer to the phenomena in general, and especially to the physical phenomena—an attitude of naïve and unquestioning acceptance. There were no tests; and consequently no "exposures." Accounts of séances with Home or Mrs. Marshall show, coupled with complete ignorance of the possibilities and methods of fraud, an almost ludicrous confidence in the medium. We have already had occasion to record Dixon's conviction, notwithstanding suspicious appearances, of the integrity of the errand-boy Dan; and the cheerful obedience yielded by Dan's master to the spirits' behests. But in fact the writers of the period lay little stress upon the physical phenomena. They were accepted as genuine, but comparatively unimportant; and few thought it worth while to give any detailed account of them. Mrs. Crosland, as

<sup>1</sup> *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. pp. 126, 131, vol. iv. p. 13, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. i. p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. pp. 85, 112.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii. pp. 97, 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 190.

already mentioned, hurries over her experiences with Home to get to the psychological phenomena. Shorter mentions "the simple fact that heavy bodies frequently moved without touch or contact"; and, again, gives a list of the marvels which he had seen, including tables rising from the floor, cantering round the room, and tilting at an angle of forty-five degrees with all the objects on them remaining unmoved. But he gives not a single case in detail.<sup>1</sup> And Mrs. de Morgan thinks "that instances of tables rising from the floor to the height of three or four feet are so well attested" that it is hardly necessary for her to refer to them.<sup>2</sup>

Attention was thus concentrated by preference, not on the actual rappings, or the movements of tables and chairs, but on the content of the messages delivered by these and other means. And the same perfect confidence was shown throughout. In the case of the automatic writers, drawing mediums, and seers, whose performances are chronicled by Wilkinson, Mrs. Crosland, and others, there is no reason to suppose that this confidence—so far as the personal character of the medium is concerned—was as a rule misplaced. Automatism of the kind is now, no doubt, sufficiently recognised as a genuine manifestation. But with professional mediums, or with persons whose mediumship brought them any advantage in coin or kind, a less childlike trustfulness might have been good for the souls of both parties. When the raps referred to "butiful riting," where an educated mortal would have spoken of *beautiful writing*, the explanation offered, that the spirits were forced to accommodate themselves to the illiterate organism through which they worked, gives less satisfaction to the modern reader than it apparently gave to the Spiritualist of the fifties.<sup>3</sup> Or again, when Jacob Dixon writes: "Matilda, it has been given me to understand, is the name of my Mother in the Spirit World," a less robust faith suspects that the medium had employed this artifice to disguise a bad shot at the proper name.<sup>4</sup> A like indulgence was accorded even to the celestial interlocutors. Not all the spirits, obviously, who claimed to be Shelley, Bacon, or Luther could have substantiated their claim. But the early Spiritualist would not therefore have felt justified in suspecting their good faith.

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions of a Truthseeker*, pp. 62, 91, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *From Matter to Spirit*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. *From Matter to Spirit*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. p. 279.

These names, no doubt, might be considered "generic terms for some species of intellectual influence."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the faith of the early English Spiritualists. In the next two decades, it need hardly be said, this faith was more than once rudely shaken.

<sup>1</sup> *From Matter to Spirit*, p. 289.

## CHAPTER III

### THE AMERICAN INVASION, 1860-1870

**I**N 1860 the movement enters upon a new phase. The next twenty years constitute the classic period of English Spiritualism. From this date onwards the movement is continuously represented in London, as well as in the provinces, by one or more periodicals of good standing and conducted with some literary ability. The miscellaneous publications devoted to the subject rapidly increase, and for the most part the veil of anonymity is dropped. More and more attention is given to Spiritualism by the outside Press; and it even figures in caricature and pantomime as a subject of popular interest. The number of those who are not ashamed to confess their interest—a number now including many men and women of distinction in various departments—is continually growing. In a word, the movement, emerging from the semi-private phase which we have considered in the last chapter, now receives a late but wide and ever-widening publicity.

This change is coincident with, and is no doubt largely consequent on, the greater activity of professional, and especially of physical, mediumship. Mrs. Marshall throughout this period was giving séances, and her originally scanty repertory was enriched, especially towards the end of the decade now under review, with many novel and, it would seem, highly attractive feats. Home had returned to England with undiminished powers in the winter of 1859; and a long succession of American mediums, of whom Squire, Redman, Foster, Colchester, Conklin, and the Davenport Brothers were the most conspicuous, visited our shores during the next ten years.

In the summer of 1860 there appeared almost simultaneously in two leading periodicals articles on the spirit manifestations. The writer of "Modern Magic," in *All the*

*Year Round*,<sup>1</sup> then conducted by Charles Dickens, had attended a séance at Mrs. Marshall's rooms in Red Lion Street. The phenomena which he witnessed—movements of the table, raps, sounding of a guitar and a bell under the table or in the dark—were all, he is convinced, due to trickery, the only "mediums" in the case being Mrs. Marshall's fingers and toes. The whole performance was a "dull and barefaced imposition," and he hardly knows whether to wonder most at "the unblushing impudence of the actors or the marvellous credulity of the spectators." Finally, he enters an indignant protest against the cruelty and wickedness of those who gain a sordid living by preying on the affection and reverence paid to the dead.

A writer in the *Cornhill Magazine*,<sup>2</sup> afterwards acknowledged to be Robert Bell, the well-known dramatist and critic, under the title "Stranger than Fiction," has a different story to tell. He also had visited the Marshalls and other mediums, but had seen things which he was satisfied were "beyond the pale of material experiences." After recounting some of these, he ends with a detailed description of a sitting with Home. The company sat round a large table, placed near the window—the part next the window being left vacant. Paper, pencils, an accordion, and a few flowers were placed on the table. All the lights were extinguished by the command of the spirits, and the room was illumined only by the occasional flicker of a dying fire and the faint grey light coming through the window. At this stage, the writer says,

"we could see, but scarcely distinguish, our hands upon the table. A festoon of dull, gleaming forms round the circle represented what we knew to be our hands. An occasional ray from the window now and then revealed the hazy surface of the white sheets [*sc.* of paper] and the misty bulk of the accordion."

But even this gloom was not sufficiently profound for the requirements of the spirits, for presently the window-blind was drawn down by an invisible hand, "and the room was thrown into deeper darkness than before." Then and then only the manifestations began: hands were felt under the table, touching the knees and pulling the clothes of the sitters; a handbell was rung by the invisible agency;

<sup>1</sup> July 28th, 1860.

<sup>2</sup> August, 1860. The *Cornhill* was then edited by Thackeray, who vouches for the good faith of his contributor.

“While this was going forward the white sheets were seen moving, and gradually disappeared over the edge of the table. Long afterwards we heard them creasing and crumpling on the floor, and saw them returned again to the table; but there was no writing upon them. In the same way the flowers which lay near the edge were removed. The semblance of what seemed a hand, with white, long, and delicate fingers, rose up slowly in the darkness, and bending over a flower, suddenly vanished with it. This occurred two or three times; and although each appearance was not equally palpable to every person, there was no person who did not see some of them. The flowers were distributed in the manner in which they had been removed; a hand, of which the lambent gleam was visible, slowly ascending from beneath the cover and placing the flower in the hand for which it was intended. In the flower-stands in the adjoining window we could hear geranium blossoms snapped off, which were afterwards thrown to different persons.

“Still more extraordinary was that which followed, or rather which took place while we were watching this transfer of the flowers. Those who had keen eyes, and who were in the best position for catching the light upon the instrument, declared that they saw the accordion in motion. I could not. It was as black as pitch to me. But concentrating my attention on the spot where I supposed it to be, I soon perceived a dark mass rise awkwardly above the edge of the table, and then go down, the instrument emitting a single sound produced by its being struck against the table as it went over. It descended to the floor in silence; and a quarter of an hour afterwards, when we were engaged in observing some fresh phenomena, we heard the accordion beginning to play where it lay on the ground.”

The writer then expatiates on the “divine tenderness” of the wondrous music produced by the accordion. The climax of the sitting was as follows:—

“Mr. Home was seated next the window. Through the semi-darkness his head was dimly visible against the curtains, and his hands might be seen in a faint white heap before him. Presently he said, in a quiet voice, ‘My chair is moving—I am off the ground—don’t notice me—talk of something else,’ or words to that effect. It was very difficult to restrain the curiosity, not unmixed with a more serious feeling, which these few words awakened; but we talked, incoherently enough, upon some indifferent topic. I was sitting nearly opposite Mr. Home, and I saw his hands disappear from the table, and his head vanish into the deep shadow beyond. In a moment or two more he spoke again. This time his voice was in the air above our heads. He had risen from his chair to a height of four or five feet from the ground. As he ascended higher he described his position, which at first was perpendicular, and after-

wards became horizontal. He said he felt as if he had been turned in the gentlest manner, as a child is turned in the arms of a nurse. In a moment or two more, he told us that he was going to pass across the window, against the grey, silvery light of which he would be visible. We watched in profound stillness, and saw his figure pass from one side of the window to the other, feet foremost, lying horizontally in the air. He spoke to us as he passed, and told us that he would turn the reverse way, and recross the window; which he did. His own tranquil confidence in the safety of what seemed from below a situation of the most novel peril gave confidence to everybody else; but, with the strongest nerves, it was impossible not to be conscious of a certain sensation of fear or awe. He hovered round the circle for several minutes, and passed, this time perpendicularly, over our heads. I heard his voice behind me in the air, and felt something lightly brush my chair. It was his foot, which he gave me leave to touch. Turning to the spot where it was on the top of the chair, I placed my hand gently upon it, when he uttered a cry of pain, and the foot was withdrawn quickly, with a palpable shudder. It was evidently not resting on the chair, but floating; and it sprang from the touch as a bird would. He now passed over to the farthest extremity of the room, and we could judge by his voice of the altitude and distance he had attained. He had reached the ceiling, upon which he made a slight mark, and soon afterwards descended and resumed his place at the table. An incident which occurred during this aerial passage, and imparted a strange solemnity to it, was that the accordion, which we supposed to be on the ground under the window close to us, played a strain of wild pathos in the air from the most distant corner of the room."<sup>1</sup>

It may be added that Dr. Gully, a well-known physician of Malvern, who had also been present at this séance, wrote in October of the same year to the *Morning Star*, corroborating and supplementing the account given by the writer in the *Cornhill Magazine*.<sup>2</sup>

A remarkable testimony to Home's ability, whether as medium or simply as conjurer, is the position which he succeeded in maintaining in society at this time, and indeed throughout his later life, and the respectful treatment accorded to him by many leading organs of the Press. No money was ever taken by him as the price of a sitting; and he seems to have had the *entrée* to some of the most aristocratic circles in Europe. He was welcomed in the houses of our own and of foreign nobility, was a frequent guest at the

<sup>1</sup> A criticism of this and other accounts of Home's mediumship will be found below, Book IV. chaps. iii. and iv.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Gully's letter is quoted in full in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1861, p. 63.

Tuileries, and had been received by the King of Prussia and the Czar. Some three years after this date, when he published the first volume of *Incidents of My Life*, the *Times* accorded him a review three columns in length, giving copious extracts from the book, and inviting in courteous terms the author's explanation of some suspicious circumstances connected with his career.<sup>1</sup> Home, a few days later, in vindicating his character refers to the generous treatment accorded to him.<sup>2</sup> So strong, indeed, was his position that he was able to compel an ample apology from a gentleman who had publicly expressed doubts of the genuineness of his mediumistic performances,<sup>3</sup> and to publish a violent and spiteful attack upon Browning on the occasion of the publication of *Sludge*.<sup>4</sup> His expulsion from Rome in 1864 on the charge of sorcery gave to Home for the time an international importance.

Another prominent medium in the year 1861 was J. R. M. Squire, one of the editors of the *Banner of Light*, an American Spiritualist paper which has been described "as in no way surpassing the *Saturday Review*."<sup>6</sup> Squire was apparently introduced to London society under Home's auspices, and later in the year was presented at Court by the American minister. Like Home, he seems to have given his sittings without payment. His performance included the usual rapping, movements of tables, and direct writing; but his speciality is described as follows by one of his most distinguished converts, the late Dr. Lockhart Robertson:—

"*Lifting Weight and breaking a large Table*.—A heavy circular table, made of birch and strongly constructed, was lifted a somersault in the air and thrown on the bed, the left hand only of Mr. Squire being placed on the surface, his other hand held, and his legs tied to the chair on which he sat. The table was afterwards twice lifted on to the head of the writer and of Mr. Squire. Only a strong force applied at the further side of the circular top could have produced this result. This force Mr. Squire, as is evident from his position (standing close to the writer at one point of the circle with his hands tied), could not have exerted. The efforts of the writer to prevent this lifting of the table had no influence on the strange unseen force applied to lift the table thus against his wish and force."

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, 9th April, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16th April, 1863.

<sup>3</sup> Captain Noble, in the *Sussex Advertiser* of March 23rd, 1864. The letter of apology is reprinted in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1864, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1864, p. 315.

<sup>5</sup> By Dr. Lockhart Robertson, in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1860, p. 343.

During the performance, it should be added, the circle, which consisted on this occasion of Dr. Lockhart Robertson and two friends, Mr. Critchett and W. M. Wilkinson, were in the dark, a screen being placed before the fire.<sup>1</sup> If Squire had the free use of his limbs, or of some of them, there is nothing to forbid the supposition that he performed the feat by muscular force alone; indeed, it was successfully imitated under those conditions, as Howitt himself describes, by an eminent English surgeon.<sup>2</sup> As the feat was always performed in darkness, under conditions dictated by the medium himself, I see no reason to doubt that Squire was able to use as many of his arms and legs as he required.<sup>3</sup>

In the course of the next three or four years, from 1860 to 1864, several American exponents of a new form of mediumship—Bly, Redman, Conklin, Colchester, and Foster—visited our island. The first-named, indeed, seems to have attempted to double the part of "medium" and exposé of Spiritualism; at any rate, he owned to performing his marvels by trickery.<sup>4</sup> Neither Redman nor Conklin appears to have attained great fame in this country. Finally, Colchester and Foster were actually detected in trickery by Spiritualists.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the first-named was some years later compelled by the verdict of an American jury to take out a licence as a juggler;<sup>6</sup> and Foster's moral character was regarded as hopelessly tainted.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as the very persons who had suspected or detected trickery were convinced that both Colchester and Foster exhibited at times genuine spirit manifestations, and as the performances of the latter, especially, are constantly quoted in later Spiritualist works as remarkable instances of mediumship, it seems worth while to consider them in detail. And for another reason these records of Foster's performances call for some consideration. They were regarded at the time, and are still regarded by many, perhaps by most, Spiritualists as at all events proofs of clairvoyance. In view

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Dialectical Society*, pp. 249-50. The account appeared originally in the *Spiritual Magazine*, April, 1860, a few weeks after the occurrence.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1863, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> There is nothing in the account given to forbid the supposition that Squire may have supplemented his muscular powers by mechanical means, e.g. by a rod concealed in his sleeve, or by a hook or other mechanical support attached to his person. See Dr. Hodgson's account (*Journal S. P. R.*, vol. vii. pp. 49, 50) of a similar apparatus.

<sup>4</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1861, p. 92.      <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1862, pp. 45, 153, 546.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from American papers in *Spiritual Magazine*, 1865, p. 464.

<sup>7</sup> In *Spiritual Magazine*, 1863, p. 147, the editor writes that he has received from Judge Edmonds such "sickening details of his criminality in another direction that . . . we should no longer soil our pages with his mediumship."

of the later manifestations through Mrs. Piper, which have so far resisted all attempts at hostile analysis, it is worth while to show what was the utmost that deliberate fraud could achieve in the early sixties.

Attention was publicly called to Foster's mediumship in the spring of 1862 by an article in the *Times*, written in a spirit of good-humoured tolerance which would much surprise readers of that austere journal at the present time. The *Times'* special correspondent appears by no means sure that what he saw was all to be explained by conjuring, and at any rate was satisfied, if it were, that he had his guinea's worth.<sup>1</sup> Even the leader-writer admits that some of the feats seem "startling and inexplicable."<sup>2</sup> On the reports furnished by most contemporary writers, Foster's performances, like those of mediums and of conjurers generally, may well have seemed inexplicable. Here, for instance, is a fairly full account, not indeed of what actually took place, but of what, at a successful séance, the sitter was induced to think had taken place. Mr. H. Spicer called upon Foster at his lodgings. After some conversation,

"Mr. Foster then said he was about to leave the room, and desired me, when left alone, to tear off some ten or twelve slips of paper, write upon each of them the name of some deceased friend; roll each slip up so tightly as to be a mere shapeless lump of paper; then roll up as many more as I pleased, in the same manner, but *blank*, and mix the whole together in a heap on the table. Having given these instructions, he left the room, closing the door, and went upstairs. . . . I then wrote down the names of six or seven deceased friends or acquaintances, purposely including one or two with whom the lapse of years had made my thoughts of late but little familiar; rolled up the strips with at least thirty others (*blank*) and flung the whole in a confused heap on the table, so as to be completely indistinguishable, even to myself. Mr. F., presently returning, handed me the pencil and alphabet, and, after a little 'spirit' jargon, the written slips were selected from the rest, and the names they bore spelled out [*i.e.* by the raps] with unfailling precision. . . . In reality I myself was not aware of the name contained in the slip under consideration until spelled out. Mr. F. afterwards varied his experiments by exhibiting the several names written in large rosy characters, as though scratched with a bramble, on his arm, but these may be set aside as easily producible by chemical means; and, indeed, I have heard of an accomplished young lady who has declared that they can, with a little practice, be produced at pleasure upon any arm, and who proved it by writing them on her own. Mr. F.'s remarks upon the spiritual agency were of the usual

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, 13th March, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 15th March.

character, and not worth recording. But to revert, for a moment, to the only point really deserving attention, the clairvoyant reading, I confess I am at a loss to suggest any explanation of this complete and clever mystery, or mystification, excepting that it is clairvoyance."<sup>1</sup>

If this were all, it would be difficult to suggest an explanation of the mystery. But Spicer, like other "good" sitters, omits to mention, and probably did not at the time regard as of any importance, some actions of Foster's. After the séance had commenced, and at intervals during its progress, Foster would take up the pellets in his hands, and mix them together—"make hay of them," as a correspondent of the *Times* puts it.<sup>2</sup> Again, he probably asked his sitter, at an early period of the sitting, to look under the table, and satisfy himself that the raps were not produced by mechanical means;<sup>3</sup> or perhaps he held a piece of paper and a pencil under the table, and tried to get a name written by the spirits,<sup>4</sup> or drew his client's notice to a "spirit standing behind his chair."<sup>5</sup> It only becomes clear when several accounts are pieced together and compared that Foster habitually handled the pellets during the sitting, thus giving himself the opportunity of abstracting some from the heap; and that he habitually employed one device or another to distract the attention of the sitters whilst he read them. The account just quoted from Spicer affords an interesting illustration of the methods employed. It will have been observed that Spicer was recommended to include several blank papers amongst his pellets. This particular piece of advice was not tendered when there were several sitters, each contributing three or more pellets. The reason is obvious. From a heap of thirty pellets four or five might be safely abstracted without much risk of detection, but the absence of even one pellet from a scanty half-dozen would be liable to attract attention.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Strange Things Among Us*, pp. 207-9, by H. Spicer. London, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, March 17th, 1862; see also the accounts given by John Jones and Jacob Dixon of sittings with Redman (*Spiritual Magazine*, 1860, pp. 375, 378).

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1862, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> T. P. Barkas, *Outlines of Ten Years' Investigations*, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Letter in the *Times*, 17th March, 1862.

<sup>6</sup> At some séances given in America in 1872 Foster appears to have discarded the somewhat clumsy device employed in the sitting with Spicer just described. He boldly palmed the pellets, and substituted others. He found an opportunity for reading the pellets by continually relighting the cigar which he smoked throughout the sitting, the match being held in the hollow of his hand, as if to shelter it from a draught. At the critical point in his third sitting Mr. Truesdell, the sitter, seized the pellets on the table, and found them blank. Foster

A feature of Foster's séances upon which much stress was laid at the time was his ability, on occasion, to name and describe spirits whose names had not been previously written on the pellets. The chief instances which I have come across in the literature of the time are concerned with Mr. and Mrs. William Howitt and Colonel Drayson;<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ashburner and two friends;<sup>2</sup> and—on the occasion of a visit to Newcastle, to which he was invited by T. P. Barkas—his host and Dr. McLeod, sometime Secretary of the Spiritualist Association in that town.<sup>3</sup> It would be doing less than justice to Mr. Foster's undoubted abilities to suppose that he had neglected any opportunity of working up the dossiers of the prominent Spiritualists—and all the persons named were prominent in the movement—whom he was likely to meet.

The writing on the arm, it need hardly be said, may be imitated by any person on his own skin with a blunt pencil. And it is noteworthy that some sitters, more observant than the rest, have recorded that spasmodic movements and contortions of the medium's body preceded this manifestation.<sup>4</sup>

Of all the American mediums who from time to time during the last half-century have visited Europe none, perhaps, with the single exception of Home, have achieved so immediate and so wide a fame as the Davenport Brothers. For the initiated, indeed, their fame had already preceded them. Dr. Loomis, Professor of Chemistry and Toxicology in the Georgetown Medical College, U.S.A., had investigated the manifestations occurring in their presence, and had published his conviction that they were produced by a

then appears, after a little persuasion, to have owned up. (See *Bottom Facts Concerning Spiritualism*, p. 133. New York, 1883.)

<sup>1</sup> *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation*, p. 275, by Mrs. Howitt Watts.

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophy of Animal Magnetism*, p. 320. Ashburner does not give the names of his friends.

<sup>3</sup> *Outlines of Ten Years' Investigations*, pp. 111-31. Barkas gives a very full and unprejudiced account of several sittings with Foster, conducted under fairly good conditions, and reported at the time by himself. A careful study of these records serves to strengthen the conclusion indicated in the text: there is nothing recorded by Barkas which could not have been accomplished by a smart conjurer who kept his wits about him; and his failures (*e.g.* to indicate relationship until he had had hints from the sitters) are extremely significant.

<sup>4</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1862, p. 46 (see also p. 45, letter from Jones and Allman); *Times*, March 17th, 1862; Barkas, *op. cit.*, p. 114. Truesdell (*op. cit.*, p. 166) describes in detail how Foster actually effected the writing on the arm. Carpenter (*Quarterly Review*, Oct., 1871) suggests that Foster read the names written by following the motion of the top of the pencil. But this explanation would obviously not fit all cases. In the *Seybert Report* (pp. 142-6) is an account by Dr. Furness of the methods employed for reading pellets by J. V. Mansfield, the "Spirit Postmaster." Mansfield's methods appear to have been much clumsier than Foster's.

power with which he was unacquainted. His report was reproduced at length in the *Spiritual Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the brothers came to this country under singularly fortunate auspices. They brought in their train not only a colleague named Fay, and the customary business manager, Palmer, but a chaplain, in the person of the Rev. J. B. Ferguson. Ferguson, as we have already seen,<sup>2</sup> was a man of considerable ability, high standing, and unquestioned sincerity. He appears to have accompanied the Davenports in order at once to testify to their good faith and to expound the philosophy of Spiritualism. There can be little doubt that his presence, and the guarantee implied, did much to secure that favourable prepossession on which, as we shall later see reason to believe, a medium's success primarily depends.<sup>3</sup>

The brothers were introduced to representatives of the Press at a meeting held at the house of Dion Boucicault, the dramatist, at the end of September, 1864. From a letter to the *Standard*<sup>4</sup> we quote the following account of the first part of the proceedings:—

" . . . I was there from the beginning, and came upon the field of action as soon as the walnut cabinet (made very like a clothes-press or wardrobe) was erected on its trestles at one end of the apartment, with its back to the chimney. I examined it and found it too simple in construction to admit of any concealed machinery, and merely noted that the three doors into which its face was equally divided fastened on the inside by a flat and easily moved bolt, and that the middle door had a lozenge-shaped aperture in the upper portion, curtained from the inside with a small square of dark velvet. At sitting height round the inside of the cabinet was a narrow plank. On this at the opposed sides the Brothers Davenport took their seats facing each other; and as they so sat the closing of the door nearest either hid him from sight. Any two gentlemen of the company were then invited to bind them firmly with ropes, then produced, to the bench, hand and foot, as well as either knew how. One of the volunteers who presented himself for this office was nautical, and, accordingly, profound in the matter of knots. He had no doubt of the perfect rigidity of his fastening, nor indeed had the other gentleman, nor any of the company who

<sup>1</sup> 1864, p. 416.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I. p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Several of the newspaper correspondents, in describing the Davenports' performances, take occasion to refer to Ferguson, and almost invariably with respect. Thus the *Lancet*: "His earnest and solemn appeal [to the audience to consider the phenomena seriously] was admirable"; and again, "a somewhat weak-headed but right honest gentleman" (*Lancet*, 29th Oct., 1864). Others refer to his intellectual abilities; thus Edwin Arnold in the *Daily Telegraph* (4th Oct. 1864): "a decidedly remarkable man, as those who encountered him in metaphysical discussions will probably acknowledge." <sup>4</sup> 3rd Oct., 1864.

examined the complicated ligatures which, passing through holes perforated in the bench, and connecting the ankles with the wrists of the patients, seemed to render all free motion, at any rate of arms or feet, an impossibility. It was suggested that the knees should also be made fast, but this was not deemed necessary. A guitar, a fiddle with its bow, a tambourine, a very heavy brass speaking-trumpet . . . and two handbells . . . were placed between the prisoners, and apparently out of their reach. The two side doors were then bolted from the inside . . . the bolt of the middle door was heard to be drawn from inside, hands then appeared at the lozenge-shaped aperture, one from each side of the cabinet, as it appeared, and jiggled fittingly in front of the curtain, which was thrust slightly back. The hands were in a semi-obscurity, the gas by which the room was lighted having been slightly lowered, and the arms belonging to them not being visible from the smallness of the aperture, they looked ghostly enough to elicit a set of little awestruck ejaculations from the ladies present."

The *Times'* correspondent entered the room whilst the cabinet manifestations were still in progress, and his account of the latter part of the sitting, which is somewhat fuller than that of the *Standard*, is given below :—

"When I entered the room devoted to the 'manifestations' I found it occupied by a number of persons who attentively listened to a strange discordant concert held within a wardrobe placed at the end furthest from the door. When the sounds had ceased the wardrobe was opened, and three compartments were discovered, two of which were occupied by the Brothers Davenport, bound hand and foot with strong cords, like the most dangerous male-factors. The centre compartment held the musical instruments, and on each side of this sat the corded brothers. The ostensible theory is that the Davenports, bound as they were, produced a combination of noises, compared to which the performance of the most obtrusive German band that ever awakened the wrath of a Babbage is the harmony of the spheres. The cords are examined, the wardrobe is closed, the instruments are replaced, and presently, through an aperture in the centre door, a trumpet is hurled with violence. The wardrobe is reopened, and there are the Brothers Davenport corded as before.

"A change takes place in the manner of the performance. Hitherto the brothers have remained incarcerated in this box, while the audience are at liberty. They now leave the wardrobe and take their place in the middle of the room, where they are firmly bound to their chairs. The gentleman who officiates as their lecturer or spokesman even offers to drop sealing-wax on the knots, and requests anyone of the company to impress it with his own seal. On the evening of my visit this offer was not accepted, but the fault, if any,

lay with the investigators. When the lights had been extinguished, and as we were all seated round the room with hands joined, at the request of the lecturer, a most extraordinary 'manifestation' took place. The air was filled with the sound of instruments which we had seen laid upon a table, but which now seemed to be flying about the room, playing as they went, without the smallest respect to the heads of the visitors. Now a bell jingled close to your ear, now a guitar was struck immediately over your head, while every now and then a cold wind passed across the faces of the whole party. Sometimes a smart blow was administered, sometimes the knee was patted by a mysterious hand, divers shrieks from the members of the company indicating the side on which the more tangible 'manifestations' had taken place. A candle having been lighted, the brothers were seen still bound to their chairs, while some of the instruments had dropped into the laps of the visitors. I myself received a blow on the face from a floating guitar, which drew enough blood to necessitate the employment of towel and sponge.

"A new experiment was now made. Darkness having regained its supremacy, one of the brothers expressed a desire to be relieved of his coat. Returning light showed him in his shirt-sleeves, though his hands were still firmly bound behind his chair. It was now stated that he was prepared to put on the coat of any one of the company willing to 'loan' that article of attire, and an assenting gentleman having been found, the coat, after a short interval of darkness, was worn in proper fashion by a person for whom it had not been designed by the tailor. Finally, the brothers desired a release, and one of the company, certainly not an accomplice, requested that the rope might fall into his lap. During the interval of darkness a rushing sound as of swiftly drawn cords was audible, and the ropes reached the required knees, after striking the face of the person in the next chair.

"Such are the chief phenomena, which are, of course, referred by the operators to spiritual agency. To sum up the essential characteristics of the exhibition, it is sufficient to state that the brothers, when not shut up in the wardrobe, are bound while the candles are alight, perform their miracles in the dark, and on the return of light are found to be bound as before. The investigators into the means of operation have to ascertain whether the brothers are able to release themselves and resume their straitened condition during the intervals of darkness, *and whether, even if this is practicable, they can, without assistance, produce the effects described.*"<sup>1</sup>

The *Times'* correspondent, it will be seen, seems by no means sure that what he had witnessed were merely feats of conjuring. A correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, Sept. 30th, 1864.

(understood to be Mr.—now Sir Edwin—Arnold) in like manner hesitates whether to class the feats as representing “the annihilation of what are called material laws,” or some extraordinary physical dexterity; and whether to regard the believers in Spiritualism as “the embodiment of a mutual and colossal self-deceit, or the silent heralds of a social revolution which must shake the world.”<sup>1</sup>

But, generally speaking, whilst editors were willing to allow their correspondents free expression of opinion, they were disinclined to commit themselves, or to suggest any explanation beyond conjuring, though it is obvious in some instances that the alternative of a new force was not looked upon as altogether out of court. Thus the *Standard*, in a special article, writes, on the occasion of a séance later in October, that the phenomena were “far more answerable [*i.e.* than on a previous occasion] to the pretensions put forward as to an occult cause in a hitherto undiscovered force of nature”; though maintaining that, until a more complete examination had established such claim, they must not be regarded as other than conjuring tricks.<sup>2</sup>

And, indeed, the phenomena did strongly suggest conjuring tricks. The *Lancet*, in a very careful and curiously open-minded article, insisted on the extreme difficulty of securing satisfactory ligatures under any circumstances, and especially with the cord provided by the Davenports for the purpose. It was also pointed out that the brothers were apparently “possessed of great physical power and activity”; that in particular their hands were such as a professional conjurer might envy; and finally, that after each cabinet performance one or both brothers betrayed violent action of the heart, disturbed respiration, and other symptoms consistent with extreme muscular exertion.<sup>3</sup> And conjurers were not long in attempting to imitate the performance. These attempts were not always conspicuously successful.<sup>4</sup> But Tolmaque, or Tollemarque, who gave an exhibition at a private house at about this time, succeeded practically in doing all that the Davenports had done, and under similar conditions, so far as the somewhat vague accounts given will allow us to judge. He was three times bound, and, on at least one occasion, by persons who had helped to tie the Davenports.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from “Master of Arts,” *Daily Telegraph*, 4th Oct., 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Oct. 24th, 1864. See, however, the leader in the same paper of the 1st Oct. and article on the 20th Oct.; the leader in the *Morning Star* of the 12th Oct., etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Lancet*, 8th Oct., 1864.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the account given in the *Lancet* for 29th Oct., 1864, of Anderson's imitation.

A screen was placed in front of him, and the instruments in about half a minute began to play, and were afterwards thrown about the room. Within less than three minutes later Tolmaque was found unbound. He succeeded also when bound in divesting himself of his coat; and finally, he tied himself up again in less time than he had taken to loosen his bonds.<sup>1</sup>

It is probable, as the Spiritualists contended at the time, though they furnished no trustworthy authority for their contention, that Tolmaque, Anderson, and other contemporary conjurers did not succeed in releasing or in binding themselves with the same rapidity as the Davenports.<sup>2</sup> But as, on the hypothesis of trickery, the Davenport Brothers had been practising that particular feat for some years, and probably started with exceptional physical qualifications for its performance, it was hardly to be expected that a novice should perfect himself in a week or two. And even the Davenports worked under strict limitations. After a successful season in London they went to the provinces, and in Liverpool met with disaster. On the committee appointed from amongst the audience on the first night were two gentlemen who possessed the secret of a special knot, called the Tom Fool's knot. This knot they applied to the wrists of the Davenport Brothers. Each protested that the knot was unfairly tight, and injured the circulation. A doctor summoned to the platform gave it as his opinion that no injury to the circulation was to be apprehended, and that, in view of the smallness of the mediums' hands, the knot was not unnecessarily tight. The Davenports refused to proceed with the performance under such conditions, and Ferguson was ordered to cut the knots. The proceedings culminated on the next night in a riot, and the Davenports had to fly from the town. A like reception awaited them at Huddersfield and at Leeds, whither the fame of Tom Fool's knot had preceded them.<sup>3</sup> Their career in England was over for the time being, and the next three years, with the exception of a visit to Ireland, were spent on the Continent.

On their return to this country in 1868, at the instance of Mr. Robert Cooper, a fervent admirer, who had followed

<sup>1</sup> *The Builder*, 22nd Oct., 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Maskelyne himself admits this. He states that he practised the tricks for six weeks before reproducing them on the stage, and could not even then for time equal the rapidity of the Davenports' performance (*Pall Mall Gazette*, April, 1885.)

<sup>3</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 14th, 15th, 16th Feb., 1865. In the *Post* of the 16th a picture of the halting knot is given.

in their train over the continent, the judgment of the Anthropological Society was sought upon their claims to supernatural powers. The Society agreed to appoint a committee of investigation; and, as a preliminary step, a trial séance was held, in order that the committee might determine the conditions of the subsequent inquiry. The séance was a failure, the committee reporting that "there were no 'manifestations' exhibited which were not capable of easy explanation; the performers declining to comply with nearly all the suggestions of the committee as to tying." The committee, however, offered to proceed with the investigation, on the conditions that they should themselves supply the ropes and other materials, should be allowed to hold the hands of the mediums during the "manifestations," to apply colouring matter to the hands either of mediums or "spirits," and to open the door of the cabinet as soon as a spirit hand appeared. The conditions were declined.<sup>1</sup>

It remains only to add that when, a few months later, Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke presented at the Crystal Palace a performance in imitation of that given by the Davenportes, some Spiritualists, amongst them Benjamin Coleman, who was one of those most familiar with the Davenportes' manifestations, found the imitation so complete that they saw no escape from the conclusion that Maskelyne and Cooke were themselves spirit mediums.<sup>2</sup>

This last position is characteristic of Spiritualist apologetics. All the stock feats of the mediums of this period, it will be seen, with the possible exception of Home, could be performed by practised physical dexterity, and were, in fact, with more or less complete success, imitated by such means again and again. The narrow margin of superiority in speed and adroitness which was all that Spiritualists themselves ventured to claim was no greater than the inaccuracy of credulous and untrained witnesses, or the longer apprenticeship of the medium-conjurer, would reasonably account for.

But these considerations had as little effect on the Spiritualists of that day as on the present generation of believers. To all such arguments and demonstrations there were two

<sup>1</sup> The correspondence is published in *Human Nature*, 1868, pp. 393-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Human Nature*, 1869, p. 303. For biographical details of the Brothers Davenport and an account, from the Spiritualist standpoint, of their tour in Europe, the reader should consult *A Biography of the Brothers Davenport*, by Dr. T. L. Nichols (London, 1864), and *Spiritual Experiences*, by Robert Cooper (London, 1867). J. W. Truesdell (*Bottom Facts*, pp. 228 *et seqq.*) describes various rope-tying tricks and the methods commonly employed by mediums for escaping from their bonds.

main answers. The first, which was adopted by some whose zeal outshone their knowledge, has been voiced by Benjamin Coleman. The other, which has been commonly held at all times by the better educated, and was at this time consistently advocated in the *Spiritual Magazine* in connection with the feats of Squire, Foster, and the Davenports, began by admitting that in certain circumstances and under certain conditions the feats performed by mediums could be paralleled by conjurers; nay, more, that on occasion genuine mediums supplied a temporary failure of the occult power by trickery. But it was contended that on various specified or unspecified occasions the conditions and the circumstances were such as to make trickery impossible, or the results achieved of a nature which no trickery could explain. At the present day, probably every believer in the Spiritualist phenomena who is capable of argument defends his position on these lines. The contention is obviously not illogical; nor to my thinking so preposterous as many critics have represented it. If a man has occult powers, and gains his livelihood by their exhibition, it is not *a priori* unlikely that, to obviate injury to his professional prospects and disappointment to his clients, he will sometimes conceal a temporary failure by adroit trickery. The only fair way to meet the Spiritualist contention is to study the evidence at its strongest. But the discerning reader will probably agree that, again apart from the evidence presented by Home's séances, no presumption of a new physical agency has been established by the records hitherto considered.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRIVATE MEDIUMSHIP, 1860-1870

**N**ATIVE mediums were slow to follow the example set by their American colleagues. For the greater part of the decade now under consideration Mrs. Marshall appears to have been the only professional medium in England for physical manifestations. It is hardly necessary to consider her performances in detail. She was, in fact, the general practitioner of the movement, dealing for the most part with such commonplace phenomena as we have referred to at the beginning of the last chapter, but able on occasion to reproduce, on a smaller scale and with less distinction, most of the manifestations exhibited by specialists such as Home, Foster, or Mrs. Guppy. During some part of 1861 and 1862 Madame Besson, a professional clairvoyant, gave sittings at which raps, lights, movements of furniture, and other physical phenomena occurred. But we hear no more of her after the latter year.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the decade several mediums who afterwards achieved distinction — amongst them Herne, Williams, and Duguid, and, of trance mediums, J. J. Morse — began to practise. But in October, 1867, the editor of *Human Nature* can find in London only two professional mediums, Mrs. Marshall and Mr. W. Wallace, to whom to refer inquirers.<sup>2</sup> And even in December, 1869, there appear to have been only three or four paid mediums in London.<sup>3</sup>

But throughout the period there were numerous private mediums, by whose agency tables were moved and raps and other phenomena obtained. For the most part, no doubt, the non-professional mediums exhibited only in the family circle. There were, however, several instances in which private persons gave, without fee or reward, regular sésances to their friends and to inquirers introduced by them, at which

<sup>1</sup> See various notices of her sésances in *Spiritual Magazine* for 1861 and 1862.

<sup>2</sup> *Human Nature*, 1867, p. 400. <sup>3</sup> *The Spiritualist*, vol. i. p. 12.

physical manifestations of various kinds were exhibited. One of the earliest of these private mediums was Mrs. Everitt, the wife of a tailor, living in Pentonville. Mrs. Everitt had apparently begun to give séances as early as 1855.<sup>1</sup> But her mediumship seems first to have attracted public attention at the end of the year 1867.<sup>2</sup> The sittings were generally prefaced with a prayer, or the reading of a chapter from the Bible. The lights were then extinguished; there were movements of the table, raps, and various other sounds; occasionally lights were seen, apparently not of a hallucinatory nature; and later, the "direct" spirit voice was heard, a cardboard tube being placed near the medium to assist this particular manifestation. On one or two occasions there were faint suspicions of trickery; but for the most part the performances seem to have been equally satisfactory to the medium and to her guests.<sup>3</sup>

Another private medium at this time who achieved some distinction, Mr. Edward Childs, owed his initiation to Mrs. Everitt. His manifestations consisted chiefly of direct writing, spirit voices, and flute-playing.<sup>4</sup> Master Willie Turketine, again, an intelligent boy of thirteen, would sit on a corner of the sofa in the dark, with an accordion, a triangle, a musical box, a tambourine, and other instruments of music placed near him. The rest of the company sat at the other end of the room and held each other's hands. If the conditions were favourable, the spirits would then sing and play on the various instruments. Unfortunately the presence of strangers was found to interfere with the manifestations, so that Master Turketine seems never to have attained the eminence which his abilities deserved.<sup>5</sup>

Another interesting private medium in the early years of

<sup>1</sup> *Human Nature*, 1869, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1867, p. 400; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1868, pp. 83, 189.

<sup>3</sup> A notice appeared in the *Spiritual Magazine* for May, 1869, referring to charges of trickery against Mrs. Everitt, but no details are given. In the next month's issue the medium herself indignantly repudiated the charge. Later in the same year, with the object apparently of vindicating the medium's character, an account of a successful séance was published in the *Spiritual Magazine*, with the names of the sitters appended, including Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall and the Countess de Medina Pomar (*Spiritual Magazine*, 1869, p. 469). For other accounts of Mrs. Everitt's mediumship at this time see *Human Nature*, 1868, p. 387; 1869, p. 419.

<sup>4</sup> See *Spiritual Magazine*, 1869, pp. 266, 390, 566; 1870, p. 323. *Spiritualist*, 1870, p. 79, etc.

<sup>5</sup> See the extraordinarily naïve reports of the boy's performances given by W. Howitt, in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 562, and 1869, p. 427. The other Spiritualist journals also contain accounts of this audacious youngster's mediumship.

this decade was the first wife of Mr. Samuel Guppy, the author of *Mary Jane*.<sup>1</sup> In this lady's presence raps were heard; a guitar was played under the table; lights were seen in a dark room glowing at the tips of her fingers, which were observed to smell strongly of phosphorus; and coloured drawings of flowers were produced under the table.

But it was Mr. Guppy's second wife who is best known to fame. In the autumn of 1866 a new medium appeared in the person of a Miss Nichol, a young lady then living with Mrs. Sims, sister of the distinguished naturalist, Dr. A. R. Wallace. Dr. Wallace had at this time been investigating the subject of Spiritualism for a little over a year, and had just published his essay, *The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural*.<sup>2</sup> Miss Nichol's mediumship, it will be seen, sprang up in a congenial environment. The manifestations began by the movement of various objects about the house, generally with Mrs. Sims and Miss Nichol as the only witnesses. One unusual characteristic about the early phenomena attracted Mrs. Sims' attention. The "power" was stronger the fewer the witnesses, and strongest of all in an empty room. Thus she writes:—

"These phenomena appear to me rather of a different nature to anything we have ever heard of or seen at our séances. . . . My friend's power does not seem nearly so strong when we sit with other persons who are anxious to see these wonderful phenomena. Some, though slight mediums themselves, seem to lessen the power rather than strengthen it. On leaving the room empty after a séance, there is no counteracting influence at work, and thus the spirits have more power for grand manifestations. We have never had anything so great happen when we were in the room as when we left it for a few minutes."<sup>3</sup>

Within a few weeks, however, the manifestations assumed a form which afterwards became very familiar in Spiritualist circles. Dr. Wallace himself describes the new development:—

"On Friday morning, December 14th, my sister, Mrs. S., had a message purporting to be from her deceased brother William to this effect: 'Go into the dark at Alfred's this evening, and I will show that I am with you.' On arriving in the evening with Miss N., my sister told me of this message. When our other friends, four in number, had arrived, we sat down as usual, but instead of having raps on the table as on previous occasions, the room and the

<sup>1</sup> *Mary Jane; or, Spiritualism Chemically explained, with Spirit Drawings*. London, 1863. <sup>2</sup> London, 1866. <sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazines*, 1867, p. 51.

table shook violently; and, finding we had no other manifestations, I mentioned the message that had been received, and we all adjourned into the next room, and the doors and windows being shut, sat down round a table (which we had previously cleared of books, etc.) holding each other's hands. Raps soon began, and we were told to draw back from the table. This we did, but thinking it better to see how we were placed before beginning the séance, I rose up to turn on the gas,<sup>1</sup> which was down to a blue point, when, just as my hand was reaching it, the medium, who was close to me, cried out and started, saying that something cold and wet was thrown on her face. This caused her to tremble violently, and I took her hand to calm her, and it then struck me this was done to prevent me lighting the gas. We then sat still, and in a few moments several of the party saw faintly that something was appearing on the table. The medium saw a hand, others what seemed flowers. These became more distinct, and someone put his hand on the table and said, 'There *are* flowers here!' Obtaining a light, we were all thunderstruck to see the table half covered with flowers and fern leaves, all fresh, cold, and damp with dew, as if they had that moment been brought out of the night air. They were the ordinary winter flowers, which are cultivated in hot-houses for table decoration, the stems apparently cut off as if for a bouquet. They consisted of fifteen chrysanthemums, six variegated anemones, four tulips, five orange-berried solanums, six ferns of two sorts, one *Auricula sinensis* with nine flowers, thirty-seven stalks in all."<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Wallace's account of this séance is corroborated by Mr. H. T. Humphreys, another of those present.<sup>3</sup>

In the course of the following year, as the medium's power grew, similar manifestations were given in other circles, the most notable occasion being a séance on the 14th June at Baron de Guldenstubbé's house in London. About a dozen persons were present, most of them well-known Spiritualists, including Mrs. Makdougall Gregory (widow of the Professor), Signor Damiani, Dr. McLeod, James Burns, the Spiritualist publisher, Robert Cooper, and the recorder, William Tebb, afterwards well known for his anti-vaccination propaganda. There were raps and other phenomena, but the climax of the séance was the discovery of a wreath of flowers and ferns on the head of Mademoiselle de Guldenstubbé. This manifestation had been preceded by a curious ceremony. Miss Nichol, under spirit direction, had walked ten times round the table—the room of course being darkened—touching each member

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Wallace, it will be observed, has not stated whether the room was lighted when they adjourned to it, or whether they had—as may perhaps be inferred from this passage—taken their places in the dark.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1867, p. 144.

of the circle as she passed.<sup>1</sup> On other occasions grapes, fruit, bread, even live eels and lobsters, were introduced and distributed to the sitters.<sup>2</sup> In the same year we find the rudimentary stage of a manifestation which in its later and more highly evolved form was destined to make the name of Mrs. Guppy famous in the annals of Spiritualism. On several occasions Miss Nichol, an extremely heavy woman, was lifted bodily on to the table without the attendant circle being aware of any movement on her part. This manifestation appears always to have taken place in the dark; but Dr. Wallace nevertheless regards it as "a test experiment perhaps even more conclusive than the flotation of Mr. Home."<sup>3</sup>

Miss Nichol was shortly afterwards married to Mr. Samuel Guppy, and resided for some time on the Continent, returning to England in the autumn of 1870.

That the manifestations witnessed in the presence of Mrs. Guppy, Mrs. Everitt, Mr. Childs, and the other non-professional mediums of the period are to be ascribed to anything beyond the familiar mechanical forces I see no reason to believe. It seems clear that there was nothing in the material conditions of the experiments to preclude such agencies. The tests imposed upon Foster and the Davenport Brothers were no doubt in most cases ludicrously inadequate to prevent trickery. But at any rate, the investigators were not hampered by any social restraints in seeking to impose them. It was difficult, however, for Mrs. Guppy's personal friends or Mrs. Everitt's guests to enjoy a similar freedom; and from the published records it seems clear that the precautions occasionally taken, with the permission, if not at the actual suggestion, of the medium herself, were quite ineffectual in themselves, and were carried out by persons whose training and temper would have rendered even better-devised precautions of little value. It will, I think, be conceded by any impartial person who reads the contemporary records that, notwithstanding that the private medium presumably lacked the long training in feats of dexterity which we are entitled to assume in the case of professionals, the physical obstacles in the way of fraud at these private séances were quite inconsiderable.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1867, pp. 346-9, 494; 1868, p. 28, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 255. See his *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, 2nd edition (1881), pp. 132-7, for some further account of early séances with Miss Nichol. See also *Experiences in Spiritualism*, by Catherine Berry, and *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Stance*, by Georgiana Houghton; also *The Spiritualist*, 1870, pp. 92, 98, etc.

The hypothesis of fraud, however, presents certain moral difficulties. No doubt to a boy of thirteen the excitement of sitting up late to bamboozle his elders may have seemed a sufficient recompense for his trouble. But the best-known private mediums at this period and later have not been children, and in the case of adults an adequate motive cannot always be discovered. Certainly their rewards were not paid in cash down, though, no doubt, as in the case of Home, there may sometimes have been the prospect, and even the partial realisation, of considerable pecuniary rewards. But Mrs. Guppy, even during the few months in which, as Miss Nichol, she practised as a professional Mesmerist, can scarcely have found her main incentive in the hope of gain. On the assumption of fraud, the mere cost of the flowers lavished on her sitters must have swallowed up any probable profit from her increased mesmeric *clientèle*. And even such a motive would have ceased with her marriage. Mrs. Everitt, again, was in quite comfortable circumstances. Not only did she receive no direct payment for her sittings, but, as I am assured by some who have enjoyed her hospitality, she kept open house for her friends and for the strangers invited to witness her mediumship.

Nor is it easy to conceive that, for a perfectly sane mind, such motives as the hope of enhanced social prestige, or the mere pleasure of deceiving, would have sufficient strength and permanence. The unutterable monotony of dark séances continued through half a lifetime, with the same unvarying round of trivial "phenomena," forces us to look for some other explanation than deliberate and spontaneous fraud. It is probable that our knowledge of the subject does not at present admit of a complete explanation being furnished. But some indications of the lines on which an explanation should be sought can, I think, be found.

The decade now under consideration is peculiarly favourable for a wide survey of the evidence. There is, in the first place, an abundance of literature, periodical and other, filled with recitals of personal experience. Moreover, towards the end of the period the Dialectical Society appointed a committee to inquire into the subject of Spiritualism, and a large number of representative believers appeared to give evidence before them. A prominent feature in all these recitals by believers of their personal experience is the frequency of hallucinations and other subjective manifestations, and the perplexing admixture of the subjective happenings with occurrences of an unquestionably objective kind. Thus

Dr. Hugh McLeod records that his wife and daughter are strong mediums; that not only do they see spirits daily, but that such phenomena as bell-ringing, loud knockings, and other inexplicable noises were at one time of common occurrence in his house. Dr. McLeod for a time saw nothing; but, after sitting for long periods with his wife and daughter in the dark, he seems ultimately to have shared their visions of many-coloured lights and spirit forms.<sup>1</sup> A more detailed account of an experience somewhat similar was communicated to the Dialectical Society by Mr. F. Fusedale:—

“8, SOUTHAMPTON ROW, HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.,  
“July 9th, 1869.

“ . . . my wife has possessed the power of seeing spirits for years, and does continue to see them, although what I am about to relate to you took place [some two or three years ago]. I may say that the phenomenon was witnessed by my wife, her sister, a girl then about twelve years old, and three of my own children, a boy about eleven and two girls about five and eight years respectively. The commencement of these extraordinary manifestations began by the moving of the furniture of the bedrooms at the top of the house, where we all slept. The tables, the washstand, and the looking-glass were constantly being moved about the room, and the looking-glass and ornaments were put on the bed, and then put back in their places again without ever doing any injury to them; and then began the rapping downstairs, on the chairs and tables, and all round the rooms; and then they commenced to take any little things of the children's or my wife's, and hide them for a time and then return them again; and the children and my wife would see the things they took (in particular a brooch of my wife's) appear to pass through solid substances, such as the wall or the doors, when they were taken from them; and they would take things out of the children's hands, as if in play, and hide them, and then after a little time return them again.

“After this another phase began. They all began to see spirits; and let me state they saw both good and evil ones—the good were bright and the evil dark. And I believe I am not going beyond the truth when I state that for six months we never sat down to meals without having audible evidence of their presence by their rapping on the table and chairs we were sitting on, and they would answer any question asked them by replying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in the usual way; and they would also show the children pictures on the wall, and they would look in rapture on what they saw. Sometimes the scenes appeared to be scenes in distant lands, for they would write

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1866, pp. 170, 171. I have written “seems to have shared,” because Dr. McLeod, who gives no details, does not expressly state, what his narrative implies, that he himself saw any of these things.

the nature of the scenery, and sometimes scenes from the spirit land. . . . And they all used to show them graphical scenes in a crystal, or, more correctly speaking, simply a toy ball silvered taken from a Christmas tree; . . . I have seen them so engaged (I mean the children) for half an hour at a time, the scenes constantly changing; and let me state that I was a little sceptical at first myself about what they saw, but they (the spirit friends) told me they would show me a scene in the crystal to convince me of the truth of what they said, which they did by showing me a scene in the Arctic regions—a ship embedded in the ice, the men on board, and dogs coming to them on the ice—which scene the children also saw. . . . They would also guide their hands to write while sitting at the table, merely with their fingers, without pencil, and if the others sitting beside them would read what they wrote they said it appeared in illuminated letters on the table; and my wife would also see different objects on the table. . . . I have also seen the chair move by request with my little boy sitting on it, his legs not being able to touch the floor, more than half across the room while we were seated round the table, with a bright lamp burning at the time, without any effort on his part or any human agency being near.”<sup>1</sup>

We have here, it will be seen, a Poltergeist of the characteristic type. The special point of interest is that the hallucinatory experiences claimed by Mrs. Fusedale and the children were on one occasion shared by Mr. Fusedale himself.<sup>2</sup>

There are many other visual experiences of a similar kind. Thus the Master of Lindsay and others relate that they saw visions in a crystal in the presence of Home.<sup>3</sup> The Hon. Mrs. — and others saw ghostly figures and spirit eyes at a séance given by Home in her own house.<sup>4</sup> That these figures, etc., were hallucinatory may be inferred from the express statement of another Spiritualist, Mrs. Honeywood, who was present at the same séance, that she could not see what the others described at the time.<sup>5</sup> So, at a séance with Miss Nichol one Whit Sunday, Miss Houghton tells us that she saw just before her eyes eight tongues of flame. From the description these were no doubt hallucinatory.<sup>6</sup> It is hardly necessary to give in detail instances of crystal vision

<sup>1</sup> *Dialectical Society's Report*, pp. 255-7.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, the evidence for the hallucinations experienced by the children, apart from the question of their good faith, is second-hand, and Mr. Fusedale's solitary experience of the same kind is not described until two or three years after the event.

<sup>3</sup> *Dialectical Report*, pp. 206, 259.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

<sup>6</sup> *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Séance*, vol. i. p. 135.

at this time; the experience was, of course, a very common one.

Again, as indicated in chapter ii., many seers and seeresses professed habitually to see coloured auras and spiritual emblems round their friends. Mrs. de Morgan and a young companion on one occasion saw a vision of three bright heads over a clergyman in the pulpit;<sup>1</sup> Miss Houghton occasionally saw a coloured aura—violet or green—round the preacher, indicating the spiritual sphere to which he belonged.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Cromwell Varley, the well-known electrician, describes several spirits which appeared to him at times of death or serious illness. Mrs. Varley also occasionally saw spirits.<sup>3</sup> Other persons gave accounts of occasional apparitions seen by them.<sup>4</sup> Miss Anna Blackwell and her friends appear to have seen many ghosts. Here is an extract from her own experiences:—

“Of the many spirits whom I have seen, only two have been those of persons known to me in my present life; one of these I have seen once, the other I have seen eight times. One evening, on nearing the door of my dressing-room, I suddenly saw, just before me, a little to my left, what looked like a dark-haired man, in ordinary dress, in the act of passing through the wall in front of me. His head was slightly thrown back, his eyes were raised, and his face wore a sad, dreamy, and fixed expression. . . . On another occasion I saw in the same room, standing in the air like the ‘saints and angels’ in old pictures, a group of eighteen or twenty handsome young men, in white tunics, with red belts and buskins, and curious red hats, with ‘cream-bowl’ crowns and very broad brims, embroidered with gold, and set on so slantingly that the thin line of gold on the edge of the brims produced, round each head, something like the effect of a nimbus. The right hand of each grasped a stout crook, taller than himself, and resting on the ground. They looked as though they had halted on the march; and the eyes of all were fixed upon me with grave, earnest, and rather friendly gaze. After looking at them for a few seconds, I put my hands to my eyes; and then, looking up again to see if they were still there, I saw the same group, but much higher up, at a height, apparently, far above the ceiling and proportionally fainter. This second glimpse was only instantaneous; and though I looked up several times during the evening in the hope of seeing them again, I saw nothing more of my white-vestured visitants.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *From Matter to Spirit*, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Evenings at Home*, etc., vol. i. pp. 26, 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of Dialectical Society*, pp. 157 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> See also evidence of Mr. Simkiss, *Report*, p. 131; Mrs. Rowcroft, p. 149; Mr. Rowcroft, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> *Dialectical Report*, p. 332.

Miss Blackwell describes also other spiritual visitants to herself, and gives many accounts of ghostly figures seen by her friends. The late Mrs. Howitt Watts and her circle also saw many apparitions, mostly of persons known to them. In the columns of the *Spiritual Magazine* at this time we find numerous records of death-wraiths, ghosts of the dead, and other apparitions. Some of the best-attested specimens of the former class have been quoted in *Phantasms of the Living*.<sup>1</sup>

The hearing of voices—that is, of voices so far externalised as to be comparable to the visions just described—was a much rarer experience. The most marked case in the literature of the time is that of Mr. Percival, a gentleman who had spent some time in an asylum.<sup>2</sup>

Tactile hallucinations are as a rule too trivial or too ambiguous to be worth recording. But one curious experience may perhaps be entered under this heading. The witness is again Miss Houghton, who writes:—

“At the time I speak of it frequently occurred to me while I was out that for a considerable distance my feet would never touch the ground. I was apparently walking like anyone else, but there was a space between me and the earth. Sometimes it would be done without my thinking about it, and I would suddenly discover what was happening; at other times I would ask for it, and was never refused, but when first it came it was a source of utter astonishment.”<sup>3</sup>

But the commonest subjective experiences were the various forms of motor automatism, writing, drawing, speaking, hearing of the “inner” voice, impressions and impulses of various kinds.<sup>4</sup> Of automatic writing, drawing, and speaking

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *Spiritual Magazine*, 1860, pp. 280–5; 1861, pp. 235, 544; 1862, p. 457.

<sup>2</sup> *Dialectical Report*, p. 222; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1860, pp. 379, 384.

<sup>3</sup> *Evenings at Home*, vol. i. p. 29. As these experiences are alleged to have occurred in 1861 or 1862, and Miss Houghton's record of them was not published until 1881, it is perhaps more probable that we have to deal, not with a sensory hallucination at all, but with a hallucination of memory. The same remark is, of course, applicable to a large proportion of the descriptions of subjective experiences quoted in the present chapter. When the account is not based upon any contemporary notes, and the witness is without training and sometimes incapable of accurate observation, it is impossible to say to what extent the experience of the moment may have become transfigured in the retrospect.

<sup>4</sup> I have thought it best to class all these experiences together, because, though it is likely that the actual experiences may have been of very different kinds, the descriptions given by the subjects are so vague, and so profoundly coloured by their prepossessions, that it seems impracticable to classify them more accurately.

the specimens cited in chapter ii. of the present book and in chapter v. of Book II. will no doubt suffice.<sup>1</sup> All these forms of manifestation continued during the present period, but the results were obviously received by Spiritualists in a more critical temper. As already noted, a large part of the pages of the *Spiritual Telegraph* was devoted to inspired essays and trance addresses; but such productions rarely find a place in the later periodicals, the *Spiritual Magazine*, *Human Nature*, or the *Spiritualist*. Some inspirational discourses of Mrs. Emma Hardinge, however, were published in book form at this time.<sup>2</sup> And there were a few other "inspired" publications: *Songs of the Spirit*, by H.; *An Angel's Message*, and the *Divinum Humanum*, by a Lady.<sup>3</sup> We read also of essays in philosophy written through the hand of a boy of eleven;<sup>4</sup> and of a new version of the Bible, prepared by the Nottingham Circle, of which J. G. H. Brown was, presumably, the mouthpiece.<sup>5</sup> A witness before the Dialectical Society describes his experiences in speaking with "tongues."<sup>6</sup>

Of spirit-drawing, again, mostly of the symbolical kind, we have elaborate accounts, especially from Mrs. Berry and Miss Houghton, in the works already referred to. Of the former lady's productions we learn that, though they conveyed "no definite ideas" to the spectator's mind, and represented nothing in the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdoms,

<sup>1</sup> Some further illustrations are given below, in chap. viii. of the present book.

<sup>2</sup> *Extemporaneous Addresses*, London, 1866. See *Spiritual Magazine*, 1865, pp. 398-400, for an interesting account by Mrs. Hardinge of her "impressionist" speaking.

<sup>3</sup> The lady in question, we learn from the *Spiritual Magazine* (1870, p. 384), was a Miss Fawcett, who died in 1870. Between 1855 and her death she published several volumes of "spiritual revealings," including, besides those mentioned in the text, *Primæval Man* and *Ecce Homo*. The two that I have read are more nearly akin to the writings of Harris than of A. J. Davis, though the latter philosopher has incorporated some quotations from one of Miss Fawcett's books in one of his own inspired writings (see *ante*, Vol. I. p. 168, footnote). Miss Fawcett's writings present a mystical Christianity obviously inspired by Swedenborg. Many of the doctrines and much of the phraseology are characteristic of Swedenborg. We read of a spiritual within the natural sense of the Bible; that the biblical narratives were not literal histories, but allegories; also of the dependence of all other worlds of Creation upon our earth. Characteristic features of later mysticism appear in the doctrines of spiritual counterparts and mystical generation, and in the lofty position assigned to woman in the New Dispensation—"Woman is the handmaiden of Deity." There is some curious information, almost in the Swedenborgian manner, about the inhabitants of other worlds, and the rather odd statement that the form of angels and of perfected human spirits is invariably spherical.

<sup>4</sup> See *Spiritual Magazine*, 1869, p. 453.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1863, p. 219; see account of Brown, *ante*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>6</sup> *Dialectical Report*, p. 183.

yet their technical manipulation was inimitable.<sup>1</sup> Two of Miss Houghton's pictures earned the distinction of being rejected by the Royal Academy; and the poor lady spent the bulk of her small fortune in opening a public exhibition of her spirit-drawings at a small gallery in Bond Street.<sup>2</sup>

The drawing, writing, and speaking were, no doubt, often in the fullest sense automatic—the action being both unconscious and involuntary. And though in other cases the process of writing, speaking, etc., was apparently accompanied by some degree of consciousness, there is no reason to question the substantial accuracy of the "medium's" statement, that he did not consciously will the process, and could not foresee its direction or its final result. But the case was different when the motor impulse chose less deeply worn channels. Many persons of unquestioned integrity have claimed to be the recipients of an "impression"—sometimes alternatively described as "an inner voice," or "an impulse"—directing a certain course of action. Very frequently the resultant action was concerned with healing by mesmeric passes. Thus Mr. Lowenthal before the Dialectical Committee :—

"On one occasion I entered a room in a hydropathic establishment, and a gentleman followed me, and I was compelled to walk up to him and speak to him. I immediately felt all sorts of ailments. I at once told him to sit down, and commenced walking round him, making all sorts of passes."

The subject of the passes, we are told, felt greatly relieved.<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Berry records similar instances in her own experience.<sup>4</sup> Frequently the impression prescribed a journey, even of considerable length, a visit to a friend, the purchase of a book, or other article. An instructive account of these motor impulses is given by Miss Houghton in the book already referred to. On one occasion, being anxious to find her way to a house which she had not visited for several years, she entrusted herself to spirit guidance, and arrived safely.<sup>5</sup> Again, in presence of Mr. Spear, she was impressed to personate the dying and the resurrection of St. Stephen.<sup>6</sup> One evening her guardian spirits (a band of seventy archangels) guided

<sup>1</sup> *Experiences in Spiritualism*, pp. 51, 167, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Evenings at Home*, vol. i. p. 90. In the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 289, we have an account of automatic drawings of butterflies, etc., by an artist called Rippon.

<sup>3</sup> *Dialectical Report*, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> *Experiences*, p. 177; see also p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. i. p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Page 65.

her hand to stir some arrowroot which had curdled.<sup>1</sup> Again, when house-hunting in Paddington, she gave herself up to the guidance of the spirits. "I went about, from street to street, asking always whether I should turn to the right hand or the left."<sup>2</sup> Eventually a house was found by this means; and the "spirits" then chose the wall-papers and carpets, and superintended the hanging of the pictures.<sup>3</sup>

Miss Houghton's case was by no means exceptional. I have myself known Spiritualists of intelligence and capacity at their first conversion yield themselves wholly for a time to such vague "impressions," until the folly of the proceeding was brought home to them. Most educated Spiritualists, however, soon recognise that, in impressions of this kind, the involuntary nature of the impulse (on which, in their view, the proof of its external inspiration depended) could not be satisfactorily tested; and saw no doubt also the danger of abandoning themselves to the guidance of such random impulses. Mr. John Jones (J. Enmore Jones), in his evidence before the Dialectical Committee, makes no mention of his earlier impressional experiences; nor do such impressions bulk at all largely in the literature of the time. But when, as with children generally and with some adults, the power of self-criticism is almost wanting, and especially when there is some powerful but imperfectly realised motive, such as the desire to attract attention, to be subserved, it is easy to see how half-conscious impulses of this kind might pass almost insensibly into systematic self-deception.

In brief, if we take a wide survey of the evidence, we find that at this period there was a marked outbreak of what the Spiritualists called mediumistic powers under various forms, in persons of unquestioned good faith; and that these powers were readily communicated from one person to another. Nothing is more noteworthy in the records of the time than the extraordinary contagion of so-called "mediumship." We have seen in chapter ii. of the present book how an epidemic of automatic writing and drawing spread amongst the friends of Mrs. de Morgan and Mrs. Newton Crosland, and how a like contagion seized Mr. and Mrs. William Howitt after inspecting the spirit-drawings in the Wilkinson family. Mr. Morell Theobald, in turn, was "initiated into writing mediumship" by William Howitt.<sup>4</sup> So Miss Houghton, Mrs. Berry,

<sup>1</sup> Page 71.

<sup>2</sup> Page 109.

<sup>3</sup> Page 111. See also Mr. John Jones's account of similar spirit impressions, *British Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. i. pp. 109, 164, and J. Murray Spear's experiences already referred to (vol. i. p. 216).

<sup>4</sup> *Spirit Workers in the Home Circle*, p. 18.

and other automatic writers and speakers have left on record that their mediumship originated in a suggestion made at a chance visit to Mrs. Marshall or some other medium; and that others were continually inspired by their example to like feats of automatism.

Again, it is pertinent to recall the fact—whatever weight we may attach to it—that physical mediums have frequently claimed, or their friends have claimed on their behalf, various hallucinatory experiences. Thus Mrs. Guppy is said by her father to have seen strange figures as a child;<sup>1</sup> Home claims to have seen spiritual forms and heard voices in his youth;<sup>2</sup> and Charles Williams has described similar experiences, one in connection with his dead mother.<sup>3</sup> Miss Florence Cook (Mrs. Corner) claims to have seen spirits and heard voices from childhood,<sup>4</sup> and Mrs. Showers tells us that her daughter Mary as a child would constantly converse with invisible interlocutors.<sup>5</sup>

Attention has already been drawn to the close analogy with the physical phenomena of the séance-room presented by those spontaneous outbreaks of bell-ringing and stone-throwing which from time to time perplex a country village.<sup>6</sup> And I have elsewhere shown that in many cases the author or "medium" of these disturbances was not only afflicted with some physical or mental abnormality, but that both he and the witnesses of his performances appear to have been liable to visual and auditory hallucination.<sup>7</sup>

It seems not unreasonable to conclude, therefore, that mediums, whether professional or private, physical or merely clairvoyant, clairaudient, or inspirational, have, as Spiritualists themselves contend, certain common characteristics; that private physical mediums generally, and many professionals, at least at the outset of their career, are to be ranked in one class with amiable enthusiasts like Miss Houghton, Mrs. Berry, Mr. Cromwell Varley, and Miss Anna Blackwell; and that all alike, again in accordance with the Spiritualist contention, may be to some extent unconscious of their actions, and therefore not fully responsible for them. In modern terminology, the medium, whether "physical" or "impressional," is probably a person of unstable nervous equilibrium, in whom the control normally exercised by the

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> *Incidents in My Life*, first series.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 524.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1872, p. 516.

<sup>5</sup> *Spiritualist*, 1873, p. 488.

<sup>6</sup> See Book I. chap. ii., on "Poltergeists."

<sup>7</sup> See *Proc. S. P. K.*, vol. xii. pp. 45-115, and *Studies in Psychological Research*, chapter on "Poltergeists."

higher brain-centres is liable, on slight provocation, to be abrogated, leaving the organism, as in dream or somnambulism, to the guidance of impulses which in a state of unimpaired consciousness would have been suppressed before they could have resulted in action.

Of course, the deviation from the normal here suggested may be, especially at the outset, quite inconsiderable; no greater, indeed, than that of the good hypnotic subject, and probably of like kind. Now most persons, probably, at certain times and under certain conditions, are amenable to hypnotic suggestion. The medium then, if this view be accepted, is not necessarily on the road to insanity, nor even, in any considerable degree, abnormal. Nor would the possibility of such a slight deviation from the normal constitute a serious argument either for or against the possession by the medium of supernormal powers, although it renders intelligible the absence of adequate motive for the trickery apparently practised. It is not difficult to conjecture how the beginnings of physical mediumship might originate in the partly conscious exaggeration of an automatic impulse. The wholly involuntary movements of the muscles which, as Faraday showed, were responsible at the outset for the rotation of the table, might develop into deliberate pushing, without perhaps any clear consciousness of deception on the part of the pusher. At some point, however, in the career of a physical medium (unless we are to suppose a barrier between the séance consciousness and that of ordinary life, of which we rarely have sufficient evidence) the conviction of cheating must surely be borne in upon the offender. And it is difficult to believe, except on the extreme assumption of a trance consciousness wholly cut off from the normal life, that such a point had not been reached before, *e.g.*, flowers and vegetables were purchased and stowed away for after-production at the dark circle. Difficult, but perhaps not impossible, for the analogy of the "post-hypnotic promise" suggests even here a way out. We have experimental evidence that an action undertaken by the trance consciousness may be fulfilled at the appointed time during waking hours, without the knowledge of the waking agent.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The question of the moral responsibility of the private medium for his physical performances will be further considered in Book IV., chaps. v., vi., and vii.

CHAPTER V  
PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP IN GENERAL,  
1870 AND ONWARDS

HITHERTO, it will be seen, the class of professional physical mediums was almost unrepresented in this country. After the departure of the American invaders there remained for some years only Mrs. Marshall. In the meantime, however, as shown in the last chapter, a band of private mediums had sprung up, and others, notably Miss Cook and Miss Showers, were shortly to come on the stage. But admission to their circles was, by the necessities of the case, restricted to the few; and those inquirers who were not fortunate enough to acquire the entry to one or other of these private circles found some difficulty in obtaining the evidence which they desired. A new medium, Mr. F. Herne, had, indeed, so early as January, 1869, begun to give public sittings, but the manifestations do not appear to have comprised any physical phenomena. Mr. Herne saw spirits in the air, and described the colour of the sitter's aura, who had to rest content with such second-hand information.<sup>1</sup>

In the following year we find Herne giving a sitting at Dr. Dixon's house, at which the phenomenon of "elongation" appeared.<sup>2</sup> J. J. Morse, who had for some time past been delivering addresses in the trance, is also recorded to have exhibited about the same time similar phenomena.<sup>3</sup> But whilst Mr. Morse thereafter remained exclusively a trance and inspirational medium, Herne soon developed other physical manifestations. Early in 1871 he joined in partnership with Charles Williams, and together they began to give public sésances at 61, Lamb's Conduit Street, an address familiar to London Spiritualists for many years to come.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, Nov. 19, 1869; *Spirit People*, p. 37, by W. H. Harrison. London, 1875.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1870, p. 399.

<sup>3</sup> *Medium*, Aug. 19th, 1870.

The manifestations at these early séances consisted, in the light, merely of raps and tilts of the table. When the lights were extinguished, however, this meagre programme was enlarged—there were spirit voices, the touches of spirit hands, spirit lights, flowers spirit-borne, floating musical instruments, and much displacement of the lighter furniture.<sup>1</sup>

Soon other native mediums appeared to share the spoil: Eglinton, Monck, Rita, Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb, Miss Stokes; whilst Miss Kate Fox (afterwards Mrs. Jencken), Mrs. Holmes, Miss (or Mrs.) Annie Eva Fay, Messrs. Bastian and Taylor, Dr. Slade, and others came over from the United States. In the year 1870 a new private medium, the Rev. W. Stainton Moses, known for many years under the pseudonym of "M.A. Oxon," made his début. The manifestations which occurred through this gentleman's mediumship, including almost every chronicled variety of physical phenomena, together with trance writing and speaking, clairvoyance, and messages from the dead, will be considered in a later chapter.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Guppy, Mrs. Everitt, David Duguid, and other private mediums also continued their circles; and the first-named lady especially distinguished herself by her patronage of her professional brethren, Messrs. Herne and Williams, who held their first public sitting under her auspices. On the other hand, Mrs. Guppy on more than one occasion assisted in exposing or embarrassing rival pretenders to mediumship.<sup>3</sup> She subsequently married Mr. Volckman, the gentleman who seized the "spirit" at Miss Cook's séance.<sup>4</sup>

It would be unprofitable to attempt an exhaustive chronicle of the mediumistic performances of the last thirty years in this country. Two special forms of manifestation—materialisation and spirit photography—will be dealt with in some detail in the two following chapters, whilst the subject of slate-writing is reserved for separate treatment hereafter.<sup>5</sup> Apart from these elaborate performances there is little worthy of note. Herne and Williams' early séances, already referred to, are a fair type of the evidence for spirit operation put before the ordinary inquirer. The sittings were nearly always held in the dark, or under illumination so faint as to preclude any possibility of accurate observation; active investigation on the part of any too curious sitters was discouraged by the

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, 15th April, 1871; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1871, pp. 183, 233.

<sup>2</sup> Book IV. chap. v.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, a note in the *Spiritualist*, 31st July, 1874, in which Mrs. Guppy is accused of having suborned a youth to disturb séances given by Mr. Holmes and Mrs. Bassett.

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Book IV. chap. ii.

linking of hands; suspicious sounds were drowned by the noise of the musical-box or by the request on the part of the "spirits" that all present should join in singing, so as to promote the harmony of the circle. Finally, the phenomena presented under such conditions were as a rule palpably within the capacity of any fairly active and intelligent mortal who had acquired with practice some manual dexterity. Outside the special manifestations to be considered later, there were hardly any secrets of the trade to be learnt. The one item which could be considered to come under this head was the method practised by the medium for releasing his hands—or more generally one hand only—from the grasp of the sitter on either side. This trick was exposed so far back as 1875 by Moncure Conway,<sup>1</sup> and has been well described recently by Dr. Hodgson in connection with the performances of Eusapia Paladino.<sup>2</sup>

To us looking back on these earlier records the marvel is that any body of men could have been deceived for so long by trickery so cheap and clumsy. Partly, no doubt, the deception was helped by the fact that there were here and there manifestations whose explanation did not lie on the surface—such as the performances of Foster, Slade, and Home. But the real secret of the ready credence accorded for more than two decades to these dark séances lies in the overwhelming predisposition to belief on the part of the assistants. By what arts of the medium, aided by what causes outside the medium's control, this predisposition to belief was produced, is a question which will receive consideration in a later chapter. Of its prepotent influence at this period no one who studies the literature of Spiritualism can doubt. The ordinary Spiritualist, though otherwise not infrequently shrewd in his estimate of the evidence, sometimes even trained in scientific observation, could hardly be induced to entertain the idea of wilful fraud. At one of the earliest séances at the rooms of Messrs. Herne and Williams Mr. W. H. Harrison, the editor of the *Spiritualist*, records that: "The name of a spirit was then written rapidly in large phosphorescent letters in the air near Mr. Williams. In the same rapid manner the spirits next began writing 'God bless——' when there was a snap, like an electrical discharge, and a flash of light which lit up the whole room." At the end of the sitting a slight smell of phosphorus was perceptible. To persons of a less unsuspecting nature than Mr. Harrison, the incident suggests the untimely bursting

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1875, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Book IV. chap. i.

into flame of the head of a common lucifer match. But this interpretation does not appear to have presented itself to any of those present.<sup>1</sup> Other illustrations of the same state of mind will be given in the next chapter.

In the present chapter it is proposed briefly to describe some of the more striking or notorious of the manifestations which, during these years, were acclaimed as instances of spirit power. Of all these episodes, perhaps the most famous is the transit of Mrs. Guppy. The following account appeared in the form of a letter in the *Echo*:—<sup>2</sup>

"I attended a 'circle' at the house of the media, Messrs. Herne and Williams, last Saturday evening. I found the company composed of three ladies and seven or eight gentlemen, including the media, a few of whom, like myself, had never attended a professional séance before. The room we entered was on the first floor, and was separated from a smaller room at the back by folding doors, which were now, however, thrown open, so that we had every opportunity of examining the inner room. The only articles of furniture were a table with a musical-box upon it, and a few chairs. There was a small cupboard, with two or three shelves in it, which we saw open, and which contained nothing beyond one or two miscellaneous articles. Upon our sitting round the table, the folding doors were closed and locked, as was also the other door in the room, and I may say, as we were sitting before eight o'clock, and the only window in the room was darkened, neither of these doors could be opened without at once being perceptible in the room by the admission of a ray of light. The séance began by one of the media saying the Lord's Prayer, the company repeating it. The musical-box, which only played sacred music, was then wound up. Almost immediately we saw lights, somewhat similar to those emitted by glowworms, floating all about the room. The musical-box rose into the air, and continued playing while hovering over our heads and going first to one corner of the ceiling and then to another. We then heard voices, said to be those of the spirits of John King and Katie. John King's voice was a very deep one, while Katie's was more like a whisper, but perfectly distinct. If you could imagine a moth flitting about a room on a summer evening, one moment striking the ceiling and the next fluttering round your head, endowed with the faculty of whispering to you in its eccentric flight, you would be able to form a good idea of Katie's performance.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, May 15th, 1872. A similar incident appears to have occurred a few days later, with Herne and Miss Cook as mediums. Several incidents of the kind are recorded in these earlier years, before the mediums acquired sufficient dexterity in manipulation to avoid such catastrophes.

<sup>2</sup> June 8th, 1871. Other accounts will be found in the *Medium*, June 15th; in the *Spiritual Magazine* for July, 1871; and in the *Spiritualist* for June 15th. The account in the *Spiritualist* is signed by all the eleven persons present.

When asked if she would bring us something, she said, 'Yes, yes.' One of the visitors, in a joking sort of way, remarked, 'I wish she would bring Mrs. G[uppy].' . . . Upon which another said, 'Good gracious! I hope not; she is one of the biggest women in London.' Katie's voice at once said, 'I will, I will, I will,' and John's rough voice shouted out, 'You can't do it, Katie,' but she appeared to chuckle and repeat, 'I will, I will.' We were all laughing and joking at the absurdity of the idea, when John's voice called out, 'Keep still, can't you?' In an instant somebody called out, 'Good God! there is something on my head,' simultaneously with a heavy bump on the table, and one or two screams. A match was instantly struck, and there was Mrs. G[uppy], standing on the centre of the table, with the whole of us seated round the table, closely packed together, as we sat at the commencement. John King's voice shouted out, 'Well, you *are* clever, Katie.' Both doors were still locked. Our attention was, however, directed to Mrs. G[uppy], who appeared to be in a trance, and perfectly motionless. Great fears were entertained that the shock would be injurious to her, supposing it to be really Mrs. G[uppy], and not some phantom in her image, but John's voice called out, 'She will soon be all right.' She had one arm over her eyes, with a pen in her hand, and an account-book in her other hand, which was hanging by her side. When she came round she seemed very much affected and began to cry. She told us that the last thing she could remember was that she was sitting at home, about three miles away, making up her week's accounts of household expenditure, and that Miss N[eyland] was in the room with her, reading the paper. The ink in the pen was wet, and the last word she had written, or, rather, begun to write, for it was one or two letters short of completion, was smeared and scarcely dry. From the joking remark about bringing Mrs. G[uppy] to the time that she was on the table three minutes did not elapse. The possibility of her being concealed in the room is as absurd as the idea of her acting in collusion with the media."

The editor of the *Echo* appends a note to this letter, stating that the writer is known to him as a "Manchester merchant of high respectability."

Several of the party at the conclusion of the séance escorted Mrs. Guppy to her house at Highbury. They there learnt from Miss Neyland, a friend of Mrs. Guppy's, who had come out as a medium under her auspices, that an hour or two previously she had been sitting with Mrs. Guppy near the fire making up the accounts, when suddenly looking up she found that her companion had disappeared, leaving a slight haze near the ceiling. Mr. Guppy, then upwards of eighty years of age, on being told of the disappearance of

his wife, remarked that no doubt the spirits had taken her, and shortly afterwards went down to supper.

From other accounts we learn that Mrs. Guppy suffered no harm from her adventure, and that the last word written in the account-book was "onions."

I find during the years 1871-4 records of three other similar transportations. Mrs. Guppy, or Messrs. Herne and Williams, or all three, were the mediums on each occasion; the persons transported were respectively Mr. Herne,<sup>1</sup> Miss Lottie Fowler,<sup>2</sup> and a Mr. Henderson.<sup>3</sup> Again, the well-known professional medium, Dr. Monck, is reported to have been transported by spirit agency from Bristol to Swindon.<sup>4</sup>

I will not weary the reader with other descriptions of levitations, nor attempt to recount the eels, live lobsters, strange fruits, and showers of feathers, with which the guests at Mrs. Guppy's sésances were favoured. But the following is an incident somewhat out of the common. Miss Kate Fox, one of the original "Rochester rappers," had married, in 1872, Mr. H. D. Jencken, a London barrister. In the early spring of 1874 Mrs. Jencken was staying with her baby, then about five or six months old, at Brighton. One day Mr. Wason, a well-known Spiritualist from Liverpool, who shared their lodgings, witnessed the following portent. I quote his own words:—

"On the 5th of this month [March] I was in Mr. Jencken's apartments at 3, Lansdowne Terrace East, Western Road, Brighton, while Mrs. Jencken's baby was in the lap of the wet nurse, near the fire. It was about 1.30 p.m., in a well-lighted room facing south. Mrs. Jencken was also present.

"Suddenly the nurse exclaimed, 'Baby has got a pencil in his hand,' but as she did not then add that the pencil had been placed in the child's hand by invisible agency, I paid little attention to the remark. The nurse next exclaimed, 'Baby is writing!' Upon this Mrs. Jencken rushed forwards and called to me to come and see. I then looked over Mrs. Jencken's shoulder and saw the pencil in the hand of the child. It had just finished writing, and Mrs. Jencken, remembering what her medical man had told her about the manifestations injuring the baby's health, snatched the pencil out of the child's hand in a very excited manner. The nurse, who was frightened, said that 'she must give up her situation.' Mrs. Jencken told her that 'she might go,' but afterwards reasoned her out of her resolve.

"The message written by the baby was:—

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, July, 1871, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritualist*, 15th March, 1872.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1874, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1875, p. 55.

"I love this little child. God bless him! Advise his father to go back to London on Monday by all means.—Susan."

"Susan was the name of my departed wife."<sup>1</sup>

A facsimile of the infant medium's writing was later published in the *Medium and Daybreak*.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Jencken was afterwards the recipient of other signs and wonders, including a Greek sentence, with most of the accents and breathings omitted, written by direct spirit agency.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1874 a new medium came to London from America, Mrs. Annie Eva Fay, who achieved a certain distinction in having been the subject of a test experiment by Sir W. Crookes, as described in a later chapter.<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Fay's mediumship was in another respect remarkable; the gentleman who acted as her business manager in the first instance appears subsequently to have established a rival show, at which he explained, with practical illustrations, the secret of her performances. These demonstrations seem hardly to have affected the Spiritualist belief in the medium's genuineness.<sup>5</sup> Her performance was of the same general type as those of the Davenport Brothers. The following extract shows how it impressed a contemporary Spiritualist:—

"Two strong staples were screwed into the jamb of a door in the corner of the room, and a curtain about six feet high tacked to the side of it. . . . The medium's hands were secured by tying tightly round each wrist a piece of strong inch-wide tape, well knotted. Her hands being placed behind her, the ends of the tape were tied together and sealed, the ends being secured to the lower staple; another tape was passed round her neck and firmly tied to the upper staple. She sat on a music stool, her feet placed on a cushion; these were tied round the ankles with a cord, the end of which was held by a lady sitter. The gas was partially turned down, a bell, a tambourine, and flageolet having been placed on her lap; an assistant—one of the party—held the curtain before the medium, the instruments were heard for a minute or so, were then thrown on the ground, and she called for 'light'; the knots were found secure. The next arrangement was the tambourine on her lap, in which was placed a glass of water; 'light down'—curtain held before her, the tambourine heard; 'light'—curtain withdrawn, and the tumbler, nearly empty, found to be held between her teeth; examination of knots. Guitar placed on her lap, which was twanged

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, March 20th, 1874; see also *Spiritual Magazine*, 1874, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> 8th May, 1874.

<sup>3</sup> *Medium*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> See below, chap. ix.

<sup>5</sup> See various notices of Mrs. Fay's mediumship in the *Medium* for 1875. It is fair to add that in the *Spiritual Magazine* for the same year her name does not seem to be mentioned.

and shown above the curtain; 'light'—all secure. . . . I cannot help making the reflection that, with all these marvellous manifestations, so many mediums seem to be totally unimpressed by the gravity of their mission."<sup>1</sup>

The present writer was never privileged to meet Mrs. Fay. In September, 1877, however, he attended a public performance given at Eastbourne by a Miss Nella Davenport, which in its essential features reproduced Mrs. Fay's public séances; so closely, indeed, that with a few exceptions—exceptions, however, in which the whole secret of the performance will be found to rest—he can endorse the description quoted from the *Medium*, both of the method of tying and of the subsequent manifestations. Briefly, the two pieces of tape which passed round the medium's wrists were tied together, and another short piece of the same tape was tied across the point of junction;<sup>2</sup> the free end of this latter piece of tape was attached, not direct to the lower staple, but to an iron ring three or four inches in diameter which passed through it. On the particular occasion referred to, moreover, Miss Davenport's manager, perhaps not rating too highly the intelligence of a provincial audience, announced that one of the committee on the platform would be allowed to be present behind the curtain during the performance. The choice fell upon myself; I was blindfolded and placed standing at the left side of the medium. As anyone who has taken part in blind man's buff is aware, it is practically impossible effectually to blindfold anyone against his will. After working my eyebrows a little I found that I could without difficulty, by raising my head slightly, get a glimpse of the medium's hands and arms. What I then saw I have only within the last few years learnt to interpret aright. Briefly, I saw the medium's bound hands, or one of them, rapidly seize the rim of an empty bucket which lay on her knees and place it on her head. The whole thing lasted only a few seconds, and, bound as she was by wrists and neck to the two staples behind her, the feat for many years seemed to me, despite the evidence of my senses, an impossible one. The explanation is, no doubt, that given by Mr. Truesdell in his *Bottom Facts concerning Spiritualism*.<sup>3</sup> The linen bracelet on the medium's right wrist slipped up her slender arm; the

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Mr. Henry Collen in *Medium*, 12th March, 1875.

<sup>2</sup> In my notes of the performance the length of the tape between the wrists is given as six inches, and of the cross-piece as five inches. But these measurements are conjectural; I had no opportunity for actual measurement.

<sup>3</sup> New York, 1883, pp. 238, etc.

piece of tape which was fastened at one end to the ring, at the other end to the linen strip connecting her wrists, was made to slip on the linen strip towards the left wrist; add the diameter of the iron ring, and it will be seen that Mrs. Fay and her imitators had at least a foot of free play for the right hand—quite enough to achieve all the marvels reported of them.<sup>1</sup>

Another noted figure at this time was David Duguid, the Glasgow painting medium. Duguid was a cabinet-maker by trade, who in 1866 discovered himself to be a medium. At first his powers were manifested in raps and visions. Later he began in the trance to paint, with his eyes apparently fast closed. This painting, it was claimed, was effected under the inspiration of Jacob Ruysdael and Jan Steen, and, in fact, one of the pictures produced was obviously a copy of a well-known work by the former of those artists—a work so well known that an engraving of it had appeared in a popular publication, *Cassell's Art Treasures Exhibitor*.<sup>2</sup> A year or two later, as the medium's powers developed, the type of manifestation changed. The sittings were now held in the dark, and the spirits of the Dutch artists produced their paintings direct, and no longer through the hand of the medium. In August, 1878, by the courtesy of Mr. H. Nisbet, I was admitted to one of these sittings. Two other persons were present, besides my host, the medium, and myself.

After a trance address, some ordinary photographer's cards, carte-de-visite size, were produced by the medium. The sitters were not allowed to touch these cards, lest they should interfere with the personal magnetism with which the cards were saturated. But in order that the visitor might be satisfied that no substitution was practised, a small corner was torn off each of the two cards selected for the experiment, and the fragments were handed to me. I placed them securely in my pocket. Duguid then, to quote my contemporary notes, "was fastened hands, arms, and legs to the chair by silk handkerchiefs, with adhesive paper on the ends." The lights were then extinguished, so that the only light came through a ground-glass panel in the door from a small gas-jet some distance off. The illumination was so faint that I, sitting in the circle four or five feet from the medium,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Maskelyne (interview in *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 18th, 1885) gives a slightly different explanation of the trick, viz. that Mrs. Fay contrived that the knot on the right wrist should be a slip knot. But it is quite probable that both explanations are correct, and that, as in other cases, the medium had more than one string to her bow.

<sup>2</sup> *Human Nature*, 1868, p. 559.

could just make out against the background of the door the dark outline of his head, which apparently did not move throughout the experiment. I could see no gleam of white from the cards which lay on the table. After a quarter of an hour the lights were turned up, and two small oil-paintings, one circular, about the size of a penny, the other oval and slightly larger, were found on the two cards. The colours were still moist, and the fragments in my pocket fitted the torn corners of the cards. The two pictures, which lie before me as I write, represent respectively a small upland stream dashing over rocks, and a mountain lake with its shores bathed in a sunset glow. The paintings, though obviously executed with some haste, were hardly such as one can imagine to have been done in such a short interval and in almost complete darkness. For many years I was quite at a loss to understand how the feat could have been accomplished by normal means. The explanation which I have now no doubt to be correct is an extremely simple one. Duguid, it has been seen, would not suffer profane hands to touch the cards; and, when he had torn off the corner of a card, he no doubt dropped into the sitter's hand, not the piece torn from the blank card on the table, but a piece previously torn from a card on which a picture had already been painted.<sup>1</sup>

In the middle of July, 1876, there came to London a new American medium, "Dr." Henry Slade. Slade, whose fame had preceded him to our shores, was warmly welcomed by leading Spiritualists. Serjeant Cox, Dr. Carter Blake, Dr. Wyld, Mr. W. H. Harrison, and others had successful sittings with him, and published their experiences.<sup>2</sup> The following extract from an article in the *World*<sup>3</sup> gives a fair idea of the phenomena presented:—

"A highly-wrought nervous temperament, a dreamy mystical face, regular features, eyes luminous with expression, a rather sad smile, and a certain melancholy grace of manner were the impressions

<sup>1</sup> I do not know if it has ever been proved that this device was actually employed by Duguid; but it is obvious that, under the conditions described, it could have been employed, and that the so-called "test" was therefore worthless. In some later experiments in spirit photography, with Duguid as medium, Sir W. Crookes and others failed to obtain any conclusive results; but I understand that suspicious appearances were found on one of the plates. For accounts of Duguid's mediumship see *Human Nature*, 1868, p. 556, 1872, p. 90; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1872, p. 555; and *Hafed, Prince of Persia* (London, 1876). In chapter viii. some account will be given of his trance communications.

<sup>2</sup> See especially the *Spiritualist* for July 21, 1876, and onwards; and *Experiments with Dr. Slade*, by George King; privately printed, no date (apparently 1876).

<sup>3</sup> 30th Aug. 1876.

conveyed by the tall lithe figure introduced to me as Dr. Slade. He is the sort of man you would pick out of a roomful as an enthusiast. He at once invited me into a back room on the same floor, in the centre of which stood a small table, without a cloth or other covering. We were now alone together, the door was closed, and, responding to Dr. Slade's invitation, I seated myself at one side of the table, he also sitting at it sideways. The corner of the table was between us. The table was about five feet by four, had four legs, no ledge below or covering upon it. It would be difficult to imagine anything simpler or more aboveboard, as we both placed our palms upon it.

"Dr. Slade's long, white, nervous fingers had scarcely touched mine when a violent knocking began. The doctor became visibly agitated. There is no mistaking the signs of genuine agitation; and I may say at once that Dr. Slade's own transitions of expression, his excitement, and subsequent exhaustion, impressed me as strongly as anything which happened during this curious interview. 'You are a medium, sir,' he gasped; and I, feeling like the man who had talked prose all his life without knowing it, smiled feebly, as if to say, 'So you've found me out.' The knocking immediately became more vehement, and the doctor declared the spirit (of his wife) wished to pronounce upon my claims to mediumship. There were a couple of ordinary-looking school slates lying near, and taking one of these, and placing on it loosely a tiny piece of common slate-pencil, bitten from a stick and about the size of a grain of wheat, the doctor held the slate under the table with one hand, saying at the same time, 'Is this gentleman a medium, Allie?' The words were hardly spoken before there was a sound of writing, followed by two or three vigorous taps. The slate was looked at, and 'He is not,' in a flowing hand, was written on it.

"Then came more and violent knockings at the table, a chair at the farthest corner from Dr. Slade was lifted rapidly in the air and hurled to the ground without visible agency. My coat and trousers were plucked violently, and I was pinched and patted, all with great rapidity, and in quarters which it seemed absolutely impossible Dr. Slade could reach. A hand appeared and disappeared fitfully, but with unmistakable reality, close to me; and when the slate was produced with a similar crumb of pencil, once on it when it was held under the table, and once under it when it was placed on the table, messages of various kinds were inscribed rapidly and in different handwritings. One, the longest, was of a religious character, and inculcated the usual religious lessons. Others were in reply to questions in which I pressed hard for a communication on some subject which could be only known to myself. Dr. Slade did not discourage this, but said, 'We can but try; write the name of the deceased person you wish to communicate with on the side of the slate I cannot see, and we'll ask if he be present.' I did so, and the answer came promptly that — (giving the initials of the name

I had written) was not present. I tried again, writing another name. The slate was held under the table, and a message came in the first person, signed with the Christian name in full and the initial of the surname, saying, 'I cannot write more at present,' or something equally vague."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I had not, and have not, a glimmering of an idea how the effects described had been produced, and I came away inexpressibly puzzled and perplexed."

The present writer paid a visit to Slade early in September of this year, and was profoundly impressed with the performance.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it appeared at the discussion which followed the reading of Professor Barrett's paper at the British Association meeting of the same year, that several men of science had visited Slade, and were unable to explain what they saw in his presence. Lord Rayleigh mentioned that he had gone to Slade in company with a professional conjurer, who had admitted that he was completely puzzled.<sup>2</sup>

Slade's triumphant career, however, was speedily cut short. On the 16th of September, 1876, within a few days of the British Association meeting, there appeared in the *Times* a letter from Professor Ray Lankester setting forth the results of a visit which he, in company with Dr. Donkin, had paid to Slade the previous day. Having satisfied himself at a previous visit, by close observation of Slade's movements and general demeanour, that the medium wrote the messages with his own hand upon the slate while it was being held under the table, Professor Lankester put his hypothesis to the test by snatching the slate out of Slade's hand before the ostensible sound of writing was heard, at a time when, presumably, therefore, the spirits had not begun to write. As he anticipated, he found the message already written. No doubt to an observer in Professor Lankester's position the demonstration of fraud left nothing to be desired. He had seen the movements of Slade's arm in the act of writing, and had found the writing so produced, where and when no writing should have been. But the Spiritualists were perhaps justified in not accepting the incident as conclusive. Slade defended himself by asserting that, immediately before the slate was snatched from his hand, he had heard the spirit writing, and had said so, but that his words were lost in the

<sup>1</sup> See my article in *Human Nature* for Oct., 1876, "A Modern Miracle."

<sup>2</sup> See the report of the discussion in the *Glasgow Herald*, Sept. 13th, 1876.

confusion which followed. If we grant that Slade's testimony was as good as Professor Lankester's or Dr. Donkin's, it was difficult summarily to dismiss this plea. Moreover, as Mr. C. C. Massey and others pointed out,<sup>1</sup> the exposure was at all events incomplete. Slade's best "tests" were given when the slate was held above the table and never allowed to be out of the observer's sight; sentences had been written under such conditions, it was alleged, on the sitter's own slate, brought with him for the purpose, or even on the inside of a double-folding slate.

Others were confident that their messages had been written on the upper side of the slate, which was of course inaccessible to Slade when pressed tightly against the table; or, again, that the writing had been produced when Slade's hand was not in contact with the slate at all; that Slade's nails were pared so close that it was impossible for him to have held a fragment of slate pencil as suggested by Professor Lankester; that the touches and movements of furniture were such as could not have been effected by Slade's hands or feet; and, finally, that pertinent answers had been given to questions written on a slate held out of the medium's sight. Even if it was admitted that Dr. Lankester had demonstrated trickery on the occasion in question, there was much in Slade's performance that remained obscure: the explanation offered was not effective.<sup>2</sup>

The incident had a disastrous sequel for Dr. Slade. Professor Lankester obtained a summons against him for unlawfully using subtle craft to deceive certain persons, to wit: E. Ray Lankester, Henry Sidgwick, R. H. Hutton, Edmund Gurney, and W. B. Carpenter. After a hearing which lasted for several days Slade was found guilty, and sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. He appealed against the sentence. The appeal was heard on the 29th June, 1877, the prosecution in this instance being undertaken by the Treasury. The conviction was, however, quashed at the outset, on the ground that the words "by palmistry or otherwise," which appeared in the statute, had been omitted. Slade at once left the country, and the fresh summons which was issued at the instance of Professor Lankester on the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the *Times*, 18th Sept., 1876, and correspondence on following days.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Lankester clearly underrated Slade's skill, and, by implication, the intelligence of those whom Slade deceived. Mr. Maskelyne states that it cost him "a few weeks' hard practice" to imitate Slade's performances (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 20th April, 1885).

following day was effectual only in preventing him from ever returning.<sup>1</sup>

I will conclude this chapter by citing a display of mediumship of a somewhat different type, which will serve as an illustration, extreme, perhaps, but by no means unparalleled, of Spiritualist manifestations in private life, and of the attitude adopted by believers.

Mr. Morell Theobald was at the time of which I speak a well-known Spiritualist. He had been for some years a friend and near neighbour of Mr. and Mrs. Everitt, and had constantly witnessed direct writing and other manifestations through their mediumship. Moreover, the gift of automatic writing had developed in members of his own family; his sister had published a record of spirit communications received through her hand;<sup>2</sup> and Mr. Theobald himself had been a writing-medium for some years, having, indeed, been first initiated by William Howitt, some time in the later fifties.<sup>3</sup>

In the early part of 1882 one Mary entered Mr. Theobald's service as cook. It soon appeared that the new cook possessed mediumistic powers of a high order, and she was welcomed into the family and treated as a friend. In 1883, on the occasion of the housemaid's leaving Mr. Theobald's service, his daughter agreed to share Mary's room and to help her with the work of the house. Mary's mediumistic powers from this time developed rapidly. She had, apparently, always been averse to early rising, and unpunctual breakfasts had resulted. Now, in the autumn of 1883, the spirits relieved their medium of the most irksome portion of her domestic duties; the fires were lit and the breakfast-table laid, day after day, by unseen agencies. Soon other manifestations followed; spirit-writings were found on walls and ceilings, in locked receptacles, or were produced under test conditions on marked paper at séances. These writings were in many languages—English, German, Old French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Raratongan. The handwriting was described as being in many cases so small as to defy human imitation. Amongst the numerous spirits who communicated in this way one especially calls for mention: Saadi, a poet of ancient Persia, not only wrote passages from his own poems, and gave

<sup>1</sup> The subject of slate-writing will be further discussed below, Book IV. chap. ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Heaven opened; or, Messages for the bereaved from their little ones in Glory*, by F. J. T. London, 1870.

<sup>3</sup> See Mr. Theobald's account in *Spirit Workers in the Home Circle*, p. 18.

a brief account of his life, with dates and other particulars, but even showed himself to two members of the circle, who reported that he had "black hair, with a dark, flowing beard, penetrating eyes, and a lovely face."

Mr. Theobald, in the spring of 1884, kindly afforded to myself and a fellow-member of the Society for Psychical Research, the late Mr. Frank S. Hughes, the opportunity to investigate such of these marvellous occurrences as lent themselves to investigation. We could not, indeed, be witnesses to the laying of the breakfast, the lighting of fires, or the performance of other humble domestic offices by the invisible agencies, since the action of the human eye was found to be inimical to such phenomena, which took place, even in the presence of the master of the house, only when his back happened to be turned. But the writings on the ceilings and the walls we did see, and noted a remarkable peculiarity about them. When the writing occurred on the woodwork of the doorway or on other spots accessible to a person of ordinary stature, mounted on a chair, the letters were regularly formed and of normal size. When the writing occurred on a high ceiling, the writing was much larger, and the letters straggling and irregular, as might be the case if the writing had chanced to have been formed by a maid-servant standing in uncertain poise on a step-ladder, or armed with pencil attached to a broomstick.<sup>1</sup> We were also shown the exact spot where the spirit-writings were wont to appear in a locked secretaire; and my companion, without much difficulty, when the secretaire was locked, pushed a piece of paper through the chink in the flap and caused it to fall on the same spot. Indeed, Mr. Theobald unwittingly gave important testimony as to the value of this particular "test." Aware of the difficulty of getting the exact test sought, he had nevertheless ventured to ask the spirits to write on a manuscript which he locked

<sup>1</sup> In some of the writings which are reproduced in Mr. Theobald's book, already alluded to, the characteristics referred to in the text are plainly discernible. Compare, for instance, the large, irregular, and *tremulous* writing of the first sentence reproduced in Plate II. (p. 141) with the small and well-formed writing in the next two sentences. The first sentence was written on the cornice of the ceiling, the others in more accessible positions. The ceilings, it may be mentioned, are eleven feet high; the house-steps are five feet eight inches high (*op. cit.*, p. 235). But Mr. Theobald says (p. 141) that the writings on the ceilings are "out of reach of anyone to do, even on our house-steps, which I mounted in order to try." It may be added that we learn from Mr. Theobald that Mary was physically incapable of standing on steps, because, apparently, she suffered from vertigo. But no evidence is offered for the truth of this statement.

up in the secretaire aforesaid. The "test" given was some writing on another piece of paper subsequently introduced into the secretaire, and found in the position above described. "I seldom get exactly what I seek," he writes in reference to this incident, "but something equally satisfactory in the way of proof."<sup>1</sup> Again, we were shown the "direct spirit-writings" of superhuman fineness, some of which are reproduced in Mr. Theobald's book, and we satisfied ourselves by actual experiment that any educated person with a little time and patience and a sharp pencil could produce with ease writing as small and not less legible. The Latin and Greek had many mistakes; some even of the letters in the Greek being incorrectly formed, and accents and breathings omitted.<sup>2</sup> Nor could we discover that in any case the "test" conditions under which these writings were asserted to have been produced were such as to preclude fraud of the most obvious kind.

But the poetry of Saadi still remained to be accounted for. Whilst I was puzzling over the problem, a friend placed in my hands Part VI. of *Chambers's Repository of Instructive and Amusing Tracts*, a once popular and widely circulated series. From an article on "Persian Poetry in the Past" were derived, it appeared, all the translations of Persian poetry quoted by the Spirit Saadi, and all the particulars of his life and death which he had vouchsafed to give to this nineteenth-century domestic circle. It seemed hardly worth while to revisit earth after so many centuries only to furnish information which was accessible to any English schoolboy. But there were some interesting variations in the spirit poetry, indicating an imperfect understanding of his subject on the part of their author. Moreover, Saadi, in the seclusion of this quiet suburban household, had ventured to claim as his own a poem written by somebody else. But even this feat was surpassed by another Persian spirit called Wamik,

<sup>1</sup> *Light*, 1884, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> It seemed to me, from a close inspection of the original, quite clear that the Greek sentence shown to me had been written by a person ignorant of the language. I pointed out to Mr. Theobald at the time (see my letter in *Light* of Jan. 24th, 1885) that there were numerous mistakes in spelling and in the formation of the letters. Mr. Theobald, in republishing the quotation (*Spirit Workers*, p. 213), adopts a conjectural interpretation of the disputed words. It is to be regretted, since the matter has been publicly discussed, and the accuracy of his treatment challenged, that he did not give a facsimile reproduction of this quotation, as he has of another and later Greek spirit-writing (*op. cit.*, Plate VIII., p. 298). The "spirit" has, however, profited by my criticism, and the later Greek writing is much less open to unfavourable comment.

who gave himself out as Saadi's friend, and communicated as his own no less than eighteen lines of poetry, signed "Wamik Zerdusht," adding the interesting information, "Wamik was burnt to death at Abyssinia; he lived in this life before 636." Here was, indeed, news from the spirit world, for, according to Sir W. Jones,<sup>1</sup> Wamik was no friend of Saadi, had written no poetry, and had no claim to the name Zerdusht, having, in fact, never lived in this life at all. For Wamik was the imaginary hero of the poem to which the spirit had subscribed his name.<sup>2</sup>

The result of the investigations made by Mr. Hughes and myself I communicated in a series of letters to *Light*.<sup>3</sup> The editor of that periodical expressed his opinion that my "difficulties" (*i.e.* in accepting these spiritual revelations) "arose wholly and solely from the incomplete and hasty investigation" which I had accorded to the phenomena. Mr. Theobald's own attitude towards criticism is summed up in the following extract from the book in which, some years later, he gave the full history of his spiritual experiences in the home circle. "Such phenomena," he writes, "can never be received until faith in accredited narrators and reliance on the commonplace integrity of ordinarily reputable people is admitted as one of the canons of scientific attestation."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the tract referred to.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Theobald, in reply to this criticism, suggested—a suggestion borrowed, no doubt, from a more famous literary controversy—that the poem in question was not written by Wamik, its hero, but by another person of the same name (*op. cit.*, p. 175).

<sup>3</sup> January, February, March, 1885.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 291. The account in the text, which is reproduced, with some additions, from my earlier work, *Studies in Psychological Research*, is based partly on Mr. Theobald's book, partly on his letters to *Light* in 1884 and 1885.

## CHAPTER VI

### MATERIALISATION

THE crowning achievement of later Spiritualism, the presentation of a visible and palpable figure, purporting to be a spirit form temporarily materialised for the occasion, was late in its appearance on the stage in this country. There were, indeed, some who professed to have seen spirit forms at the early séances ; but there can be little doubt that in some cases at least, since they were not visible to all the sitters, these forms were hallucinations, or at most hallucinatory distortions of real objects imperfectly seen in the dim light.<sup>1</sup> In a letter published in the first number of the *Spiritualist* (November, 1869) Mr. S. C. Hall relates that, at a sitting with Home as medium, he saw the figure of his deceased sister. As the figure was apparently visible to others also, and especially as it was not in the first instance recognised by Mr. Hall, it is possible that this may have been a case of spirit impersonation on the part of the medium. But the details given are not sufficient to enable us to form an opinion.

In America, however, "materialised" spirit forms made their appearance at an early stage in the history of the movement. In October, 1860, Robert Dale Owen held a sitting with three members of the Underhill family (Mrs. Underhill, the medium in the present case, was one of the Fox sisters), at which a veiled and luminous female figure presented itself and walked about the room. In January of the following year began the famous series of sittings with Kate Fox and Mr. Livermore, a New York banker. Mr. Livermore, when prostrated with grief at the recent loss of his wife, was persuaded by Dr. Gray, one of the Spiritualist pioneers in America, to endeavour to open up communication through a medium. In the event he held nearly four hundred sittings, extending over six years, with

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 70, and below, Book IV. chap. iv.

Kate Fox. At the earlier sittings, and indeed throughout the entire series, with the exception of a few occasions on which one or more trusted friends, such as Dr. Gray, were admitted, Mr. Livermore sat alone with the medium, and in the dark. Under these exceptionally favourable conditions there appeared, clothed in shining raiment, a female figure, which was readily recognised by the sitter as that of his deceased wife. Later Benjamin Franklin also appeared, and was seen by Dr. Gray and others.<sup>1</sup>

In the latter part of 1871 the American papers contained accounts of sittings held with a new medium, Mrs. Andrews, at the house of a farmer named Keeler, in Moravia, New York, not far from Auburn. At these sittings spirit hands and faces were shown from the cabinet; and spirit forms, frequently recognised as those of deceased relations, walked about the room and conversed with the sitters.

Simultaneously with the receipt in England, through the Spiritualist Press, of news of these doings came the publication of Dale Owen's book, with reports of the earlier materialisations already referred to. English mediums, who had not hitherto advanced beyond the occasional production, under favourable conditions, of arms and faces, were naturally put upon their mettle not to be altogether outdone by their American colleagues. Mrs. Guppy was first in the field. In January, 1872, a meeting was held at Mr. Guppy's house, among those present being the Countess de Medina Pomar and the Hon. Cholmondeley Pennell. The mediums—Mrs. Guppy and another lady, unnamed—retired to the cabinet, a common wooden cupboard fastened against a corner of the room, with several window-openings cut in the side facing the circle. The lights were extinguished, but moonlight was allowed to enter the room through the uncovered windows. Under these conditions the faces of the two mediums were thrust through one of the lower openings of the cabinet, and a small face, "as white as alabaster," appeared simultaneously at an upper opening. Neither this face nor a similar one, which appeared later, were recognised, nor did they speak or make any movement beyond nodding in answer to questions. The performance, except for the darkness and the presence of the distinguished guests, seems to have been rather like a Punch and Judy show, and was not regarded as a conspicuous success.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Debatable Land*, by R. D. Owen, pp. 366-408. London, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritualist*, 1872, p. 9. An account of a séance held a few weeks later, with similar results, will be found on page 17.

In April of this year the leading professional mediums, Messrs. Herne and Williams, took up the subject, and at their dark séances shadowy forms and faces began to appear and move about the room. The forms were rendered visible in the partial darkness by a faintly luminous smoke or vaporous substance, and were accompanied by a smell of phosphorus, which the editor of the *Spiritualist* assures us was extremely faint.<sup>1</sup> But it was a new medium, Miss Florence Cook—then a girl of sixteen—who first exhibited materialisation in its full development in a good light. Miss Cook attended several of the early sittings at the rooms of Herne and Williams; and later she and Herne had some successful materialisations at Mr. Cook's house at Hackney. From this point Miss Cook, soon discarding Herne's assistance, appears to have given regular séances on her own account. At the outset Miss Cook (at the present time a professional medium under the name of Mrs. Corner) took no money for her séances; and, shortly after she had begun to give regular sittings, a wealthy citizen of Manchester, Mr. Charles Blackburn, came forward and undertook to pay her an annual retaining fee, that she might be free to give her services when required.

In this manner Miss Cook was placed in much the same position as Mrs. Guppy and other non-professional mediums. Though receiving a substantial payment for the exercise of her gifts, she was in no way beholden to the individual sitters who attended her circles. They were invited guests of herself or her family, and for the most part accepted without question the restraints imposed by that condition. The following extracts from two articles which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* will show how her performances appeared to a contemporary writer.<sup>2</sup> After describing the medium, "a pretty Jewish-like little girl," and the other persons present, all members of the medium's family, or well-known Spiritualists, the writer continues:—

"A sort of corner cupboard had been fitted up with two doors opening in the usual manner from the centre, and an aperture of some eighteen inches square in the fixed portion at the top. At this I was told the faces would appear. A lamp on a table in the other corner of the room was so arranged as to shed a bright light on this opening, whilst it left the rest of the small apartment in subdued, but still in full light. I examined the cupboard or cabinet

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, 1872, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 10th, 1872, article on "Spirit Faces," by "Our Own Commissioner."

carefully, put a chair in, and saw little Miss Blank carefully shut up inside, like a pot of jam or a pound of candles. A rope was put in her lap, the object of which will appear anon, and we all sat round like a party of grown-up children waiting for the magic-lantern.

"We were told to sing, and so we did—at least the rest did, for the songs were spiritualistic ones for the most part, which I did not know. They were pretty, cheerful little hymns, such as 'Hand in hand with Angels,' 'The Beautiful River,' and Longfellow's 'Foot-steps of Angels.' By-and-by raps inside the cupboard door told us to 'open sesame.' We did so; and there was pretty Miss Blank tied round the neck, arms, and legs to the chair, in a very uncomfortable and apparently secure manner. We sealed the knots, shut her up in the cupboard, and warbled again. After some delay a face rose gently to the aperture rather far back, but presently came well to the front. It was slightly pale, and the head was swathed in white drapery. The eyes were fixed, and altogether it looked ghostly. It remained for some time, disappeared and reappeared; and the lamp was turned full upon it, but the eyes never lost their fixed stare, and showed no symptom of winking. After several minutes it went altogether. The doors were opened, and little Miss Blank was found still tied, with seals unbroken, and to all appearance in a deep sleep. . . . After a good deal more singing than I cared about, another appearance took place in obedience to the command of the doctor, who had been in the East, and asked to see a Parsee friend. After some delay, a head appeared, surmounted by a turban, and with a decidedly Eastern expression of countenance and dark complexion. It did not satisfy the doctor, who declared that the face bore a resemblance to the one demanded, but that the headgear was not *en règle*. This was Tableau No. 2. . . . In Scene the Third the face was quite different. The head was still surmounted by white drapery, but a black band was over the forehead, like a nun's hood. The teeth were projecting, and the expression of the face sad. They fancied it was a spirit that was pained at not being recognised. When this face disappeared, Kate came again for a little while, and allowed me to go up to the cupboard and touch her face and hand, after first putting to me the pertinent question, 'Do you squeeze?' On assuring her I did not do anything so improper, the manipulations were permitted. This was the finale, and the circle broke up forthwith. The gentleman from Manchester was delighted, and all the Spiritualists, of course, were loud in their commendations."

In the following year the same writer gives an account of a later phase of the manifestations:—

"In a short time, however, Katie—as the familiar of Miss B. was termed—thought she would be able to 'materialise' herself so far as

to present the whole form, if we arranged the corner cupboard so as to admit of her doing so. Accordingly we opened the door, and from it suspended a rug or two opening in the centre, after the fashion of a Bedouin Arab's tent, formed a semicircle, sat and sang Longfellow's 'Footsteps of Angels.' Therein occurs the passage, 'Then the forms of the departed enter at the open door.' And, lo and behold, though we had left Miss B. tied and sealed to her chair, and clad in an ordinary black dress somewhat voluminous as to the skirts, a tall female figure draped classically in white, with bare arms and feet, did enter at the open door, or rather down the centre from between the two rugs, and stood statuelike before us, spoke a few words, and retired; after which we entered the Bedouin tent and found pretty Miss B. with her dress as before, knots and seals secure, and her boots on! This was Form No. 1, the first I had ever seen. It looked as material as myself; and on a subsequent occasion—for I have seen it several times—we took four very good photographic portraits of it by magnesium light. The difficulty I still felt, with the form as with the faces, was that it seemed so thoroughly material and flesh and blood like."<sup>1</sup>

Whilst Miss Cook was still giving her séances a new private medium came on the stage. Mrs. Showers, the widow of General Showers, was living at Teignmouth, with one daughter, Mary, who at the time when the manifestations began was sixteen years old. The attention of the family was called to the accounts of Spiritualism in London, and they began to hold nightly séances for themselves in the spring of 1872. The tables moved, messages were spelt out by the raps, and Miss Mary Showers and the servant Ellen professed to see spirits moving about the room, amongst them John King and Peter. Direct writing, at first in *spiegel-schrift*, followed. Then a young gentleman named H. appeared upon the scene. He came in one evening to bid farewell before starting for Australia. At his entrance the dining-room table started to run across the room by itself. Mrs. Showers tells us that, herself by this time accustomed to such marvels, she tried to divert her guest's attention by suggesting that he should dry his feet—it being a wet night—at the kitchen fire. Immediately after his departure from the room on this errand a crash was heard, and Mrs. Showers, hastening to the kitchen, found Mr. H. standing on the kitchen floor in a pool of soup. He assured her that the saucepan had jumped off the fire at his entrance. Moreover, two large dish-covers, no unusual

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 12th Aug., 1873. Another account of Miss Cook's early séances will be found in Mr. Dunphy's article, "Modern Mysteries," in *London Society*, Feb., 1874.

occurrence at that period, Mrs. Showers tells us, were seen to be suspended from the bell wires. From this precarious eminence they shortly descended with a crash on the china below. Then other manifestations of the usual Poltergeist order followed. Mr. H.'s chair was snatched away from him as he attempted to sit down at table. Sofa cushions, egg-cups, flower-pots, umbrellas, pots of jam, chairs, ottomans, a roll of lard, and other things flew about the house. Scraps of paper, inscribed with doggerel rhymes, fluttered down from the ceiling. Mr. H. developed into a seeing medium, and recognised John King, in luminous robe and turban, and Peter, in a shooting coat, sitting on the sofa. Mr. H. shortly afterwards left for Australia, but the spiritual forces continued to develop. Peter now communicated with Mrs. Showers through the "direct" voice, and finally promised to show himself to her in material form, through the mediumship of Ellen, the servant. Mrs. Showers was bidden to leave the room whilst the materialisation was being prepared ;

"As I turned from the door," she writes, "the blended voices of Peter and Ada swelled out into a harmony so mournful and sublime, that the tears involuntarily started into my eyes. 'Oh, my God!' I exclaimed, clasping my hands, 'is it possible that these things are true, and that the majority of mankind are living in utter ignorance of them?' Hardly knowing where I went, I walked up and down the garden path in company with Lion, who carefully measured his pace with my own, in evident consciousness of my abstracted mood, until the now solemn and almost terrible voice of Peter called to me from above: 'Come up, but turn away your eyes at first from the aperture; stand at the further end of the room and only approach gradually, as I tell you.'

"I did as Peter directed, and soon perceived the living, animated countenance of a young man, clad in a dark, flowing mantle, standing at the aperture a few feet from me. He had a long, dark moustache, and his face was rounder and fuller, but the resemblance to Ellen was nevertheless plainly discernible. My daughter, however, assured me that Ellen was at that moment lying back insensible in her chair."

At the termination of the sitting Peter prescribed some good wine and other delicacies for the medium's supper.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the publication of Mrs. Showers' account of her daughter's mediumship at the end of 1873, the two ladies

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, 1874, p. 43. The two previous letters from Mrs. Showers, on which the account in the text is based, will be found in the same paper, 1873, p. 487, and 1874, p. 30.

came up to London to give séances to many representative Spiritualists. At first, indeed, the manifestations went no further than the presentation, in a mildly subdued light, at an opening between the curtains of the cabinet, of a face admitted by Spiritualists themselves to bear a strong resemblance to the face of the medium. The test commonly employed at these early séances to guard against impersonation by the medium had been devised apparently under direct spirit instruction. By the side of the medium would be placed, at the beginning of the séance, in the cabinet or curtained recess, a sufficient quantity of rope or tape for Peter's use. At a signal from within the curtain would be drawn aside, and the medium discovered apparently entranced, and straitly bound by that dexterous fiend. Some of the company would then impress their seals upon the knots, and the curtains would again be drawn.<sup>1</sup>

When by means of this and similar tests the honesty of the medium was held to be sufficiently vindicated, all precautions were at some of the later séances dispensed with, to permit of the "spirit" appearing in full form before the spectators. The following account of one of the earliest of these full-form manifestations is taken from a letter written by Dr. Richardson to the *Medium and Daybreak*:—<sup>2</sup>

"At a private séance held at Mrs. Showers's residence, March 19th, we were favoured with the appearance of the full form of the spirit calling herself 'Florence Maple.' I requested 'Peter,' the spiritual stage-manager, to allow me to employ what I had been impressed would be a good test for the readers of these notes, viz. to make a mark with chalk or charcoal on the face of the medium before entrancement. This was declined on the alleged ground that the mark might reappear on some part of the created spirit form, and he could not say which part. This I knew to accord with reported experiences, and was impossible to be denied. Being fully satisfied of the reality of former manifestations, all present decided to dispense with the tests of tying and sealing. After the usual lapse of time, occupied, as we were told, by entrancement, 'Florence' appeared holding aside the curtain. She was robed from head to foot in white; her head-dress was, as before, net or tulle; her bodice, sleeves, and skirt were of soft material, described by the ladies as resembling merino, by 'Florence' as being cashmere. She wore white pearl buttons in place, she said, of gold, which she was unable to procure. We all noticed the extreme pallor of her features, the open, staring, never-winking eyes. There was not so great a resemblance to the medium as formerly. She asked to

<sup>1</sup> See the accounts of these early séances given in the *Spiritualist*, 1874, pp. 11, 74, 108, etc.

<sup>2</sup> April 3rd, 1874.

examine our rings and jewellery, and expressed herself much gratified at being allowed to handle them. Miss Florence Cook was present, and was permitted to look into the curtained recess. She stated that she saw at the same time 'Florence' the spirit, the medium lying back in her chair, and a third form dressed in a grey jacket as a man. Her viewing the group was attended by no ill consequences either to the spirits or the mortals, and demonstrates that much of the fear on this ground is needless. The spirit 'Florence' kissed the human Florence, and shook hands with all of us. She appeared at times uneasy about the light, which was a lamp on the mantelpiece, burning dimly, and objected to being scrutinised too closely. The wonderful mediumship of Miss Showers was displayed by the disregard of usual rules: we walked about the room, and Mrs. Showers absolutely left the room and admitted the servant while 'Florence' was in full view. She evinced some little nervousness on the entrance of the servant, exclaiming, 'I do not know her.' I noted the height of 'Florence,' and found it to vary. At one time she stood six to eight inches taller (by subsequent measurement) than the medium, while at another she shrunk in proportion while under observation. I asked if she had bones. She replied, 'Yes'; and on retiring behind the curtain, we heard certain noises resembling the cracking of joints. Of course, I should have liked to have examined her anatomically, but was met with a cold refusal even when I asked her to put out her tongue and to let me feel her pulse. After a conversation extending over half an hour she asked if we were gratified, and on being assured that we were, she replied, 'Then we are repaid; God bless you all.'

"W. LINDESAY RICHARDSON, M.D.

*"March 20th, 1874."*

It will be seen that at these early form manifestations practically no precautions were taken against trickery. There was nothing, so far as can be discovered, to throw any hindrance in the way of the medium if she chose to impersonate the spirit by exhibiting a mask through the opening of the curtain, or by dressing herself up and walking about the room. Nor were there any collateral circumstances to justify belief in the genuineness of the manifestations.

That an imposture so naïve and so flagrant should have escaped detection for so long in itself requires explanation. That explanation is, no doubt, to be found in the peculiar conditions of the exhibition. The two principal performers were, as we have seen, young girls, little more than children in years, and one of them at least possessed of considerable personal attractions. The performances were given either in a private house in presence of members of the medium's own family, or in the house of some tried and trusted Spiritualist.

The spectators, carefully selected for the purpose, were all present in the quality of favoured guests, and chivalry and good manners joined in imposing restraints upon the legitimate satisfaction of scientific curiosity. These restraints were not, indeed, always effectual. At a dark séance with Miss Cook one William Hipp seized the hand of the "spirit" which was sprinkling him with water, and, when a light was struck, found himself firmly grasping the hand of the medium. Miss Cook's explanation, that she had instinctively stretched her hand across the table to recover a flower which had been removed by the spirits from her dress, appears to have given satisfaction to her friends.<sup>1</sup>

On December 9th, 1873, a séance was held at Mr. Cook's house, amongst the persons present being the Earl and Countess of Caithness and the lady's son, the Count (afterwards Duke) de Medina Pomar. One of the invited guests was Mr. W. Volckman, invited, as he subsequently explained, after nine months' importunity, only when, in accordance with a hint received from Mr. Cook, he had presented the youthful medium with a present of jewellery.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Volckman, "having for forty minutes carefully observed and scrutinised the form, features, gestures, size, style, and peculiarities of utterance of the so-called spirit," and having "perceived also an occasional tiptoeing by the young lady as if to alter her stature," became convinced that the "spirit" was no ghost, but Miss Florence Cook herself. He therefore rushed forward and seized first the hand and then the waist of the white-robed figure. Two of the medium's friends at once jumped up and forcibly extricated the form from Mr. Volckman's grasp; the gas was extinguished; "Katie" retreated to the cabinet; and "after a delay of about five minutes . . . the cabinet was opened, and Miss Cook found in black dress and boots with the tape tightly round her waist as at the beginning of the séance, the knot sealed as at first with the signet ring of the Earl of Caithness." Subsequently the medium was searched, and no white drapery was found on her.<sup>3</sup>

The editor of the *Medium* alone blamed the conduct of those who had endeavoured to stifle investigation. But most

<sup>1</sup> See letter in *Echo*, Jan. 3rd, 1874, and letter by Thomas Blyton in the *Spiritualist*, Jan. 16th, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Volckman's letter to the *Medium and Daybreak*, Jan. 23rd, 1874.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Spiritualist*, Dec., 1873, and *Medium*, Jan., 1874. Another of those present, Mr. Dunphy, in describing the struggle between the "spirit" and Mr. Volckman, writes that "the figure appeared to lose its feet and legs and to elude the grasp, making for that purpose a movement somewhat similar to that of a seal in water" (*London Society*, Feb., 1874).

Spiritualists reserved their indignation for Mr. Volckman, and were no whit shaken in their belief in the genuineness of Miss Cook's mediumship. Indirectly the Spiritualist position was, indeed, considerably strengthened, as the incident was the immediate occasion of the publication in the Spiritualist journals of three letters from Sir William Crookes, giving an account of his own experiences with the same medium.<sup>1</sup>

A like fate befell the next attempt at exposure. Mrs. and Miss Showers were invited on the 2nd of April, 1874, to give a materialisation sitting at the house of Serjeant Cox. Serjeant Cox had already, as he tells us, seen the "spirits" "Katie" and "Florence" moving about together in a lighted room; had seen that they could breathe, talk, perspire, and eat; and that in face, complexion, gesture, and voice they precisely resembled the two mediums who were asserted to be lying entranced behind the curtains. At the séance on April 2nd, when the form of "Florence" appeared in the aperture between the curtains, Serjeant Cox's daughter, Mrs. Edwards, opened the curtains wider; in the spirit's struggles to prevent this, the head-dress fell off, and revealed the "spirit's" head as that of Miss Showers, and still visibly attached to the body of that young lady, which was clothed in a dark silk dress. Moreover, the chair, where the medium should have been sitting, was seen to be empty. Serjeant Cox's own explanation was that the medium was entranced and unconscious of her impersonation of the spirit. This explanation does not, of course, take into account the awkward fact that Miss Showers had introduced into the cabinet, presumably in her waking state, some white drapery wherewithal to clothe the spirit form.<sup>2</sup> Serjeant Cox's action was not well received in Spiritualist circles.

The professional mediums, as already indicated, were not slow to follow the lead given them by the lady amateurs. At a séance held in the rooms of Messrs. Herne and Williams on April 13th, 1872, a veiled, nunlike figure was seen for a few seconds, "not very distinctly."<sup>3</sup> The mediums on this occasion were sitting in the circle; but at later séances a "cabinet" was constructed, and the spirit form would then come out and walk amongst the audience.

<sup>1</sup> See below, chap. ix.

<sup>2</sup> See Cox's letters in the *Medium* for May 8th and 22nd, and a letter from Mrs. Showers in the same journal for May 15th, 1874; also letter to the *Spiritualist*, May 15th, 1874; see also editorial comments in the same number, and letter from Mrs. Corner in the following week's issue.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritualist*, May 15th, 1872. For another account of these early séances see *Spiritual Magazine*, 1875, p. 367.

During the years 1872-80 a large number of mediums appeared for this form of manifestation, and the columns of the Spiritualist periodicals were filled with accounts of successful materialisation séances. Amongst the leading exponents, besides those already mentioned, were Dr. Monck, W. Eglinton, Miss Lottie Fowler, the Misses Wood and Fairlamb—the official mediums of the Newcastle Society—Mrs. Petty and her sons, boys of thirteen and seventeen, Rita, Bastian and Taylor.

It would be tedious as unprofitable to consider these professional performances in detail. The procedure was in all essentials alike in every case. The medium would be placed apart from the circle in a "cabinet," the cabinet consisting sometimes of a large wooden box, like a sentry-box; sometimes of a curtained recess; sometimes of another room, communicating with that in which the circle was seated by a curtained doorway. The medium would generally be bound to his chair, the lights lowered, and the circle would then be requested to talk, sometimes to sing. Occasionally the silence would be relieved by the strains of a musical-box. After an interval of varying duration, glimpses of white drapery would be discerned, in the semi-darkness, at the opening of the curtains; and, if the conditions were favourable, one or more spirit forms, who for the most part affected turbans, or nondescript headgear, and flowing robes of various kinds, would walk amongst the audience, speak to them, and occasionally touch favoured individuals. At the end of the evening the medium would be found in deep trance, with his bonds unbroken. There is no recorded case in which medium and spirit have been seen together, by competent witnesses, under unequivocal conditions. The experiments conducted by Sir W. Crookes and the late Mr. Cromwell Varley on various mediums furnish us with the nearest approximation to proof of the separate existence of medium and spirit.

In these experiments, as will be shown later on,<sup>1</sup> it is possible, if not always to explain the fraud practised, at least to see where the opportunity for fraud occurred. But the ordinary Spiritualist, untrained in any kind of exact observation, could neither unravel the mystery himself nor will suffer us to unravel it now. When, for instance, Signor Rondi tells us that in a private house he spent two hours in the company of a materialised spirit, was allowed to examine and even to touch the hands and feet of the figure, and thus satisfy himself that it was a distinct entity from the

<sup>1</sup> See below, chap. ix.

medium, and finally felt the hands of medium and spirit simultaneously, he leaves us no doubt unconvinced, but unable from the very imperfection of the record to explain the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Again, to take another case recorded in the same year, the Hon. J. L. O'Sullivan describes how, through the mediumship of Firman, he had made the acquaintance of several spirits—to wit, his own mother, "the venerable and saintly Glaucus," John King, and two lovely girl spirits, Alexandrine and Nathalie; that these spirit figures would sometimes rise to the ceiling, sometimes seem almost to sink through the floor; and that occasionally four of them would be present at once, with the sleeping form of the medium still plainly visible.<sup>2</sup> We don't see how the things were done, but we remember that Firman had already been detected in Paris masquerading as an Indian spirit, and had left his mantle in the hands of the lady who had seized him.<sup>3</sup>

At the public sésances for materialisation, where the restraints already referred to as withholding the sitters at a private circle from too probing an inquiry would no longer operate, charges of fraud and attempts at detection were frequent, and would, no doubt, have been yet more numerous but for the full conviction which the earlier Spiritualists had of the honesty of the mediums. For the ordinary incidents of a materialisation sésance, and especially the perambulation of the spirit form amongst the company, offered opportunities for investigation against which all the precautions devised by the mediums for their own safety were frequently powerless. Probably from the outset some care was exercised in the admission of sitters; and the earlier mediums, Herne and Williams, Bastian and Taylor, the Misses Wood and Fairlamb, the Petty family, etc., preferred to work in couples. But after the darkness the safeguard chiefly relied upon, no doubt, was the holding of hands by the circle; for any breach of this condition involved the confederacy of at least two sitters, and by skilfully disposing the circle in accordance with spirit direction, the medium could nearly always prevent the contingency of two strangers or suspicious persons sitting side by side. Further, the sympathies of all those who believed, or were in any degree disposed towards belief, were enlisted on the side of law and order by continual insistence—in itself a sufficiently plausible

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, April 20th, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 13th and May 4th, 1877.

<sup>3</sup> *Practs des Spirites*, by M. Leymarie, p. 45.

warning—on the grave danger which must result to the medium's organism from any violent breach of the conditions. Thus protected by his own cunning and by a strong body-guard of volunteer defenders, the medium could, as a rule, defy the attempts of the solitary intruder to confound him. As a matter of fact, most of the earliest attempts at exposure were inconclusive, and Spiritualists had some justification for ignoring and even resenting them. Thus in August, 1874, at a séance given by Bastian and Taylor, a lady caught Bastian's arm where a spirit hand should have been. According to the account in the *Medium*, since Bastian was sitting in the circle, within arm's length, the result proved nothing.<sup>1</sup> Again, in the same month, at Newcastle, an outsider turned the light of a dark lantern on the circle, and claims to have seen one of the mediums hurrying back to her seat. But the evidence appears not to have been clear, and a summons for assault which the intruder brought against two members of the circle was dismissed in the local police court, on the ground that the conditions on which the would-be exposé was admitted to the séance had been violated by his action.<sup>2</sup> Again, at a séance at Arnheim with Bastian and Taylor, an electric lamp was suddenly introduced, and a moment's glimpse obtained of Bastian holding a guitar in his hand over the heads of the sitters. But Mr. Riko, the editor of the *Medium*, and others held that the member seen was a spirit hand in the act of dematerialising and sinking back into the medium's body.<sup>3</sup>

Later in the same year, 1875, Mr. St. George Stock made an heroic attempt at exposure. The mediums were Herne and young Petty. Mr. Stock had possessed his soul in patience for some time, whilst enthusiastic believers loudly professed to see both mediums and spirits together, where he could see only two white-robed forms, in stature and general appearance corresponding to the two mortals. But unfortunately Mr. Stock chose his opportunity not well. Whilst the white-robed forms were still before the curtain, and the conflict between faith and sight was most acute, he held his peace. When they had retired and the séance was about to end, moved by a momentary impulse, he turned up the gas, and discovered Herne seated in his chair and leaning forward. Mr. Stock, whatever grounds he may have had for suspecting fraud, admits his failure on this occasion to

<sup>1</sup> *Medium*, Aug. 14th, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 21st Aug., 1874; *Medium*, 21st Aug., 1874; *Spiritualist*, 28th Aug., 1874.

<sup>3</sup> *Medium*, 15th Jan., 1875.

demonstrate it.<sup>1</sup> Once more, when Miss Wood was giving a séance at Blackburn, in the autumn of 1877, the materialised form was seized and found to be the medium herself. Miss Wood "protested that she was an unconscious instrument temporarily in the hands of an evil power," and the explanation appears to have been accepted.<sup>2</sup>

These repeated discoveries, however individually inconclusive, could not fail to produce some effect on the better-educated persons, at any rate, who took an interest in the movement. The columns of the *Spiritualist*, a weekly newspaper conducted with fairness and ability by W. H. Harrison, contain during the years 1876 and 1877 numerous editorials and other contributions dealing with the philosophy of materialisation. It was conceded by all those who took part in the discussion that the evidence for the actual presentation of a material form distinct from that of the medium left much to be desired. It was indeed suggested that such a form probably existed merely as a temporary emanation from the body of the medium, deriving its material elements wholly from that body; thus medium and spirit form were alike for the time materialised entities in a condition of unstable equilibrium, and reciprocally dependent, in such sort that when the rude hand of the sceptic seized the spirit form, the question "whether they united in the hands of the observer or in the cabinet . . . depended upon the relative proportion of energy in the two forms at the time of the seizure."<sup>3</sup> This ingenious theory was not allowed to pass altogether into the background, even when, with the progress of time, it became apparent that in all cases this hypothetical coalition took place in the hands of the observer, and not in the cabinet.

It was recognised by most that the duplication of form was rare. Miss Kisingbury, the Secretary of the "British National Association of Spiritualists," went so far as to state that the stricter the conditions, the rarer the genuine phenomena.<sup>4</sup> It was even suggested by some Spiritualists that the form seen at materialisation séances was the physical body of the medium, sometimes transfigured by spirit power into the

<sup>1</sup> See his letter in the *Medium* for June 25th, 1875. Mr. Stock later considered that he had received satisfactory evidence of a "speaking apparition" distinct from medium (in this case Mr. Williams). See his article in the *Spiritualist*, April 20th, 1877, and his letter in the same issue containing an apology to Herne for the part which he had played in 1875.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritualist*, Sept. 28th, 1877.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. Harrison, in the *Spiritualist*, Dec. 29th, 1876.

<sup>4</sup> "When strict test conditions are imposed, even when united with harmony and good feeling, it is only in very rare instances that full-form manifestations take place."—*Spiritualist*, Dec. 22nd, 1876.

likeness of another body, sometimes in *propria persona*, the medium being at the time entranced and controlled by his spirit guides. For the supposed "transformation" no evidence is offered worth consideration. But the alternative theory presented no special difficulty. It was admitted that to the spirits the extrication of the medium's body from the most cunningly devised bonds was an easy task. And there were, no doubt, many spiritual intelligences, especially those of sub-human "elementals," who would find pleasure in thus practising on the credulity of mortals. Clearly, then, the only satisfactory evidence of materialisation would be the simultaneous presentation of the "form" and the medium to the eyes of the circle; or, failing that, irrefragable proof of the presence of the medium in the cabinet at the time when the spirit form was outside. To Stainton Moses it appeared that evidence of the kind desired was afforded by certain experiments, notably those of the Comte de Bullet with Firman already referred to; to W. H. Harrison that the electrical tests employed by Mr. Varley and Sir W. Crookes amounted almost to a demonstration. But all were agreed that more evidence was required.

To the outsider the most noteworthy feature in the discussion is the implied belief on all hands in the honesty of the medium. Policy alone would no doubt have dictated such a profession of faith. But the accents are those of genuine conviction. It would seem that to Spiritualists at that time the idea of systematic and wholesale imposture on the part of the medium—even such unconscious or semi-conscious imposture as might be associated with a hypnoid state—had hardly presented itself as a serious possibility. If fraud there were, it was assumed to be fraud on the part of tricky elementals.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In an editorial article in the *Spiritualist* for 28th December, 1877, Mr. Harrison sums up the position. He begins by pointing out that there are two well-marked classes of so-called materialisations: (1) Forms with flexible features commonly bearing a strong resemblance to the medium, which move and speak. These are the forms which come out when the medium is in the cabinet. (2) Forms with features which are inflexible and masklike (the epithet is not Mr. Harrison's) and which do not move about or speak. Such inflexible faces are seen chiefly when the medium is held by the sitters, or is in full view of the circle. Mr. Harrison then continues: "We have patiently watched for years for a living, flexible face in a good light, which face bore no resemblance to that of the medium, and was not produced on his or her own premises. Hitherto this search has been prosecuted without success. Mr. A. R. Wallace and Mr. Crookes have witnessed a great number of form manifestations, without once recording that, off the premises of the medium, they have seen a living, flexible, materialised spirit form, bearing no resemblance to the sensitive. Neither has Mr. Varley made any such record."

During the year 1878 the Research Committee of the "B. N. A. S." set itself to fill up the gap in the evidence thus demonstrated. Their labours met with some apparent success. A cabinet was constructed and mounted on an apparatus made after the model of a platform weighing-machine, with an automatic recording apparatus attached.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Williams, the medium, sat in the cabinet, the séance-room being in complete darkness, except that a recorder was shut up in another cabinet with a lighted lamp, in such wise that no ray from it should relieve the gloom in which the spectators sat. Under these circumstances a spirit form was seen, heard, and felt to move about the room, giving on various occasions tangible proof of its presence at a distance of ten or twelve feet from the cabinet. The times of these manifestations were carefully noted, and were found to correspond with fluctuations in the weight recorded by the self-registering apparatus, the extreme limit over which the variations in weight extended amounting to about 100 lbs. When the form was at its maximum distance from the cabinet, the automatic record indicated a weight of about 30 lbs. Now since there was no heavy object which could have been placed in the cabinet during the absence of the medium, it was contended that these results indicated that part of the bodily substance of the medium had been withdrawn to make up the spirit form, whilst part remained in the cabinet, and affected the balance. The editor of the *Spiritualist* appears to have regarded the experiments as conclusive.<sup>2</sup>

No doubt the suggestion of a transatlantic sceptic that the medium could have manipulated the recording instrument may be dismissed as impracticable.<sup>3</sup> But the experiment as described was clearly open to one source of error. The medium had only to fasten the suspended cabinet to the floor by a gimlet or a piece of string and a nail, and he could move about the room as he pleased. Some fifteen months later Mr. C. C. Massey pointed out that a similar series of experiments was vitiated by the neglect to guard against this possibility.<sup>4</sup> That this form of fraud did not suggest itself at the time to Mr. Harrison, who was by no means lacking in shrewdness or the capacity to weigh evidence, was again

<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that Miss Cook—or rather "Katie"—had refused to accede to Sir W. Crookes' request that she should allow herself to be weighed (see *Spiritualist*, 29th Dec., 1876, p. 257).

<sup>2</sup> See his articles on the experiments, *Spiritualist*, May 3rd and 17th and June 7th, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, June 14th, 1878.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17th Oct. and 14th Nov., 1879.

due probably in a large measure to the extraordinary confidence which he and other Spiritualists seem habitually to have placed in the professional medium.

That confidence was, however, soon rudely shaken. A few months after the results of the weighing experiments, with all due scientific appurtenances of charts and diagrams, had appeared in the *Spiritualist*, Williams and his new colleague Rita were exposed in Amsterdam, under circumstances which made it difficult for the most hardened believer to lay all the blame upon the spirits. The incident took place in the rooms of a Spiritualist; the members of the circle were Spiritualists; and it was aggrieved and indignant Spiritualists who made the facts public. Suspicion had been aroused; one of the sitters clutched at the spirit form of "Charlie," and grasped Rita by the coat collar. Up to this point, no doubt, the Spiritualist theories already referred to were elastic enough to cover the facts. But when the mediums were searched, there were found, in their pockets or hidden in various parts of their clothing, on Rita a nearly new beard, six handkerchiefs, assorted, and a small round scent-bottle containing phosphorised oil, bearing a resemblance all too convincing to "Charlie's" spirit-lamp; on Williams a dirty black beard with brown silk ribbon, and several yards of very dirty muslin—the simple ingredients which represented the spiritual make-up of the repentant pirate John King—together with another bottle of phosphorised oil, a bottle of scent, and a few minor properties.

It was difficult for the believer to lay all the blame upon the spirits. But he did not shrink from the attempt; and that dirty muslin was washed in public with much circumstance. Harrison began by suggesting that evil spirits sometimes abetted their mediums in imposture, and that the facts pointed to Williams and Rita being under some strong control on the disastrous occasion.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Blackburn opined that the spirits—as was their wont—had brought in the muslin, etc., to save themselves the trouble of materialising it, and had, in their hurry, omitted to take it away with them.<sup>2</sup> Other experienced Spiritualists wrote to support this view; and Mr. Gledstanes suggested that, before concluding that his favourite medium was dishonest, it would be best to consult "John King" himself.<sup>3</sup>

But if the Spiritualists learnt little from the incident, the general public profited by the lesson. From this episode

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, Sept. 20th and 27th, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Letter in *Spiritualist*, Nov. 1st, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 25th, 1878.

may be said to date the decline of Spiritualism in this country. Its later history is little else, indeed, than a history of similar exposures. One other example, in which the writer was personally concerned, may perhaps be quoted.

In the year 1882 there appeared in a Spiritualist journal<sup>1</sup> an account, by Mr. J. F. Collingwood, of a séance held under "test" conditions, with Miss Wood, a well-known Newcastle medium. Mr. Collingwood saw two distinct materialised spirit forms walking about the room, one of which—the child form of a little Indian girl called "Pocha"—touched and even kissed some of the sitters. It so happened that I had myself attended a séance with the same medium, held under the same "test" conditions, which, briefly, were as follows: Miss Wood was placed in a cupboard, the door of which had been removed and the entry secured by passing a continuous cord through eye-headed screws, placed at short intervals along the sides, top, and bottom of the doorway, the result being a kind of irregular network, with meshes whose sides varied from five to ten inches in measurement. This arrangement was designed to prevent Miss Wood from leaving the cupboard. A thick curtain was drawn across the corner of the room at an angle to the doorway, so as to leave a considerable space between the network and curtain. The lights were lowered, and after a short interval occupied by singing, two figures—a woman and "Pocha," the aforesaid little Indian girl—emerged successively from the curtain and moved about in the semi-darkness. The figures did not in my presence appear together, nor did either of them touch the sitters. After the sitting was concluded I examined the network, and found by actual trial that it was quite easy to creep in and out without injuring the meshes. I accordingly wrote to *Light*,<sup>2</sup> communicating my discovery, and pointing out that, when once the medium had come through the network, it would have been quite easy for her, with the aid of a little drapery, to produce all the phenomena which had been observed. The taller of the two figures, on this hypothesis, would be Miss Wood standing upright, the shorter, Miss Wood on her knees. The singing would effectually drown any noise made by the medium in creeping through the network; the presence and position of the curtain would hide her movements during the operation; whilst the more than semi-darkness would render detection difficult.

The letter was intended, not as a demonstration that fraud had been committed, but as a protest against the assumption

<sup>1</sup> *Light*, July 29th, 1882.

<sup>2</sup> Aug. 19th, 1882.

that, under the given conditions, fraud was impossible. It met with a somewhat surprising reception. The next three numbers of the paper contained nine lengthy letters—selected, as the editor explained, out of a much larger number, some of them too personal for publication—from indignant Spiritualists. Not one of the writers recognised that temperate criticism of the kind employed was legitimate and even helpful. Some, indeed, disputed the possibility of the “tests” being evaded in the manner I described. But the majority thought it a sufficient answer to describe similar phenomena obtained, also “under test conditions,” at other times and in other circumstances. One writer even maintained that to take any precaution against fraud was superfluous and unphilosophical. By all my action was condemned.

Then came a dramatic intervention. The last of the letters appeared in *Light* for September 9th. The following week came a communication from a Spiritualist narrating that at a séance held at his house a few days previously Miss Wood had been detected in flagrant imposture. A member of the circle had ventured to do what I had not done. He had seized the child form of “Pocha,” and found himself holding Miss Wood on her knees, partially undressed, and covered with muslin, which she unsuccessfully endeavoured to conceal about her person. Again *Light* was filled with letters in defence of Miss Wood. A main feature of the defence, as before, was the description of marvellous phenomena at previous séances. Various alternative explanations of the exposure, as in the case of Williams and Rita, were suggested: that the sitters had made a mistake; that the gentleman who seized the medium had brought in the muslin himself; that Miss Wood was possessed by an evil spirit on the occasion in question; and finally, that, in accordance with Mr. Harrison's views, when the form is seized and can no longer return to the medium, the spirits, in order to secure the medium from serious injury, are obliged to bring the body to the form. They coalesce, and the inquirer who began by seizing a spirit finds that his grasp has closed upon a frame of flesh and blood. This last theory, it should be explained, was now propounded on the authority of a spirit, who had communicated it to the correspondent.<sup>1</sup>

So far, then, there seems no reason to doubt that the so-called spirit form was in all cases that of the medium or

<sup>1</sup> The foregoing account of Miss Wood's exposure, and of the events which preceded it, is taken with slight verbal alterations from my earlier work, *Studies in Psychical Research*.

an accomplice, more or less successfully disguised. Nor were there any collateral circumstances tending to render this explanation doubtful. Fragments of spirit drapery—materialised, *ex hypothesi*, for the occasion—were sometimes, at the earlier sésances in this country, cut off and presented to importunate admirers; but in all cases they proved to be indistinguishable from the products of earthly looms.<sup>1</sup> Later this theory was gradually discredited, and it was freely recognised by Spiritualists that the drapery shown on materialised forms had been borrowed for the occasion, either by the spirits or the medium “under control.”

Again, as already shown, the face of the spirit form, by the testimony of Spiritualists themselves, in most cases strongly resembled the face of the medium,<sup>2</sup> though some believers, admitting this, yet professed to recognise substantial differences.<sup>3</sup> Medium and spirit were never seen together in unequivocal circumstances and by disinterested and competent witnesses;<sup>4</sup> under the like circumstances the “direct” voice of the spirit was never heard speaking at the same time as the medium.<sup>5</sup>

At the early sésances in America, as already mentioned, the sitters were reported to have constantly “recognised” the spirit forms. Mr. J. W. Truesdell was present at some of the sittings given by Mrs. Anderson in Moravia, and has described some of the “recognitions” of which he was a witness. Thus Mr. T. R. Hazard (a well-known Spiritualist) was greeted by a figure purporting to be his mother. Mr. Hazard could not see the features of the figure, and could not recognise the voice; but he had no doubt that it really was his mother, founding his conviction on his recognition of the Quaker cap and bonnet which the figure wore. This Quaker cap and bonnet, Mr. Truesdell tells us, had already done duty in a similar capacity for several other witnesses with equal success.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *Spiritualist*, Sept. 15th, 1872, letter from E. Gunton; May 1st, 1874, editorial article; *Spiritual Magazine*, Dec., 1872, p. 549, etc., etc.

<sup>2</sup> See, in addition to the references already cited, the editorial in *Spiritualist*, May 10th, 1874, and the account, pp. 153-4, below, of the materialised form of “Katie” photographed by Sir W. Crookes.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Mr. Tapp's letter in the *Spiritualist*, Feb. 6th, 1874.

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion on this point with respect to Sir W. Crookes' experiments with Miss Cook, below, pp. 153-5. Mr. Stock's testimony (*Spiritualist*, April 20th, 1877) does not seem really pertinent. Mr. Stock saw and spoke with the form of John King, while Williams, the medium, lay on the floor at his feet. But Herne and Eglinton were both present.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the careful historical accounts by Mr. W. H. Harrison, the editor, in the *Spiritualist* for Feb. 6th and May 1st, 1874, etc., etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Bottom Facts concerning Spiritualism*, p. 83, etc. New York, 1883.

Of the famous recognitions at the Eddy séances we have various accounts, to correct the too imaginative history given by Colonel Olcott.<sup>1</sup> Thus Mr. C. C. Massey, a witness who was certainly not prejudiced against the Spiritualist position, attended the Eddy séances for a fortnight in 1875. This is how he describes the nightly incident of the apparition of a deceased relative of someone present:—

"A dusky young man would look out, and we had to say in turn, all round the circle, 'Is it for me?' When the right person was reached, three taps would be given, and the fortunate possessor of the ghost would gaze doubtfully, upon which the ghost would look grieved, and that generally softened the heart of the observer, and brought about a recognition in the remark, 'Lor, so you be——.' And that sort of thing went on night after night at the Eddys."<sup>2</sup>

At the early séances in this country the faces which appeared were occasionally, if rarely, recognised by the sitters as those of deceased relatives. Thus, at a sitting held on April 20th, 1872, Mr. Clifford Smith recognised one of the spirit faces as that of a lady to whom he had been engaged. The illumination, however, is described as "dim," and Mr. Smith, to judge from his own version of the incident, appears to have been in a state of much emotional excitement. Moreover, the "recognition" did not take place until after the spirit form had addressed Mr. Smith by name and claimed acquaintance.<sup>3</sup> At a séance with Mrs. Holmes as medium a face appeared which was recognised by Dr. and Mrs. Speer and the latter's brother as that of a departed relative. "M.A. Oxon" (Stainton Moses), who also contributes an account of the séance, states that the light was good, and that the face appeared at a few feet from the sitters. But the details given are not sufficient to enable us to judge of the value of the "recognition."<sup>4</sup> Again, Serjeant Cox, at a séance in January, 1873, it is stated, asked of a spirit face, "Are you my uncle, Robert Cox?" and the face bowed an affirmative.<sup>5</sup> But as Serjeant Cox himself does not refer to the incident, and later repeatedly expressed his entire disbelief in materialised spirit forms, it may be presumed that the recognition was premature. Later, such recognitions were reported not infrequently.<sup>6</sup> I have myself within the last

<sup>1</sup> *People from the Other World*, by H. S. Olcott. Hartford (Conn.), 1875.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritualist*, Dec. 29th, 1876; see also D. D. Home, *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, pp. 260-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritualist*, May 15th, 1872.

<sup>4</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1873, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1873, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Mr. J. L. O'Sullivan's recognition of his mother at Firman's séances already referred to; Mr. Coleman's account of a lady recognising her husband

twenty years received accounts of several such incidents from persons of unquestioned good faith, who believed themselves actually to have seen the features of some dead friend. In all cases, however, the light was dim,<sup>1</sup> and the observers appear to have been in some emotional stress.

In short, there can be no doubt that in most cases the attendants at these dark séances see what they wish to see. Dr. Horace Furness has given a most instructive account of his experiences at materialisation séances in America, from which I quote the following:—

“At another séance a woman, a visitor, led from the cabinet to me a materialised spirit, whom she introduced to me as ‘her daughter, her dear, darling daughter,’ while nothing could be clearer to me than the features of the medium in every line and lineament. Again and again men have led round the circle the materialised spirits of their wives, and introduced them to each visitor in turn; fathers have taken round their daughters, and I have seen widows sob in the arms of their dead husbands. Testimony such as this staggers me. Have I been smitten with colour-blindness? Before me, as far as I can detect, stands the very medium herself, in shape, size, form, and feature true to a line; and yet, one after another, honest men and women at my side, within ten minutes of each other, assert that she is the absolute counterpart of their nearest and dearest friend, nay, that she *is* that friend. It is as incomprehensible to me as the assertion that the heavens are green and the leaves of the trees deep-blue. Can it be that the faculty of observation and comparison is rare, and that our features are really vague and misty to our best friends? or is it that the medium exercises some mesmeric influence on her visitors, who are thus made to accept the faces which she wills them to see? or is it, after all, only the dim light and a fresh illustration of *la nuit tous les chats sont gris*!”<sup>2</sup>

We shall have occasion to return to the subject of recognition in the next chapter, and again in Book IV. chapter iv.

(*Spiritualist*, 14th July, 1876); Mr. Ronald’s recognition of his brother (*Spiritualist*, April 20th, 1877, letter by St. George Stock), etc. Remarkable accounts have recently appeared in *Light* (April, 1900, and later dates) of séances with Husk, at which several spirit faces have been shown against the background of a luminous slate, and in each case recognised by one or other of those present.

<sup>1</sup> “The recognisable faces of deceased persons seem to be formed with more difficulty, and in all cases to bear less light than the faces in affinity to the medium. . . . The recognisable faces have less life in them, and but few of them can talk.” (W. H. Harrison, in *Spiritualist*, Feb. 1st, 1873.)

<sup>2</sup> *Seybert Report*, p. 150. The bodies of drowned persons are not seldom erroneously recognised. For a striking instance see Le Bon, *Psychologie des Foules*, p. 34.

## CHAPTER VII

### SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS

THE history of spirit photography, though, in this country at any rate, extremely brief, presents several features of interest. Like most other types of manifestation, it originated in America. So early as October, 1862, Dr. Gardner, of Boston, announced that a photographer of that city named Mumler had, in taking a photograph of himself, obtained on the same plate the likeness of a cousin dead some twelve years before. In the course of the next few weeks many well-known Spiritualists flocked to Mumler's studio and obtained "spirit photographs," some of which were recognised as being the likenesses of deceased friends. In February of the following year, however, Dr. Gardner discovered that, in two at least of the so-called spirit photographs, a living person had sat for the "spirit." Dr. Gardner himself and most other Spiritualists appear still to have been satisfied that some of the photographs were genuine, basing their conviction on the double ground that many of the spirit figures had been recognised, and that in some cases the process of production had been supervised throughout by expert witnesses without trickery being detected.

But the exposure put a stop to the trade for the time, and we hear no more of Mumler until 1869, when he reappeared in New York. Within a few weeks of his commencing operations in that city a prosecution was instituted against him by the municipal authorities. The prosecution, however, was unable—the old Boston evidence being barred—to bring forward any actual proof of fraud; whilst for the defence numerous witnesses appeared, some themselves photographers who had investigated and failed to detect trickery, others, sitters who had obtained on the plate portraits of deceased relatives. In the event Mumler was discharged for want of evidence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1862, p. 562; 1863, pp. 36, 82, 128, 182; 1869, pp. 226, 241.

It is not until 1872, however, that we find any record of spirit photography in this country. The manifestation originated about the same time as the materialisations dealt with in the last chapter, and through the same instrumentality—that of Mr. and Mrs. Guppy. After trial in the domestic circle for some weeks without success, Mr. Guppy found a photographer named Hudson who, with the assistance of Mrs. Guppy or some other medium, was able to produce spirit pictures. The procedure was much the same as that followed by Mumler. The sitter would be posed in front of the camera, and, if the operation were successful, the developed picture would present, in addition to his own image, another figure, in most cases draped, and with the features blurred or only partly discernible.

Hudson's studio was at once besieged by eager Spiritualists, and numerous testimonies to the genuineness of the results appeared in the Spiritualist papers. Mr. Slater, an optician, took his own camera, lenses, and plates, and watched the process throughout, without discovering any suspicious circumstance. Moreover, though most of the spirit faces were more or less veiled in white drapery, a considerable proportion were unhesitatingly recognised by the sitters as the likenesses of friends. But very shortly the bright prospect clouded. Mr. Enmore Jones, a well-known Spiritualist, who had in his first enthusiasm described the instant recognition by his son of an imperfectly discernible profile as that of a dead sister, wrote later to say that he had found grounds for suspicion, and that on further inspection he was satisfied that the likeness was not that of his daughter or of any member of his family. And worse was to follow. The editor of the *Spiritualist*, W. H. Harrison, himself a practical photographer, another Spiritualist photographer, Beattie, and other persons soon ascertained that fraud had been used. It was observed, on a close scrutiny of the pictures, that in some cases the medium had dressed up to play the part of ghost. In many there were signs of double exposure, the pattern of the carpet and other parts of the background showing through the legs of the sitter, as well as through those of the ghost. Inspection of the actual negatives again revealed that in some cases they had been tampered with in the attempt to erase these tell-tale marks.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Spiritualist*, April, May, June, July, 1872. Hudson's photographs are now difficult to obtain; but I have examined a few specimens—the property of Mr. Dawson Rogers and the Spiritual Alliance—two of which bear clear marks of double exposure, the background in each case being visible through the dress of the sitter.

But the demonstration produced little effect. The *Spiritualist* newspaper, indeed, ceased to pay any more attention to Hudson's spirit photography; but its contemporaries, the *Spiritual Magazine*, *Human Nature*, and the *Medium*, gladly opened their columns to fresh testimonies and heated vindications. The explanation of the curious duplication of the pattern of the carpet and other marks of double exposure which found most favour with believers was of a sufficiently ingenious kind. The spirits explained that these suspicious appearances were due to refraction; the spirit aura, the presence of which was essential to the success of the experiment, differing apparently in density and refracting power from the ordinary terrestrial atmosphere.<sup>1</sup> Hudson's studio was more thronged than ever, and Stainton Moses, in reviewing two years later the evidence for spirit photography, bases his case largely on Hudson's work, and does not think it necessary to dwell on his detected frauds.<sup>2</sup>

The conviction entertained by most Spiritualists of the authenticity, in general, of these spirit photographs, a conviction shared, as we have seen in the case of Mumler, even by some who admitted that fraud had been occasionally practised, rested ultimately upon the fact that many of the spirit figures were claimed by the sitters as recognisable likenesses of their friends. How untrustworthy such recognition may be is made evident in many cases out of the mouths of the witnesses themselves. Enmore Jones repudiated the recognition of his dead daughter as soon as he became aware of suspicious circumstances in the production of the photograph. A well-known Spiritualist, Mrs. Fitzgerald, professed to recognise "unmistakably," by the contour alone, a veiled and draped figure.<sup>3</sup> A sceptical clergyman is reported by Stainton Moses to have recognised two faces which were so close together on the plate that "although the features were quite different, three eyes only were required to form two perfect faces."<sup>4</sup> Stainton Moses himself selects, out of a hundred and eighty photographs by Hudson submitted to him, two—presumably not the least impressive—to be reproduced as illustrations to the articles referred to. Copies of these two photographs are before me as I write. One of the two represents an upright figure with the whole of the bust enveloped in white drapery, so as entirely to conceal the form.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1872, p. 482; *Human Nature*, 1872, p. 448.

<sup>2</sup> See a series of articles by "M. A., Oxon.," published in *Human Nature*, for 1874 and 1875.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1872, p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> *Human Nature*, 1874, p. 429.

The head presents a three-quarter face, with strongly marked prominent features. The upper part of the head is concealed by a dark covering which may be a skull-cap, coming low down on the brow; the white drapery referred to encroaches just so far on the cheek and chin as to leave it uncertain whether there were whiskers or beard. The figure was "recognised" as that of the sitter's father, an old gentleman in a skull-cap. It is undoubtedly a favourable specimen of the spirit photographer's art. But, as will be seen from the description, so little of the face is exposed to view that any identification must be of a very doubtful character. The same sitter subsequently "recognised" a portrait of a dead sister "by the manner in which she wore her hair as a child."<sup>1</sup> But the other photograph selected for representation is still less convincing. There are two spirits on the plate, a closely veiled (apparently) female figure, with its back half turned towards the spectator, and a baby enshrouded in copious white drapery. Moses, himself one of the sitters, claims that both figures were recognised, the mother, whose face is invisible, by her glove, the child by its features. Presumably when the photograph was new—my own copy has faded with time—the baby's features may have presented something more distinctive than a smooth superficies punctuated by two black dots. But as the baby, *ex hypothesi*, had died fifty years before at the age of seven months, the validity of this particular recognition must even so appear questionable.

But fresh evidence was soon forthcoming of the real significance of recognition in spirit photography. In the summer of 1874 a Parisian photographer, one Buguet, had come to London and produced spirit pictures. These pictures were of much higher artistic quality than those proceeding from Hudson's studio; the spirit faces were in most cases clearly defined, and were, in fact, frequently recognised by the sitters, and even W. H. Harrison failed to detect any trickery in the operation.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the recognised figures were, indeed, those of well-known personages. Thus, Allan Kardec appeared on the plate when his widow was the sitter; the same spirit also appeared with Miss Anna Blackwell, his best-known English disciple. Miss Blackwell was also favoured by the presence

<sup>1</sup> *Human Nature*, 1874, p. 395.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritualist*, June, 1874, quoted in *Human Nature*, 1875, p. 14. Harrison watched the operation throughout, but was not allowed himself to operate, and for the identification of the glass plate he relied upon a small fragment of glass broken off by Buguet. I suspect that, as in the case of Duguid already referred to (pp. 86-7, above), Buguet found here an opportunity for substitution.

of Charles Dickens and of King Charles' head. Mr. Gledstones obtained a portrait of the recently deceased Judge Edmonds. Prominent Spiritualists like Lady Caithness, her son, the Duke de Medina Pomar, and the Comte de Bullet, obtained portraits of near relatives. Instances of this kind do not in themselves afford any presumption of supernormal power. Nor, again, is it difficult to account, on the hypothesis of trickery, for the appearance of the well-known features of Stainton Moses himself on the sensitised plate in Buguet's studio in Paris, when the original was, as he tells us, lying in his bed in London in a state of deep trance.<sup>1</sup> It is much more remarkable to find that comparatively obscure persons, of whom it is unlikely that Buguet could have heard, should again and again have obtained recognisable portraits of their dead friends. Out of a hundred and twenty photographs by Buguet dealt with by Stainton Moses, evidence was forthcoming of recognition, or of the operation being produced under test conditions, in as many as forty, a far higher proportion than was the case with Hudson or Parkes.

Stainton Moses' endorsement of Buguet's claims appeared in *Human Nature* for May, 1875. In the following month Buguet was arrested and charged by the French Government with the fraudulent manufacture of spirit photographs. When put on his trial Buguet made a full confession. The whole of his "spirit" photographs were, he stated, produced by means of double exposure. In the first instance he employed his assistants—of whom there were three or four—to play the part of ghost. Later, as his business grew, and he feared that the constant repetition of the same features might arouse suspicion, he constructed a headless doll or lay figure, which, variously draped, served for the body of the ghost. The head was commonly chosen to suit the expectations, where these were expressed, or apparent circumstances of the sitter; information on these points being frequently extracted by the assistants, who received the visitors on their entrance. The lay figure and a large stock of heads were seized by the police at the studio.<sup>2</sup>

The peculiar interest of the trial did not consist, however,

<sup>1</sup> *Human Nature*, 1875, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> A verbatim account of the trial will be found in a book, *Procès des Spirites*, published in Paris in 1875 by Madame Leymarie. M. Leymarie, editor of the *Revue spirite*, who had admittedly suggested to Buguet that he should endeavour to produce spirit photographs like those of Mumler, was put on his trial with Buguet, and was in the event condemned, notwithstanding his protestations of innocence, to a like punishment, viz. a year's imprisonment and a fine of 500 francs.

in these paltry revelations; for, after all, Buguet did little to improve on the methods inaugurated by his predecessors. It is the effect produced on his dupes by Buguet's confession, and the display of his trick apparatus, which is really worthy of attention. Witness after witness—journalist, photographic expert, musician, merchant, man of letters, optician, ex-professor of history, colonel of artillery, etc., etc.—came forward to testify on behalf of the accused. Some had watched the process throughout, and were satisfied that trickery had not been practised. Many had obtained on the plate unmistakable portraits of those dear to them, and found it impossible to relinquish their faith. One after another these witnesses were confronted with Buguet, and heard him explain how the trick had been done. One after another they left the witness-box, protesting that they could not doubt the evidence of their own eyes. Here, chosen almost at random from many similar accounts, is the testimony of M. Dessenon, picture-seller, aged fifty-five. After describing how he had obtained in the first instance various figures which he could not recognise, he continues:—

“The portrait of my wife, which I had specially asked for, is so like her that when I showed it to one of my relatives he exclaimed, ‘It’s my cousin.’

*The Court.* Was that chance, Buguet?

*Buguet.* Yes, pure chance. I had no photograph of Mme. Dessenon.

*The Witness.* My children, like myself, thought the likeness perfect. When I showed them the picture, they cried, ‘It’s mamma.’ A very fortunate chance! . . . I am convinced it was my wife.

*The Court.* You see this doll and all the rest of the things?

*The Witness.* There is nothing there in the least like the photograph which I obtained.

*The Court.* You may stand down.”<sup>1</sup>

Incidentally there were two or three curious bits of evidence on the value of recognition as a test. A police officer stated that Buguet showed him a portrait which had done duty as the sister of one sitter, the mother of a second, and the friend of a third.<sup>2</sup> Again, it came out in the evidence that a very clearly defined head (reproduced as an illustration to Moses’ articles in *Human Nature*), which had been claimed by M. Leymarie as the portrait of his almost lifelong friend, M. Poiret, was recognised by another witness as an excellent likeness of his father-in-law, still living at Dreux,

<sup>1</sup> *Procès des Spirites*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

and much annoyed at his premature introduction to the spirit world.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of the exposure on English Spiritualists appears to have been much the same as the effect on Buguet's actual dupes. Stainton Moses remarked that the prosecution bore traces of clerical origin, that the judge was strongly biassed, and that Buguet was obviously a genuine medium, who had no doubt been bribed or terrorised to make a spurious confession, and to fabricate a box full of trick apparatus for exhibition at the trial.<sup>2</sup> William Howitt saw in the whole proceedings further evidence of an organised conspiracy on the part of the Jesuits to overthrow Spiritualism. They had in this instance, he pointed out, apparently bribed a genuine medium to confess to imaginary trickery, as a few years before they had sent one of their own emissaries, Allan Kardec, to poison the pure wells of the new truth with the pestilential doctrine of reincarnation.<sup>3</sup>

However, the result of the trial was undoubtedly on the whole to discourage the profession of spirit photography, and we hear little more of it in this country after 1875.

Of other alleged instances of spirit photography at this time, one only deserves serious notice.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Beattie, a practical photographer, who had already, on the strength of the signs of double exposure, denounced Hudson's spurious pictures, in the years 1874-5 carried on with a few friends a series of experiments at Bristol. The results, after many blank séances, were the production of a number of plates exhibiting curious blotches and splashes of light, a few bearing a remote resemblance to the human figure, but the majority being shapeless and unrecognisable. Judged from the reproductions which I have seen,<sup>5</sup> the effects might well be due to rays of light being admitted through a small aperture on to the sensitised plate in the developing room.<sup>6</sup> The experiments took place in the studio of a

<sup>1</sup> *Procès des Spirites*, p. 42; see also *Human Nature*, 1875, frontispiece. The spirit head in the photograph is noticeably flat, thus testifying to its origin.

<sup>2</sup> *Human Nature*, 1875, pp. 334, 335. <sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazines*, 1875, p. 346.

<sup>4</sup> I omit any account of Parkes' pictures, partly because he would not apparently allow his processes to be thoroughly supervised, partly because so very few of his spirit photographs were even claimed as recognised. See the article by Mrs. Sidgwick, *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. vii., and Stainton Moses' articles in *Human Nature*.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these photographs are reproduced in Aksakof's *Animismus und Spiritismus*, vol. i. Leipzig, 1890.

<sup>6</sup> Or the blotches might be due to the use of a strong developer; or conceivably they might have been produced by smearing the negative with some reagent—e.g. a soluble sulphide—which would blacken it. From the reproductions referred to it is not clear that the white blotches have any spatial relation to the

professional photographer named Josty, who supplied also the apparatus used, and who received payment for his services. Josty further acted as medium and assistant in the necessary operations. From the evidence published by Mrs. Sidgwick, it is clear that Josty's character was not such as to make trickery on his part a very improbable explanation.<sup>1</sup>

The profession of spirit photography has languished in this country since 1875.<sup>2</sup> From time to time within the last five-and-twenty years, however, reputed spirit photographs have been obtained by private persons without the aid of a professional medium or photographer. Most of those which I have seen represent mere vague fogs or splotches of light, and were no doubt caused by the inadvertent admission of light to the sensitised plate, whether through incapacity on the part of the operator or some undetected defect in the apparatus. In a case which was brought to my notice lately the supposed ghost was apparently to be attributed to an accidental double exposure; there were faint marks of double exposure in the print.

A very curious ghost photograph attained some celebrity ten years ago. A lady, on the 5th December, 1891, took a photograph of the library of D— Hall. Six months later she developed the plate and found seated in a large armchair the faint but clearly discernible figure of a man. Various friends recognised the image as the likeness of the late Lord D—, the owner of D— Hall, and it was ascertained that Lord D— had actually been buried on the day the photograph was taken. Professor Barrett, however, who investigated the case, showed (1) that the image is too faint and blurred for any likeness to be substantiated; (2) that the plate had been exposed in the camera for an hour and the room left unguarded; (3) that actual experiments show that an appearance such as that on the plate could have been

figures of the sitters, *i.e.* the blotches may have been produced before the plate was put into the camera.

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. vii. p. 286, on "Spirit Photography": a reply to Dr. A. R. Wallace, by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick. Mrs. Sidgwick's article, to which I have been much indebted in the preparation of this chapter, furnishes a trenchant analysis of the chief evidence for spirit photography, and should be referred to by all interested in the subject.

<sup>2</sup> Bournsell is the professional who has attained most celebrity in Spiritualist circles of recent years. I am not aware, however, of any evidence entitling his productions to serious consideration. Some of his photographs which I have seen bear unmistakable marks of double exposure—the pattern of the floorcloth and the drop-curtain of the studio being visible through the sitter's legs, etc. One of Bournsell's spirit pictures represents a well-known statesman, in which the head has apparently, as in Baguet's productions, been cut from a photograph, the contour being heavily draped to hide the sharp edges of the card.

produced if a man—there were four men in the house—had sat in the chair for a few seconds during the exposure, moving his head and limbs the while. There seems no reason to doubt that in fact the picture was so produced, though it is now impossible to verify this hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> A ghost picture, which was probably caused in a similar way, was shown me lately. The operator had been photographing a chapel. On developing the plate he observed in a panel of the woodwork a faintly discernible face, in which he recognised the features of a young acquaintance who had recently met with a tragic death. In fact, when he told me the story and showed me the picture, I could easily see the faint but well-marked features of a handsome, melancholy lad of eighteen. A colleague, however, to whom I showed the photograph without relating the story, at once identified the face as that of a woman of thirty. The outlines are in reality so indistinct as to leave ample room for the imagination to work in; and there is no reason to doubt that, as in the ghost of the library, the camera had merely preserved faint traces of some intruder who, during prolonged exposure, stood for a few seconds in front of it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the account of this case in *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xiv. p. 234, and the subsequent discussion in the *Journal S. P. R.* for February and the following months, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> No attempt has been made in the text to give a systematic account of the various kinds of fraud or accident which may give rise to reputed spirit photographs. Nor, indeed, does such a systematic exposition of the possibilities of deception form any part of the plan of this book. But it may be useful briefly to enumerate some of the leading methods suggested or actually shown to have been employed.

(1) A confederate may be surreptitiously introduced and stand for a few seconds behind the sitter; (2) the figure of a spirit may be painted in sulphate of quinine or other fluorescent substance on part of the background; (3) the positive may be printed from two different negatives (this last is a clumsy device, and can, of course, be guarded against by inspection of the negative at the time); (4) the negative may be twice exposed: this, as explained in the text, is the method which has been actually adopted by most spirit photographers, and, if care is taken, in taking the picture of the ghost, that only that part of the plate on which the ghost is to appear shall be exposed to the light, excellent results may be obtained; (5) in some cases, where old glass plates are used, the image of a previous photograph may remain on the glass and may reappear when the positives are printed off. The Rev. A. T. Fryer has called my attention to a case in which a faint portrait of a man was discerned in one of the panes of glass in a greenhouse. The pane had apparently come from a photographic studio (*British Journal of Photography*, April 13th, 1900).

The above are the chief methods by which a clearly defined figure, other than that of the ostensible sitter, can be introduced on to the plate. But (6) a transparency may be introduced into the camera itself, between the lens and the plate. Images like those in Mr. Beattie's photographs might conceivably have been produced in this way; (7) or the actinic light may be allowed to fall upon the plate in the dark room. I have heard of cases in which the images of raised glass letters on the side of the bath have been imprinted on the plate during the process of development.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CLAIRVOYANCE AND TRANCE-SPEAKING

OF the psychological manifestations of later Spiritualism there is little to be said. Prior to 1860, as already shown, trance communications and inspirational writing and drawing had played the leading part in this country in the spread of the new faith. But from that date onward the increasing prevalence of physical phenomena drew away attention from the less arresting manifestations of the trance. It was gradually realised, moreover, by the more sober-minded Spiritualists that trance manifestations of the ordinary type were in themselves of little value as evidence for any external agency. The communications were obviously in most cases coloured by the medium's mind, if they did not actually originate there. The difficulty of obtaining conclusive answers to "test" questions was considerable; and satisfactory evidence of the identity of the so-called spirit communicators was still more rarely forthcoming. Thus Mr. W. H. Harrison, writing in 1875, states that he had on two occasions only received any evidence of this kind worth consideration, and that after studying trance mediumship for some months, he had been forced to fall back on the physical manifestations for the proof which he required.<sup>1</sup> Dr. A. R. Wallace admits that "the purely mental phenomena are generally of no use as evidence to non-Spiritualists."<sup>2</sup> The only instances of such test phenomena quoted in Dr. Wallace's book as coming under his personal observation are messages spelt out by raps at séances with Mrs. Marshall.<sup>3</sup> For illustrations of clairvoyance he quotes accounts of Dr. Haddock's somnambule, Emma, and the performances of Adolphe and Alexis Didier.<sup>4</sup> And, speaking generally, in the recitals of personal experience after 1860 a small and rapidly lessening

<sup>1</sup> *Spirit People*, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, pp. 202, 203 (2nd edition, 1881).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60 et seq.

share is assigned to the subjective phenomena of the trance and automatism. The three hundred pages of evidence published in the Dialectical Society's Report include only a few brief accounts of verified spirit messages, or even of proofs of clairvoyance.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, in the years 1860-80, and indeed up to the present time, automatic writing and speaking have been abundant in private circles; and in many cases within my own knowledge manifestations of this kind, occurring as it were spontaneously in the family circle after recent bereavement, have done much to carry conviction of intercourse with the spirit world. These communications, however, rarely contain anything of general interest, or of objective value as evidence, and the subject has probably been sufficiently considered in previous chapters.<sup>2</sup> There have also been numerous mediums who professed clairvoyance. Of the trance communications of Home and Stainton Moses we shall speak later. Of purely professional mediums some of the most notable were Miss Lottie Fowler, Mrs. Olive, Mr. Towns, Miss Hudson, and Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher.<sup>3</sup> Of all these Miss Fowler, an American by birth, enjoyed the highest reputation. I have received from various friends accounts of communications received from her which certainly, as described, appeared to point to the possession on her part of supernormal powers of obtaining information.<sup>4</sup> But testimony in matters of this kind is peculiarly liable to fallacy; and the investigators of the Society for Psychical Research have failed almost completely to extract any evidence for clairvoyance or thought-transference having even a *primâ facie* value from the annals of English Spiritualism prior to the last decade.

But apart from trance messages and clairvoyance of the ordinary type, there have been various series of trance communications of a more impersonal character which have

<sup>1</sup> See especially the evidence of Cromwell Varley, Hockley, Signor Damiani, Mrs. Honeywood, and the Master of Lindsay.

<sup>2</sup> See especially chaps. ii. and iv. of the present book.

<sup>3</sup> For some illustrations of the mediumship of Miss Fowler, Mrs. Olive, and Miss Hudson, see *Where are the Dead?* by Fritz (London, 1873). Some startling accounts of test communications received through Miss Fowler are given in the Spiritualist periodicals between 1872 and 1874. In the *Spiritual Magazines* (1874, pp. 36, 187, 286) are quoted articles which appeared in the *Glasgow Daily News* in March of that year, in which the "Special Commissioner" of the paper, presumably a personal stranger to Miss Fowler, describes some remarkable pieces of intimate personal history given to himself and a friend. Hellenbach (*Eine Philosophie des gesunden Menschenverstandes*) bears witness to Miss Fowler's clairvoyance.

<sup>4</sup> My own solitary interview with Miss Fowler was completely unsuccessful.

been supposed by Spiritualists to exhibit supernormal knowledge. Two of the most striking of these I select for consideration. It is to be noted that each of the mediums concerned has also produced physical phenomena of a kind to imply either supernormal powers over matter, or systematic fraud.

In 1875 Mr. T. P. Barkas held a series of sittings with a trance medium, afterwards well known, chiefly for her physical phenomena, as Madame Esperance. A selection of the results was published a few years later in the *Psychological Review*,<sup>1</sup> and again in *Light*.<sup>2</sup> From Mr. Barkas' narrative we learn that the sittings were given freely. The medium, an imperfectly educated woman, would answer in the trance questions put to her by the sitter. Before Mr. Barkas' advent the questions had been of a miscellaneous character, without system or continuity, and the records had been imperfectly preserved. Mr. Barkas conceived the idea of putting a series of questions in various branches of physical science, and received answers of a very surprising kind. The answers were generally relevant to the question, occasionally correct, and in any event revealed a copious and bewildering technical vocabulary. Mr. Barkas claimed that in view of the limited education of the medium, and the circumstances under which the answers were given, the scientific knowledge displayed must have emanated from a supernormal source—presumably from the spirits of the dead *savants* who professed to speak through the human organism.

On a superficial examination the results are certainly difficult to explain. But if we read Mr. Barkas' narrative closely we shall note (1) that the medium had due notice of the subject on which she was to be questioned: "I was gratified," writes Mr. Barkas, "when I proposed to the control to take up questions in physical science, to find," etc.<sup>3</sup> (2) Mr. Barkas has published not all the answers received, but only a small selection, presumably not those least calculated to support his argument. (3) Again, it is quite clear that the few answers published have been edited, though to what precise extent does not appear. If we compare the answers, for instance, given on page 228 of the *Psychological Review* with the version of the same answers given in *Light* (February 21st and March 14th, 1885), we shall find numerous and not always unimportant discrepancies. (4) Lastly, though many of the answers as selected and edited are substantially

<sup>1</sup> Oct., 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Feb., March, April, etc., 1885.

<sup>3</sup> *Psychological Review*, vol. i. p. 219.

correct, others are not merely erroneous, but contain errors which would be impossible for anyone with a rudimentary understanding of the subject.

Thus, at a séance held on August 16th, 1875, Mr. Barkas asked the following question:—

“In making reed organ pipes there are single notes that cannot be made to speak correctly without having a small hole bored in what is termed the ‘boot’ of the pipe. Why is this?”

The answer is given: *Because in organ pipes the sound is made to, or I mean the air is made to vibrate, by issuing from a small slit and striking on a sharp cutting edge. This should be done in every case. I don't know why in reed organs alone, since it would be an advantage in every case.*<sup>1</sup>

The answer would have some relevance only if the question had referred to the action of the mouthpiece of the pipe.<sup>2</sup> Again, at the séance of November 15th, 1875, which was devoted to questions on heat, the medium is asked:—

“What is radiant heat?”

The answer runs: *Heat given off from an invisible source: heat from a dark object.*

To appreciate the full significance of this answer it should be understood that in the text-books the definition of radiant heat is commonly followed by the statement that heat may be radiated from dark as well as from luminous bodies.

Or take this question: “Has glass or rock salt the greater dispersive power for heat?”

Answer: *Glass being almost athermanous does not disperse the heat, but rock salt is the most diathermanous, and transmits all, or nearly all, luminous and obscure rays.*<sup>3</sup>

Again the answer shows a failure to comprehend the question. The conjunction of glass and rock salt no doubt suggested to the medium an answer which would have been relevant, though only partially correct, if the question asked had been different.

In a dissertation on the structure of the ear we read of “a series of filaments known as otolithes”;<sup>4</sup> and later on we get an amazing classification of all chemical compounds under ten heads, viz. *acids, oxides, anhydrides, hydrates, chlorates, chlorides, sulphides, sulphates, carbonates, nitrates.*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Light*, 14th March, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the medium's mistakes in acoustics see an article by Professor Mathews, in the *Journal of the S. P. R.* for November, 1885.

<sup>3</sup> *Psychological Review*, Oct., 1878, p. 232.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239

I imagine a fairly intelligent schoolboy, if he had known beforehand the subject of his *viva voce* examination, and had been able, as Madame Esperance apparently was, to suggest or modify the questions, or when hard pressed to refuse an answer, above all, if his answers had been selected and touched up by a sympathetic examiner,—such a schoolboy, I imagine, if he could have been induced to cram at all, would have had better results to show for his cramming.<sup>1</sup>

A more interesting because, apparently, a more spontaneous case, is that of David Duguid, the Glasgow painting medium, some of whose performances have been already described.<sup>2</sup> Duguid, a working cabinet-maker by trade, was over thirty when, in 1865, he first joined a Spiritualist circle. He soon developed the power of painting pictures in the trance, with his eyes apparently fast closed. Mr. H. Nisbet, the Glasgow publisher, at whose house the circle was held, has written a biographical notice of the medium,<sup>3</sup> from which we learn that Duguid took no fee for his séances, and that strangers were, for some years at any rate, admitted freely to witness the paintings in progress. No experiments appear to have been made to test the genuineness of the trance, nor, indeed, is there any test which can be relied upon in such cases, though certain persons display in the trance symptoms (*e.g.* insensibility of the conjunctiva) which cannot readily be feigned.

From Dr. William Anderson, who witnessed the performance in 1866, and who had himself no doubt that the medium was really entranced, we have a fairly accurate description of what took place.<sup>4</sup> For the convenience of the spectator, the easel was usually placed in the full light of the gas. The medium, apparently in deep trance, and with his eyes apparently closed, would paint rapidly and effectively, the subjects being for the most part landscapes, lakes, waterfalls, etc. On one occasion, when the light was reduced to a feeble glimmer and a screen held between that glimmer and the canvas, the medium in Dr. Anderson's presence went on working at the picture, introducing, during the almost complete darkness, several small boats on the surface of a lake.

<sup>1</sup> The Spiritualist paper *Light* in 1890 contained several letters signed "Edina" giving accounts of trance communications, purporting to come from different spirits through the organism of the writer's daughter, a young woman of twenty-three. The result of a careful analysis of these trance communications will be found in the *Journal of the S. P. R.* for July, 1891. The analysis showed that, in every case which could conveniently be tested, the information given was either incorrect, or was such as could be obtained from books or other readily accessible sources.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 86-7.

<sup>3</sup> See the Introduction to *Hafed, Prince of Persia*. Glasgow, H. Nisbet, 1876.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

On the whole, the description given is consistent with the supposition that Duguid was really entranced, but that he used his normal eyesight, in the same manner as the entranced "clairvoyants" who figured before the second French Commission;<sup>1</sup> or it is permissible to suppose that the extraordinary sense of space relation exhibited in certain abnormal states may have helped the manifestations.<sup>2</sup> It is not until we come to the "direct spirit paintings" executed in darkness, as already described, that we are confronted with the alternative of preconcerted fraud or occult faculty.

For similar reasons I am disposed to regard Duguid's trance utterances as probably not involving conscious deception. The spirit artists who inspired his earlier trances purported, as already said, to be Ruysdael and Steen. In August, 1869, however, there appeared a new control, Hafed, a prince of Persia in the early days of the Christian era, and the interest of his revelations eclipsed even the marvel of the spirit paintings. Throughout a hundred sittings, extending over some years, the spirit of Hafed delivered himself of a series of discourses, dealing with his own experiences on earth and with the wonders of the spirit spheres. Of princely birth, Hafed had been summoned at an early age to take command of his country's armies in an expedition against a host of ruthless Arab invaders. He had fought and been victorious, had loved, married, and lost his wife. He was admitted to the order of the Magi, and ultimately chosen Archmagus. He was thus enabled to furnish the Glasgow circle with detailed descriptions of the creeds and social life of ancient Persia, Tyre, Greece, Egypt, Judæa, Babylon, and many other long-perished civilisations which the Archmagus visited in his travels. Incidentally he corrects the history and chronology of Moses, and many false conceptions current among the learned concerning the ancient world. But all this is introductory to the climax of his life. His guardian spirit summoned Hafed and two brother Magi to go to Judæa and take with them rich gifts to greet the birth

<sup>1</sup> See above, vol. i. p. 74, and pp. 141-5.

<sup>2</sup> The best-known example of this singular faculty, which almost seems occasionally to usurp the sense of sight, is that of the soldier wounded in the Franco-Prussian War, who could fill a whole sheet of paper with writing, and then, without the use of his eyesight, go back over what he had written, dotting the i's and making erasures and amendments. The case was described by Huxley (following Mesnet) in his article on "Human Automatism." Other instances of the faculty are given by Braid, Carpenter (*Mental Physiology*, edition of 1876, p. 143), W. James (*Proc. Am. S. P. R.*, p. 554). I have myself seen one doubtful instance of it. It is commonly explained as a special development of the muscular sense.

of a young child then cradled in a cattle shed in the city of Bethlehem. A few years later the Persian Magus travelled with the young child in Persia, India, and many other countries, listening to his young companion as he preached to the people, and wondering at the miracles performed by him.

In the end the aged Persian, after conversing with Paul in Athens, and himself preaching the gospel in Venice and Alexandria, perished in his hundredth year in the arena at Rome.

The narrative is copiously illustrated with "direct" spirit drawings, portraying such subjects as the battle-scene between the hosts of Persia and Araby; a sea-fight in the Persian Gulf; Egyptian and Indian temples; Jesus as a young man recalling to life the spirit of a dead Hindoo; and, finally, the arena at Rome, with lions and martyrs.

If the human artist was in fact entirely without education in such matters, the drawings, especially those concerned with architectural subjects, are, it must be admitted, not without merit. As regards the discourses, which were taken down verbatim by Nisbet, and afterwards revised by the entranced medium, the style is surprisingly good. It is free from the pretentious verbosity of Andrew Jackson Davis and others of the early American trance-speakers; it is grammatical throughout, and rarely degenerates into rhapsody or mere sounding verbiage. Nor, apart from the nature of the subjects treated, is there anything to cause offence in the narrative. If published apart from its accessories, it would perhaps pass muster as a historical romance, the most didactic and one of the dullest of its kind. At worst, it would probably be said that the dramatic interest of the story was not sufficient to justify the historical inaccuracies and improbabilities; and that the undoubted sincerity and high moral aim of the writer should have restrained him from too familiar handling of sacred personalities.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I will not attempt the task of analysing Hafed's historical and other errors. It is more interesting, for our present purpose, to note the attempts of the trance intelligence to justify or explain away discrepancies. Thus on page 89 it is stated that Cyrus, when still a youth, met Zoroaster, and was instructed by him in the principles of true religion. On its being pointed out to the control that Cyrus and Zoroaster were not, according to the ordinary chronology, contemporaries, he replied that Cyrus' teacher was not the eponymous founder of a religion, but another person of the same name. Again (p. 82), Ararat is described as a mountain "near the Red Sea." It was pointed out, on revision, that the mountain now known as Ararat is not near the Red Sea. Hafed replied that the name was wrongly applied by modern geographers. "Such mistakes," he said, "were easily accounted for in the translation of the original records from one

To recognise that the volume is in fact an historical romance, constructed by a pious and half-educated Scotchman on the basis of his studies in the Bible and various popular manuals, is not to impute conscious deception to its author. But the question of the responsibility of trance mediums for their utterances will best be dealt with in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup>

A book published in 1870, *Heaven opened, or Messages for the bereaved from their little ones in Glory*,<sup>2</sup> which excited some attention amongst believers, gives a fair idea of the kind of spirit messages received in devout circles at this time. The authoress—a sister of Mr. Morell Theobald, already referred to—concealed her identity under the initials "F. J. T." The messages, produced by automatic writing, purported for the most part to proceed from the spirits of young children, relations of the medium, and are concerned with the glories of the spirit world, described in language appropriate to young children. The imagery is apparently borrowed partly from the Bible, partly from current fairy tales.

Throughout the history of English Spiritualism, and down even to the present day, inspirational speakers have played a large part in the propaganda. One of the earliest native speakers of distinction was Mrs. Emma Hardinge, afterwards Mrs. Hardinge Britten, from whose work on American Spiritualism I have had occasion to quote in previous chapters. Mrs. Hardinge, in 1865 and onwards, delivered eloquent discourses professedly under spirit guidance, and generally on subjects chosen at the meeting by a committee from the audience.<sup>3</sup>

In or about 1870 Mr. Morse, still one of the best-known English trance-speakers, began his career. His eloquence is referred to in high terms by Serjeant Cox. "I have heard an uneducated barman, when in a state of trance, maintain a dialogue with a party of philosophers on 'Reason and Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,' and hold his own against them. I have put to him the most difficult questions in

language to another." Once more (p. 38), Hafed, preparing to do battle, spoke of the unsheathing of his *falcon*. It was suggested to him that perhaps "falcon" was a mistake for "falchion." But he rejected the suggestion. "The *falcon*," he said, "was a long, straight, two-edged sword, with a falcon's head on the hilt."

<sup>1</sup> See Book IV. chaps. vi. and vii., especially the discussion of the Reincarnation romance of "Helene Smith," the medium described by M. Th. Flournoy.

<sup>2</sup> London: J. Burns.

<sup>3</sup> See her *Extemporaneous Addresses*, First and Second Series. London, 1865 and 1866.

psychology, and received answers always thoughtful, often full of wisdom, and invariably conveyed in choice and eloquent language. Nevertheless, in a quarter of an hour afterwards, when released from the trance, he was unable to answer the simplest query on a philosophical subject, and was at a loss for sufficient language in which to express a commonplace idea."<sup>1</sup>

But the supreme example in this line was an American, Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan (later Tappan-Richmond). Under her maiden name of Scott she had very early made her appearance in the Spiritualist Movement. As a child of eleven or twelve she had passed some months in Adin Ballou's community at Hopedale. Thereafter she had been controlled by the spirit of young Ballou. At the age of thirteen we hear of her addressing public audiences in Wisconsin. Three years later, as a girl of sixteen, she went to New York, and from that time onwards she became famous throughout the States as a Spiritualist lecturer. In 1873 she came to England, and received an enthusiastic welcome. For some years she lectured regularly, or at frequent intervals, in this country. According to her own belief in the matter, she spoke under spirit guidance. Actually, there can be little doubt that her utterances were in large measure unpremeditated, and that she was not herself a wholly conscious or voluntary agent in their production. As with her predecessor, Mrs. Hardinge, the subject of the lecture was commonly chosen by the audience after the lecturer had entered the room. But though no opportunity was afforded for preparing a discourse, it must be remembered that the subjects chosen by a committee of Spiritualists—since the audience had met together for edification and not for a scientific test—were naturally connected not remotely with the great issues raised by Spiritualism. And since Mrs. Tappan, by the estimate of her English biographer, had delivered some three thousand discourses in the previous fifteen years, it can hardly be supposed that any of the topics selected were altogether unfamiliar to her.<sup>2</sup> Let it be granted, too, that, as her biographer candidly admits, the quantity of the eloquence is more in evidence than the quality of it. But when all discounts have been made the

<sup>1</sup> *The Mechanism of Man*, vol. ii. p. 301. The passage is quoted in *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, p. 201, by Dr. Wallace, who endorses the testimony given by Serjeant Cox.

<sup>2</sup> *Discourses through the Mediumship of Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan*, Introduction, p. xvii. London, 1875.

feat must still remain a very surprising one. That the flow of verbiage never fails is a small matter: Mrs. Tappan's trance-utterances surpass those of almost every other automatist in that there is a fairly coherent argument throughout. Two at least of the subjects set to her in 1874, "The Origin of Man" and "The Comparative Influence of Science and Morality on the Rise and Progress of Nations," may be presumed to have been little familiar.<sup>1</sup> But the speaker is never at a loss. In the first case, after referring briefly to the various solutions of the problem given by ancient theologies, she states the theory of evolution, and after propounding an intelligent, if not profound, criticism of it, proceeds to develop her own views of a kind of immanent Pantheism. Here is an extract from her criticism of the Darwinian theory, which gives a fair idea of her reasoning powers:—

"In fact, the weak points in the Darwinian theory are easily found out by the student of science or natural philosophy. One is, that he makes the doctrine of the theory of selection and evolution account for the existence of distinctive types. In our opinion this is most erroneous; there is no such process going on in nature; there never has been known to be such a process in nature as the one type of existence ever becoming merged into or becoming another type. There is no change going on in the lower orders that are said to resemble man by which it is possible that they may become future men. The gorilla and the ape, though resembling man in appearance, fail to resemble him in any distinctive qualities of expressed intelligence, and there has never been known in the history of the world a specific change from the lower to the higher degree of existence. Besides, that which is said to be the organic and continuous property of evolution applies not to the change and transition from one type to another of existence, but to the perfection and development of the type already formed; so that if Nature does select her types, it does not and has not been shown that she has ever confused those types, interblent them, or in any way lost them, but persistently, sacredly preserved the germs of every specific type in existence up to the present time"

\* \* \* \* \*

"But, as we stated, if we are to trace man's origin we must consider him in his complete nature, and not merely in his physical nature. It is sufficiently easy—a process of the greatest facility—to trace, with the scientific data that are in the world, the results of natural law up to the development of man—the monad, or

<sup>1</sup> *Discourses*, etc., Part I. p. 179, and Part II. p. 383. The volume includes some fifty long discourses, besides minor speeches in answer to questions, etc.

distinctive particle which exists by itself; the duad, which means two monads added together, makes another stage, etc., etc. These atoms in their sixfold nature, constantly changing and developing, are fully and absolutely empowered by the law of existence to develop all phases of physical life that are known. But atoms are not intelligent; monads, duads, triads are not intelligent; molecules are not intelligent. No atom or atomic structure contains within itself that which is the final source and cause of organisation; and when the physical scientist declares that he has discovered the process of creation, he omits the one power of creation that alone is capable of solving the mystery."<sup>1</sup>

As said, the reasoning is not profound, but it is not un-intelligent; and the rhythm and fluency, no doubt, for the audience covered any gaps in the logic. If we scrutinise the style more closely, we shall find that, though a favourable specimen of its kind, it yet has the characteristic defect of the automatic utterance—a redundancy of words for words' sake. Note, for instance, the constant duplication of words without any substantial enlargement of meaning—"science or natural philosophy"; "merged into or becoming"; "change and transition"; "perfection and development"; "atom or atomic structure." There is a similar barren repetition of phrases, *e.g.* "It is sufficiently easy—a process of the greatest facility"; "atoms are not intelligent; monads are not intelligent"; and so on.

When concerned with more congenial themes, the rhythmical quality of the eloquence and its invertebrate structure are alike more conspicuous. Here, for instance, is the peroration to a discourse on "The Eternal Progress of the Human Spirit":—

"Are these the themes of your aspirations? Then what wonder if through the vistas of eternity there open, broad and wide, theme upon theme of lofty thought, of divine aspiration, of glorious work, of everlasting conquest! It is not that man shall there conquer matter, and build gold and silver temples, and the idols of material worship. It is not that the hero shall slay millions of human beings, and so gain what is called earthly fame. The paltry excuses of human ambition, the small needs of human life, the imposing objects of your being, pale and disappear before the higher themes of spiritual meditation and of eternal advancement. One by one the vistas of that divine subject open to your gaze; one by one the hosts that are marshalled in glorious array appear before your vision; one by one the ideas of eternal progress are gained, and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Part I. pp. 182, 183.

new ideas, new mountains of knowledge, present themselves for you to climb; one by one the stars in space, the planets in their orbits, and systems and constellations pass beyond you; and you go on and on through the eras of eternal life, without pause, never resting, never tiring, but with new-found companies of knowledge and wisdom cleave the air of space and visit the habitations of the most celestial beings—angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim! Behold they dawn upon you with their wondrous powers and matchless knowledge! They sing the songs of creation! they people space with their thoughts! they give you a glimpse of their life! and on and on you go, ever with those countless myriads of hosts, marching up the steep of eternity, hand in hand, heart to heart, linked together still by the love of God and by your love for one another!"<sup>1</sup>

I have heard Mrs. Tappan's eloquence described as "flatulent," and I am not prepared to dispute the aptness of the epithet. A more salient characteristic is its extraordinary monotony. We are not perhaps entitled in oratorical efforts to look for the same finish that we expect in literary essays of a more considered kind. Certainly we shall look in vain throughout Mrs. Tappan's published discourses for the inevitable word, the novel simile, the polished epigram. The spirits could pour forth *ore rotundo*, but knew not the virtues of compactness. Mrs. Tappan's utterances may, as some of her contemporaries asserted, have been jewelled, but her jewels are five hundred words long, and they do not sparkle. Again, we find none of the literary artifices by which ordinary speakers are wont to give relief—there is no antithesis, no climax, no irony or humour in any form. And the dead level of style reflects a dead level of sentiment; there is no scorn or indignation, no recognition of human effort and pain, no sense of the mystery of things. The style is clear, as jelly is clear; it is the protoplasm of human speech, and it is flavoured throughout with mild, cosmic emotions.

Frequently at the close of an address Mrs. Tappan would recite an impromptu poem, again on a subject chosen at the moment by the audience. Some of these poems are strikingly melodious, and it is interesting to note how the melody continually overpowers the sense. In the first two of the stanzas which follow, for instance, quoted from a poem on "Prayer," the meaning sought to be conveyed is, it will be admitted, less conspicuous than a certain sonorous quality which, on analysis, is found to be largely mechanical:—

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Part II. p. 140.

" Like the stars that sweep and burn  
 In their orbits of pure flame,  
 Where God kindled in the urn  
 Of their life His holy name ;

" Like the suns with points like swords,  
 Flashing up the steep of space,  
 Leading armies without words,  
 By the light from God's own face ;

" Each world filling its own sphere,  
 Each star keeping perfect time  
 To the mandate written there,  
 On the scrolls of heaven sublime.

" To the planets ye may turn,  
 As they flash and toil and shine,  
 For a lesson ye may learn  
 To employ each gift divine."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, it must be owned, the audience were rather exacting in their tests. There is an heroic attempt, for instance, at a poem on "Cremation":<sup>2</sup> that the poetic afflatus should have failed before this task is perhaps no matter for surprise. In another trial, hardly less severe, Mrs. Tappan has achieved some measure of success. The subject set was "The Future of England," and the result was a poem, by no means unmusical, of about a hundred lines. One stanza may perhaps be quoted :—

"What is it that upholds her but the chime  
 Of nations that die out when she appears?  
 But meanwhile here at home one voice she hears.  
 Wealth, power, greatness, all are hers, the sway  
 Of high supremacy on land and sea,  
 All power and purpose of true industry.  
 One subtle heart-drop ebbing day by day  
 Despoils her of her life, tears from her those who toil,  
 The purpose and the blood with which to stay  
 Her honour in some future darker day—  
 Bearers of burdens, tillers of her soil.  
 She keeps her greatness and her line of kings,  
 But she must lose the deep heart-murmurings  
 Of love ; the very strings that make her strong,  
 The sinews and the arms of power,  
 Are slow escaping every day and hour,  
 Singing in distant lands their freedom's song."<sup>3</sup>

There is a curious indication here of the mechanical character of the utterance. The word "chime," meaningless in its context, is a mere echo of the word "clime," which ends the preceding stanza. The passage as a whole re-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Part I. p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Part I. p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> Part II. pp. 395, 396.

presents Mrs. Tappan's eloquence at its best. But it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the inspiration proceeds from purely mundane sources. There are, indeed, obvious reverberations in Mrs. Tappan's verse from contemporary poets—Mrs. Browning, Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, and Rossetti; though I have failed to find any actual plagiarisms.

Of other inspirational works at this time there is little to be recorded. T. L. Harris, who during the decade 1860-70 appears to have resided chiefly in this country, delivered many discourses, inferior, if at all, only to Mrs. Tappan's orations. He also published other poems—*The Great Republic; or, Poems of the Sun*.<sup>1</sup> Some of Harris' earlier poems had been described by William Howitt, in the course of a review in the *Spiritual Magazine*, as possessing "scarcely less than Miltonic grandeur . . . and more than Miltonic splendour."<sup>2</sup> A later notice in the same magazine, in reviewing *The Great Republic*, gives a juster appreciation of his work in general:—

"The charm of the metre and the clearness of the ideas, which extend to a few stanzas . . . rapidly vanish in clouds. . . . The words and stanzas go on as sonorously as ever, but we clutch in vain at the guiding clue of reason. . . . All is a phantasmagoria."<sup>3</sup>

In 1873 there appeared a volume by Fred Griffin, entitled *The Destiny of Man*.<sup>4</sup> The preface to the volume obscurely hints at some mysterious origin, and we learn that the book was openly advertised as having been written through planchette. Less melodious than the productions of Harris or Mrs. Tappan, the poems are more coherent, but unhappily quite commonplace. A few years later a young man named Veitch produced some poetry, not without merit, under the inspiration of Chatterton.<sup>5</sup> But of late years the stream of inspirational poetry seems to have run dry.

<sup>1</sup> London, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> 1860, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1868, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Trübner and Co., 1873.

<sup>5</sup> See the Appendix to Home's *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, where much of this poetry is quoted.

## CHAPTER IX

### SCIENCE AND SUPERSTITION

IN 1872, in describing some recent visits paid to spirit mediums, the special correspondent of the *Times* commented on the extraordinary vitality, notwithstanding frequent exposures, of the Spiritualist belief, and the hold that it had obtained on many educated minds:—<sup>1</sup>

“It is evident,” the reviewer continues, “either that the subject is surrounded by unusual difficulties, or that in this matter scientific men have signally failed to do their duty by the public, which looks to them for its facts. We believe the latter to be the case. It may be said, and is said by some, that Spiritualism was long ago investigated, and proved to be a mass of imposture and delusion; but, as a matter of fact, this is not so, for there has never been undertaken an inquiry of that impartial, authoritative, and thorough nature which alone can decide a prejudiced controversy. . . . However absurd the phenomena and paraphernalia of Spiritualism may be, the sifting and settling of the whole matter, once and for all, would be a practical benefit, for which the age would thank our *savants* at least as much as it thanks them for recondite theories and abstract speculations, half of which are only laid up in print for the next generation to ridicule.”

And again, speaking of the Dialectical Committee's Report, “if it proves nothing else, it proves that it is high time competent hands undertake the unravelling of the Gordian knot. It must be fairly and patiently unravelled, and not cut through. The slash of an Alexandrian blade has been tried often enough, and has never sufficed.”

It is singular that the writer in the *Times* completely ignores a systematic investigation by a competent man of science—Mr. (now Sir William) Crookes—then proceeding, some results of which had already been placed before the public. But in his main argument he has the support not

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, 26th Dec., 1872.

only of Mr. Crookes himself, but of the late Professor Balfour Stewart, who had some eighteen months previously written: "We are inclined to endorse the remark of Mr. Crookes, that men of science have shown too great a disinclination to investigate the evidence and nature of these alleged facts, even when their occurrence has been asserted by competent and credible witnesses."<sup>1</sup>

Whether men of science were justified in their indifference—an indifference no doubt largely fostered by the belief that the craze would shortly die out of its own accord—is fair matter for debate. Certainly the results achieved by the first French Commission on Animal Magnetism offered little encouragement for interference. And, after all, most scientific workers could fairly plead that they had other tasks for which they were better adapted. But the euthanasia of superstition, which has been looked for in each succeeding decade, still delays its coming; and to this delay the ill-informed and injudicious opposition of some has contributed probably as much as the equally injudicious, if not equally ill-informed, advocacy of others. The dealings of science with Spiritualism form an instructive chapter in the history of human thought. Not the least instructive feature of the chronicle is the sharp contrast between the tone and temper of those men of science who, after examination, accepted, and of those who, with or without examination, rejected the evidence for the alleged physical phenomena. Those who held themselves justified in believing in a new physical force—for de Morgan, Crookes, and other scientific converts did not at the outset, nor in some cases at all, adopt the Spiritualist belief proper—showed in their writings a modesty, candour, and freedom from prepossession, which shine the more conspicuously by comparison with the blustering arrogance of some of the self-constituted champions of scientific orthodoxy. The ordinary reader, whose acquaintance with the subject was confined, for instance, on the one side, to the scholarly dissertation by de Morgan, which prefaces his wife's book, *From Matter to Spirit*—a preface which is perhaps the wisest, as it is unquestionably the wittiest utterance on the subject—and, on the other, to the unmannerly letters contributed by Tyndall to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1868, could hardly fail to be prepossessed in favour of the new views. Again, the obvious candour of Mr. Crookes' articles in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*, and their judicial tone, present a striking contrast to the inaccuracy, spiteful depreciation, under the shield of

<sup>1</sup> *Nature*, 27th July, 1871.

anonymity, of other men's work and grotesque self-assertion which disfigured Dr. Carpenter's criticisms.<sup>1</sup> The mere prospect of contact with Spiritualism seems to have exercised a deteriorating effect, alike on the mind and the manners. Even Faraday, in his letter of June, 1861, forgot his wonted modesty and courtesy; and Huxley's reply to the Dialectical Society's invitation to co-operate with them is a clumsy thrust altogether unworthy of so distinguished a gladiator.

The present chapter furnishes an outline sketch of the dealings of scientific men in this country with the alleged phenomena of Spiritualism down to 1882. Faraday's demonstration of the part played by unconscious muscular action in table-turning, referred to in chapter i. of the present book, formed the first contribution to the subject. Later, apparently in June, 1855,<sup>2</sup> Sir David Brewster and Lord Brougham attended two sittings with D. D. Home. This is Brewster's contemporary account of the first sitting, dated June, 1855, extracted from his private diary:—

"Last of all I went with Lord Brougham to a *séance* of the new spirit-rapper, Mr. Home, a lad of twenty, the son of a brother of the late Earl Home. . . He lives in Cox's Hotel, Jermyn Street; and Mr. Cox, who knows Lord Brougham, wished him to have a *séance*, and his lordship invited me to accompany him in order to assist in finding out the trick. We four sat down at a moderately-sized table, the structure of which we were invited to examine. In a short time the table shuddered, and a tremulous motion ran up all our arms; at our bidding these motions ceased and returned. The most unaccountable rappings were produced in various parts of the table; and the table actually rose from the ground when no hand was upon it. A larger table was produced, and exhibited similar movements. . . . A small hand-bell was then laid down with its mouth on the carpet; and, after lying for some time, it actually rang when nothing could have touched it. The bell was then placed on the other side, still upon the carpet, and it came over to me and placed itself in my hand. It did the same to Lord Brougham. These were the principal experiments. We could give no explanation of them, and could not conjecture how they could be produced by any kind of mechanism."<sup>3</sup>

In September of the same year, in consequence of an erroneous version of the incident having appeared in some

<sup>1</sup> See his article in the *Quarterly Review*, Oct., 1871.

<sup>2</sup> I cannot find that the actual date of the *séance* is given either by Brewster himself, or by any of the other persons who have published accounts of the incident.

<sup>3</sup> *The Home Life of Sir D. Brewster*, by his daughter, Mrs. Gordon, pp. 257-8. Edinburgh, 1869.

American paper, Brewster wrote a letter to the *Morning Advertiser*, in which he states that though he "could not account for all" that he witnessed at the two séances, yet "I saw enough to satisfy myself that they could all be produced by human hands and feet."<sup>1</sup> William Cox, at whose hotel the first sitting had taken place, and Benjamin Coleman at once wrote to the *Advertiser*, pointing out that Brewster's present version of the matter differed materially from that given by him in their presence within a few days of the first sitting. Brewster, accordingly, in a later letter gave a full description of the sitting:—

"At Mr. Cox's house, Mr. Home, Mr. Cox, Lord Brougham, and myself sat down to a small table, Mr. Home having previously requested us to examine if there was any machinery about his person, an examination, however, which we declined to make. When all our hands were upon the table noises were heard—rappings in abundance; and, finally, when we rose up the table actually rose, as appeared to me, from the ground. This result I do not pretend to explain; but rather than believe that spirits made the noise, I will conjecture that the raps were produced by Mr. Home's toes, which, as will be seen, were active on another occasion; . . . and rather than believe that spirits raised the table, I will conjecture that it was done by the agency of Mr. Home's feet, which were always below it.

"Some time after this experiment Mr. Home left the room and returned, probably to equip himself for the feats which were to be performed by the spirits beneath a large round table covered with copious drapery, *beneath which nobody was allowed to look.*"<sup>2</sup>

"The spirits are powerless aboveboard . . . a small hand-bell, to be rung by the spirits, was placed on the ground near my feet. I placed my feet round it in the form of an angle, to catch any intrusive apparatus. The bell did not ring; but when taken to a place near Mr. Home's feet, it speedily came across and placed itself in my hand. This was amusing.

"It did the same thing, bunglingly, to Lord Brougham, by knocking itself against his lordship's knuckles, and, after a jingle, it fell. How these things were produced neither Lord Brougham nor I could say, but I conjecture that they may be produced by machinery attached to the lower extremities of Mr. Home."<sup>3</sup>

It will be seen that in the interval between June and October Brewster's mental attitude had undergone a decided

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Advertiser*, Oct. 3rd, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> Home, commenting on this passage, explains that he was seized with a violent fit of coughing and left the room to get a handkerchief (*Incidents*, First Series, p. 238).

<sup>3</sup> *Advertiser*, Oct. 12th, 1855.

change, and that he now finds himself able to "conjecture"—at a distance of some months from the actual facts—how the things were done. It may be urged, indeed, that this change of attitude is due to the discovery of suspicious circumstances at the second *séance*, described in the same letter to the *Advertiser*. But no later discoveries of the kind can explain or excuse positive discrepancies between the earlier and the later account of the first sitting. In the earlier account it is expressly stated that the bell rang on the floor, when nothing could have touched it; in the later account it is stated that the bell did *not* ring; and various incidents, tending to throw suspicion or ridicule on the performance, are introduced for the first time in the later account. Suppose the positions had been reversed, and that two discrepant accounts of the same *séance*, the later account embellished with marvellous details which found no place in the contemporary version, had been published by some preposterous Spiritualist. Brewster would, no doubt, for our warning and edification, have pointed the obvious moral; and perhaps, if the names are changed, the moral will still serve. But the Spiritualists were denied their revenge, for Brewster's diary was only published after his death.

In 1863, as already stated, appeared Mrs. de Morgan's book, *From Matter to Spirit*, with a preface by her husband. De Morgan's confession of faith is worth quoting:—

"I am perfectly convinced that I have both seen and heard, in a manner which should make unbelief impossible, things *called* spiritual which cannot be taken by a rational being to be capable of explanation by imposture, coincidence, or mistake. So far I feel the ground firm under me. But when it comes to what is the cause of these phenomena, I find I cannot adopt any explanation which has yet been suggested. If I were bound to choose among things which I can conceive, I should say that there is some sort of action of some combination of will, intellect, and physical power, which is not that of any of the human beings present. But, thinking it very likely that the universe may contain a few agencies—say half a million—about which no man knows anything, I cannot but suspect that a small proportion of these agencies—say five thousand—may be severally competent to the production of all the phenomena, or may be quite up to the task among them. The physical explanations which I have seen are easy, but miserably insufficient: the spiritual hypothesis is sufficient, but ponderously difficult. Time and thought will decide, the second asking the first for more results of trial."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pages v., vi.

This extract gives a fair indication of de Morgan's position. Briefly, he contends that the Spiritualists—whatever we may think of their conclusions—are in the right both in their spirit and their method; and that the champions of physical science, who refuse to investigate for themselves, and sneer at those who do, on the ground that the things alleged are impossible, are as unquestionably in the wrong. For himself he pins his faith on a maxim laid down by Aristotle—*τὰ δὲ γεινόμενα φανερόν ὅτι δυνατὰ· οὐ γὰρ ἐγένετο, εἴ ἦν ἀδύνατα.*<sup>1</sup>

For us, it is true, the effect of the homily is liable to be impaired because, in the single illustration of the practical working of his principle which he allows himself to give, it is unfortunately obvious that the homilist has been gulled by a clever adventuress.<sup>2</sup>

At the trial of *Lyon v. Home*, in 1868, extracts from this preface were read in court; and testimony was also furnished by Cromwell Varley, Robert Chambers, Dr. Gully, and other persons of scientific repute. This provoked a retort from Professor Tyndall, who, whilst the trial was still proceeding, wrote to the *Pall Mall Gazette*<sup>3</sup> a letter giving an account of an episode in which Faraday had been concerned some years previously. According to Tyndall, after Faraday had accepted an invitation to examine the manifestations occurring in Home's presence, the investigation fell through because the conditions required by Faraday were not accepted. Tyndall's account of the incident was certainly inadequate, if not actually misleading, as appeared when, in response to a challenge from Home, the original correspondence between Faraday and Sir Emerson Tennant was published. Faraday, it would seem, assented with reluctance to entering upon the proposed investigation, on the condition that he received satisfactory answers to a string of questions, of which an extract will suffice to show the purport:—

"(7) If the effects are miracles, or the work of spirits, does he (Home) admit the utterly contemptible character, both of them and their results, up to the present time, in respect either of yielding information or instruction, or supplying any force or action of the least value to mankind?"

From the whole tone of the letter it is clear that Faraday had made up his mind that the phenomena were delusive or fraudulent, and Home an impostor, and that he had no

<sup>1</sup> "Now things which have happened are manifestly possible: for if they had been impossible, they would not have happened."

<sup>2</sup> See the description of his séance with Mrs. Hayden, quoted above, pp. 6, 7.

<sup>3</sup> May 5th, 1868.

desire to conceal his opinion. Whether Faraday's conclusions were justified or not, no philosopher was justified in undertaking an inquiry of which he had so ostentatiously prejudged the issue; nor could the subject of the proposed inquiry have been fairly blamed for declining a trial in which the judge had already pronounced sentence. As a matter of fact, it appears that the proposal was declined by Robert Bell, the intermediary in the matter, without even consulting Home.

The letter was of course altogether unworthy of Faraday's high character and scientific eminence, and was no doubt the outcome of a moment of transient irritation.<sup>1</sup> The position taken was quite indefensible. It would have been reasonable for Faraday to plead that his time was too much occupied with his proper work to undertake a task of this kind; or that he was not qualified for an investigation which confessedly led or might lead beyond the limits of the physical sciences. But to enter upon a judicial inquiry by treating the subject-matter as a *chose jugée* was surely a parody of scientific methods. Faraday either had grounds sufficient for condemning Home, or he had not. In the former case an inquiry was superfluous, and could only be mischievous; in the latter Home and his manifestations were alike entitled to strictly neutral treatment.

But if illogical, Faraday's attitude was readily intelligible. As a man of common sense, he was no doubt repelled by the follies of which he heard; as a man of fastidious honour, he was sickened by the chicanery undoubtedly practised in many cases; as a man of deeply religious feeling, he was shocked by the facile irreverence which heard celestial revelations in an entranced medium's babble. But if Faraday's error was a venial one, Tyndall, in endorsing his master's conduct and following his example after its errors had been pointed out to him, has little excuse. "Faraday," writes his disciple, "regarded the necessity even of discussing such phenomena as are ascribed to Mr. Home as a discredit, to use no stronger term, to the education of this age. Still . . . having in this spirit satisfied his own mind that these reputed spiritualistic phenomena were only worthy of the scorn or pity of all intelligent persons," he was willing to investigate them! Naturally, Tyndall's own offer to investigate "in the same spirit" was not accepted.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This was the view taken at the time by Mr. F. T. Palgrave (*Pall Mall Gazette*, May 16th) and the editor (*Pall Mall Gazette*, May 22nd, 1868).

<sup>2</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 18th, 1868.

In his *Fragments of Science for Unscientific People*,<sup>1</sup> Tyndall furnishes a sample of his mode of investigation. The date of the solitary séance which he describes is not given, but from another source we learn that it took place in the early sixties, at the house of Mr. Newton Crosland.<sup>2</sup> The séance was a failure; nothing occurred which could not have been effected by fraud or accident. Tyndall claims, however, to have checked one or two intended movements of the table; he further asserts that the medium, after boasting that she was so sensitive as to be rendered seriously ill by the mere presence of a magnet in the room, failed to detect a magnet in Tyndall's pocket, within a few inches of her person; and that some of the company attributed to spirit influence movements and sounds which were actually caused by Tyndall himself. Tyndall's account of the sitting is quite possibly correct, but we have only his own word for it, and the fact that at the time he kept his experiments and observations to himself, so as to shut out all possibility of corroborative evidence, gives an appearance of unfairness to his article which is much to be regretted. As we have already seen, even a distinguished physicist is liable, like ordinary mortals, to make serious mistakes in his report of a séance, and, as a matter of fact, Tyndall's version of the evening's performance was challenged, on publication, by his host.<sup>3</sup>

But even if the accuracy of the narrative is admitted, the propriety of publishing it is dubious. The séance was admittedly unsuccessful; no fraud was actually detected; and it hardly seems worth while to have written an article to prove that some Spiritualists were credulous and some mediums imaginative. But when dogs are to be beaten any stick will serve.<sup>4</sup>

In 1869, however, an inquiry on an extended scale was undertaken. In January of that year the London Dialectical Society appointed a committee to investigate the alleged phenomena. The committee, as ultimately constituted, consisted of some thirty odd persons, of whom the most notable were A. R. Wallace, Serjeant Cox, Charles Bradlaugh, H. G. Atkinson, Dr. James Edmunds, and several other physicians and surgeons. The committee invited the co-operation of Professor Huxley and G. H. Lewes, but both declined, the

<sup>1</sup> London, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> See his *Apparitions*, p. 24. London, 1873.

<sup>3</sup> See Crosland's *Apparitions*.

<sup>4</sup> In his *Spiritualism; a narrative with a discussion* (Edinburgh, 1871), P. P. Alexander devotes an appendix of several pages to demonstrating the futility of Tyndall's arguments. But the demonstration is hardly needed.

former on the ground that "supposing the phenomena to be genuine, they do not interest me. If anybody would endow me with the faculty of listening to the chatter of old women and curates in the nearest cathedral town, I should decline the privilege, having better things to do."<sup>1</sup>

The committee's labours extended over eighteen months. Evidence, oral or written, was received from a large number of persons who believed the phenomena to be genuine, but the committee explain that they had "almost wholly failed to obtain evidence from those who attributed them to fraud or delusion."<sup>2</sup> The committee further investigated the matter experimentally by means of six sub-committees, who were at liberty to invite mediums and other persons to assist in their researches.

In the event the committee reported that the great majority of their number had themselves witnessed several phases of the phenomena without the presence of any professional medium, and that the evidence thus obtained appeared to establish, amongst other things, the occurrence of sounds and movements of heavy bodies without the use of mechanical contrivance, or the exertion of adequate muscular force. In conclusion, the committee,

"taking into consideration the high character and great intelligence of many of the witnesses to the more extraordinary facts, the extent to which their testimony is supported by the reports of the sub-committees, and the absence of any proof of imposture or delusion as regards a large portion of the phenomena; and further, having regard to the exceptional character of the phenomena, the large number of persons in every grade of society and over the whole civilised world who are more or less influenced by a belief in their supernatural origin, and to the fact that no philosophical explanation of them has yet been arrived at, deem it incumbent upon them to state their conviction that the subject is worthy of more serious and careful investigation than it has hitherto received."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately the names of the signatories to this report are not given. It would seem, however, that at least two members of the original committee, Charles Bradlaugh and Dr. Edmunds, were unable to accept the finding of their colleagues.<sup>4</sup> As will be seen from the names quoted, several prominent members were already committed, not indeed to the spirit hypothesis, but to a belief in the genuineness of the physical phenomena; nor does it appear that any of the

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Dialectical Society*, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Report*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50 and 279.

committee had special qualifications for the delicate investigation which they had undertaken. Again, though reports are printed of various sub-committees, together with detailed minutes of the sittings, the names of the experimenters, and even of the members of the sub-committees, are furnished in one case only: Sub-Committee No. 5, which included Dr. Edmunds and Charles Bradlaugh, had four sittings with Home, but the phenomena witnessed were feeble and inconclusive. Moreover, there are many indications that the work of the other sub-committees was not carried on under sufficiently rigorous conditions, or with due regard to accuracy.

The following description of a sitting is extracted from the Report of Sub-Committee No. 1, the most persevering and most successful of all the sub-committees:—

“On an occasion when eleven members of your sub-committee had been sitting round one of the dining-tables above described for forty minutes, and various motions and sounds had occurred, they, by way of test, turned the backs of their chairs to the table, at about nine inches from it. They all then knelt upon their chairs, placing their arms upon the backs thereof. In this position their feet were, of course, turned away from the table, and by no possibility could be placed under it or touch the floor. The hands of each person were extended over the table at about four inches from the surface. Contact, therefore, with any part of the table could not take place without detection.

“In less than a minute the table, untouched, moved *four* times; at first about *five* inches to one side, then about *twelve* inches to the opposite side, and then, in like manner, four inches and six inches respectively.

“The hands of all present were next placed on the backs of their chairs, and about a foot from the table, which again moved, as before, *five* times, over spaces varying from four to six inches. Then all the chairs were removed twelve inches from the table, and each person knelt on his chair as before, this time, however, folding his hands behind his back, his body being thus about eighteen inches from the table, and having the back of the chair between himself and the table. The table again moved four times in various directions. In the course of this conclusive experiment, and in less than half an hour, the table thus moved, without contact or possibility of contact with any person present, thirteen times, the movements being in different directions, and some of them according to the request of various members of your sub-committee.

“The table was then carefully examined, turned upside down and taken to pieces, but nothing was discovered to account for the phenomena. The experiment was conducted throughout in the full light of gas above the table.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, pp. 10, 11.

The date of this experiment is not given in the Report, and in the detailed minutes of the sittings there is no experiment which precisely corresponds with that above quoted. But sitting No. 38, of December 28th, 1869, may be presumed to be the occasion referred to. If, however, we compare the account given in the minutes, and presumably written at the time, with that quoted from the Report, we find several discrepancies, of which the more important are (1) that only *eight* members are mentioned as being present; (2) that the second series is stated to have consisted of *four* movements, not five, as in the Report; (3) that the number of separate movements at the third trial is not stated; (4) that the gas is recorded to have been "turned up higher, so as to give abundance of light," after the first eight experiments, from which it may be inferred that the statement in the Report, "The experiment was conducted *throughout* in the full light of gas," requires some modification.<sup>1</sup>

These discrepancies are not, perhaps, in themselves serious; their real importance lies in their revealing such slovenliness in the recording as justifies us in attaching little value to the record. There is another fact which throws light on the character of the investigation and the qualifications of those who took part in it. After this, the most successful sitting of the series, only two more meetings, each unsuccessful and each attended by a smaller number of members, are recorded to have been held. What manner of investigators were these who, having just obtained a striking demonstration of the action of a new force, were content to break off their experiments without making repeated attempts to obtain at least a renewal of the demonstration, if not fresh light on the nature of the new force and the conditions of its operation!

It should be added that Serjeant Cox, in his evidence before the committee,<sup>2</sup> describes at length an experiment at which some remarkable movements of the table were observed. He refers to this experiment as "the most conclusive evidence myself and the scientific investigators [*sc.* apparently, the sub-committee] have yet had of motion without contact." Yet this remarkable *séance*, which is said to have taken place on the 3rd March, 1871, is not referred to in the Reports, or recorded in the minutes, of any of the sub-committees; another instance of the slovenliness which appears to have characterised throughout the proceedings of the committee.

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, pp. 390, 391.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 103.

The work done by the Dialectical Society was, no doubt, of value, since it has brought together and preserved for us a large number of records of personal experiences by representative Spiritualists. For those who wish to ascertain what Spiritualists believed at this time, and what phenomena were alleged to occur, the book may be of service. But, except in the Minority Report by Dr. Edmunds, there is no trace of any critical handling of the materials, and the conclusions of the committee can carry little weight.

And yet, with the single exception of the work done by Mr. Crookes, described below, the Report of the Dialectical Society represents up till 1882 the only attempt in this country at a systematic investigation, by any man or body of men having serious pretensions to scientific qualifications, of the phenomena of Spiritualism. This statement is not intended to disparage the value of the testimony of men like Cromwell Varley, Dr. A. R. Wallace, and Lord Lindsay (the present Earl of Crawford). But none of these gentlemen have published any record of systematic investigations on scientific lines. Dr. Wallace, in his *Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural*,<sup>1</sup> already cited, refrains from recounting his own experiences, as not demonstrative, and contents himself with quoting the testimony of others. Mr. Varley's evidence before the Dialectical Committee has been already referred to, and an isolated experiment of his own with Miss Cook is described below. Lord Lindsay's evidence will most conveniently be considered in connection with Home's mediumship, to which it almost exclusively relates.<sup>2</sup>

One other name deserves mention. Dr. Carpenter claims for more than a dozen years to have taken every opportunity which offered for investigating "the higher phenomena of Spiritualism."<sup>3</sup> But his investigations can hardly have been exhaustive, since he expressly states that he always refused to attend a dark séance, or to investigate phenomena which took place under a table. No doubt Carpenter, following the example of Braid and Faraday, did good service in demonstrating the large part played in many "magnetic," "odylic," and minor spiritualistic phenomena by unconscious expectation and involuntary muscular action. To him we owe also not only the phrase "unconscious cerebration," but a lucid analysis of the physiological mechanism of planchette writing and other automatic manifestations. But of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism in their later developments—and

<sup>1</sup> London, 1866.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Book IV. chaps. iii. and iv.

<sup>3</sup> *Quarterly Review*, Oct., 1871.

especially of the marvels occurring in the presence of Home—he can give no adequate account. He was content to write them down as fraudulent, without in most cases attempting, or as in the case of Crookes' experiments with Home, after attempting with conspicuous ill-success, to demonstrate how the fraud was accomplished. As already indicated, the effect of his really relevant criticism was impaired by the extraordinary egotism and malevolence which he displayed.<sup>1</sup>

In an article published in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* for July, 1870, Mr. Crookes announced that he had entered upon a systematic investigation of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism. In the course of the next two or three years he published in the same periodical articles setting forth some of the results of his investigations. As the experiments described in these articles related for the most part to manifestations observed in the presence of Home, they can most conveniently be discussed in a later chapter, in connection with Home's mediumship in general.<sup>2</sup> In the early part of 1874, however, Mr. Crookes was led into a further pronouncement on the subject of Spiritualism. At a séance with Miss Cook as medium, held in the previous December, Mr. Volckman, who had borne a prominent part on the committee of the Dialectical Society, had, as already described,<sup>3</sup> seized the supposed spirit form of "Katie" as she walked about the room. Mr. Volckman found himself grasping a solid and strongly reluctant wrist, and held on to it until the attacks of the spirit form, aided by the efforts of two of the sitters, compelled him to desist. Mr. Volckman then expressed the opinion that the form which he had seized was that of the medium herself masquerading as a

<sup>1</sup> See his articles in the *Quarterly Review* for September, 1853, and October, 1871; his lectures on *Mesmerism, Spiritualism, etc.*, published in 1877; and the chapter on "Unconscious Cerebration," in his *Physiology*. In the later article in the *Quarterly* he writes of Cromwell Varley as a man "possessing considerable technical knowledge . . . but his scientific attainments are so cheaply estimated . . . that he has never been admitted to the Royal Society." Mr. Varley had been elected to the Fellowship some months before this statement appeared. Of Mr. (now Sir William) Huggins he writes as "a brewer, a scientific amateur," lacking "a broad basis of general culture," and "owing his success to his association with a justly distinguished professor." Mr. Huggins was *not* a brewer; and the present generation can judge how far Carpenter's spiteful depreciation was justified. Mr. Crookes he describes as a "specialist of the specialists," an investigator whose ability was "purely technical," and added, "We speak advisedly when we say that (the Fellowship of the Royal Society) was conferred on him with considerable hesitation." When this latter statement was brought to the notice of the Council of the Royal Society, that body passed a special resolution regretting its publication, on the double ground that it was incorrect in point of fact, and that its publication was a breach of the usages of the Society.

<sup>2</sup> Book IV, chap. iii.

<sup>3</sup> Above, page 103.

spirit. In the newspaper discussion which followed, Mr. Crookes, as one who had tested and satisfied himself of the genuineness of the materialisations exhibited in Miss Cook's presence, felt bound to intervene. In his first letter the only proof offered, beyond the assertion of his own conviction, of the independent existence of the spirit form was that, on one occasion, in the house of Mr. Luxmoore, when "Katie" was standing before him in the room, Mr. Crookes had distinctly heard from behind the curtain the sobbing and moaning habitually made by Miss Cook during such sésances.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence, no doubt, left something to be desired, and in two later letters Mr. Crookes essayed to supply the deficiency.<sup>2</sup> At a sésance at his own house on March 12th, 1874, "Katie," robed in white, came to the opening of the curtain and summoned him to the assistance of her medium. Mr. Crookes followed "immediately," and found Miss Cook, clad in her ordinary black velvet dress, lying across the sofa. But "Katie" had vanished, and he did not actually see the two forms together. Nor did he apparently ever succeed in seeing the *faces* of "Katie" and Miss Cook simultaneously in his own house. Later, however, he claims to have seen their forms together, in a good light. Miss Cook gave a series of sittings in May of this year (1874) at Mr. Crookes' house for the purpose of allowing "Katie" to be photographed. The sittings took place by electric light, and five cameras were at work simultaneously. Miss Cook would lie down on the floor behind a curtain with her face muffled in a shawl, and "Katie," when ready, would appear in the full light, in front of the curtain. Mr. Crookes adds:—

"I frequently drew the curtain on one side when Katie was standing near, and it was a common thing for the seven or eight of us in the laboratory to see Miss Cook and Katie at the same time, under the full blaze of the electric light. We did not on these occasions actually see the face of the medium, because of the shawl, but we saw her hands and feet; we saw her move uneasily under the influence of the intense light, and we heard her moan occasionally. I have one photograph of the two together, but Katie is seated in front of Miss Cook's head."

Even here, it will be seen, full proof is wanting. Apparently all that Mr. Crookes and his fellow-observers

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the *Spiritualist*, 6th Feb., 1874.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 3rd and June 5th, 1874. All three letters are included in the reprint of Mr. Crookes' articles from the *Quarterly Journal of Science*, published by James Burns, under the title, *Researches in Spiritualism*. London (no date).

actually *saw*, besides the figure of "Katie," was a bundle of clothes on the floor, with a shawl at one end, a pair of boots at the other, and something like hands attached to it. As "Katie" generally, if not invariably, appeared barefooted, the boots presented no special difficulty.

Nor do the photographs themselves—some of which, by the courtesy of Sir W. Crookes, I have lately been permitted to examine—afford more conclusive evidence. It was admitted even at the time, and by believers, that "Katie's" appearance differed widely on different occasions, and that at many sésances she strongly resembled the medium. This was unquestionably the case during these photographic experiments. Side by side with the photographs of the supposed "Katie," Sir W. Crookes has placed some photographs taken about the same time, and under as nearly as may be the same conditions, of Miss Cook herself. The likeness between the two sets is unmistakable. Nor is it possible to substantiate any real difference in the features. The apparently greater breadth of the "spirit" face may well be due to the fact that, whereas Miss Cook wore hanging ringlets, "Katie's" hair is effectually concealed by the drapery, which in most cases comes down over the forehead, and falls in two thick folds on either side of the head, something like the headgear of a sphinx. Again, as Miss Cook, when photographed, wore her ordinary dress, which concealed her feet, the apparent difference in height on some occasions between herself and the spirit figure cannot be relied upon. One piece of evidence would, indeed, have been conclusive—that the ears of the spirit form should have appeared intact, for Miss Cook's ears were pierced for earrings. But the encircling drapery effectually concealed both the ears and the hair of the spirit "Katie."

But conclusive evidence of the simultaneous appearance of two figures was at length obtained. At a sésance held on March 29th Mr. Crookes reports:—

"Katie . . . for nearly two hours walked about the room conversing familiarly with those present, on several occasions she took my arm when walking . . . Katie now said she thought she should be able this time to show herself and Miss Cook together. I was to turn the gas out, and then come with my phosphorus lamp into the room now used as a cabinet. This I did, having previously asked a friend who was skilful at shorthand to take down any statement I might make when in the cabinet, knowing the importance attaching to first impressions, and not wishing to leave more to memory than necessary. His notes are now before me.

"I went cautiously into the room, it being dark, and felt about for Miss Cook. I found her crouching on the floor. Kneeling down, I let air enter the lamp, and by its light I saw the young lady dressed in black velvet, as she had been in the early part of the evening, and to all appearance perfectly senseless; she did not move when I took her hand and held the light quite close to her face, but continued quietly breathing. Raising the lamp, I looked around and saw Katie standing close behind Miss Cook. She was robed in flowing white drapery as we had seen her previously during the séance. Holding one of Miss Cook's hands in mine, and still kneeling, I passed the lamp up and down so as to illuminate Katie's whole figure, and satisfy myself thoroughly that I was really looking at the veritable Katie whom I had clasped in my arms a few minutes before, and not at the phantasm of a disordered brain. She did not speak, but moved her head and smiled in recognition. Three separate times did I carefully examine Miss Cook crouching before me to be sure that the hand I held was that of a living woman, and three separate times did I turn the lamp to Katie and examine her with steadfast scrutiny until I had no doubt whatever of her objective reality."

Mr. Crookes further ascertained on this occasion that a blister on Miss Cook's neck was wanting on "Katie's," and that "Katie's" ears were not pierced for earrings.

At a later séance held on the 21st of May, Mr. Crookes was privileged to be present, behind the curtain, at the farewell meeting between Miss Cook and "Katie," and saw and heard the two figures conversing together for several minutes.

There can be no reasonable doubt that on these two occasions, at any rate, the figure of "Katie," seen, heard, and touched by Mr. Crookes and most of those present, was not that of Miss Cook masquerading as a spirit, but was a separate entity of some kind. Both séances were in fact held, by Miss Cook's special invitation, in her own home and in presence of several members of her family, and the room used as a dark cabinet was the medium's bedroom.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See various letters in the *Spiritualist* and the *Medium* in the early part of 1874 referring to these séances. The evidence was not apparently good enough even for convinced Spiritualists. The editor of the *Spiritualist* expressly states that the séance of the 21st May was not held under test conditions (*Spiritualist*, 10th July, 1874). Mr. J. Enmore Jones, whose acquaintance we have already made in previous chapters, and who cannot certainly be regarded as unduly exacting of evidence, thought the conditions at this final series of séances by no means satisfactory, and found fault with Mr. Crookes' conduct of the one séance at which he was present (*Medium*, May 22nd, 1874). And, finally, Serjeant Cox, who accepted most of the phenomena, drew the line at materialisation, and asked for more precise evidence of the separate appearance of medium and spirit. What he thought of Mr. Crookes' later observations may perhaps be inferred from the fact that when challenged in the columns of the

One other experiment of this period calls for mention. In March, 1874, Mr. Cromwell Varley, F.R.S., the well-known electrician, applied an ingenious electrical test to Miss Cook during one of her materialisation séances. The medium, seated in an inner room darkened for the purpose, was placed in a circuit connected with a resistance coil and a galvanometer, the two instruments being in the outer room in full view of the sitters. The movements of the galvanometer were shown by means of a light reflected from a mirror on to a large graduated scale. The free ends of the wire were soldered to sovereigns, which were fastened, one to each of the medium's arms, by means of elastic bands, some blotting-paper moistened with nitrate of ammonia being interposed between the metal and the skin in order to improve the contact. At the outset, when the blotting-paper was still quite moist, the needle showed a deviation of about two hundred and twenty divisions on the scale. But as the moisture gradually evaporated, and the resistance therefore increased, this deviation was gradually diminished, until at the end of thirty-eight minutes, when the wires were finally removed from the medium's arms, the scale showed a deviation of one hundred and forty-six divisions only. As the movement of the needle on the scale was fairly regular, broken by no such sudden and extreme fluctuations as must have ensued if the medium had removed the wires, it seems clear that the wires remained attached to her person throughout. Yet during this period the figure "Katie" came out before the expectant circle, waved her arms, shook hands with some of her friends, and wrote in their presence.

From this experiment it may legitimately be inferred that, if "Katie" was a spirit, whose apparently solid form was constructed, in accordance with the Spiritualist hypothesis, out of materials drawn from the body of the medium, the abstraction of the required materials in no way affected the electrical resistance of the organism drawn upon. So much may legitimately be inferred. But Mr. Harrison, the editor of the *Spiritualist*, in printing Mr. Varley's report,

*Medium* (June 5th, 1874) to point out in what respect they fell short of his demand for proof on this point, he left the letter unanswered.

It is fair to point out, on the other hand, that, as already indicated, Mr. Crookes' letters on the "Katie" appearances, written to a Spiritualist journal, were primarily intended as a vindication of the character of a young woman whom he held to have been unjustly attacked. If intended as a serious contribution to science, no doubt the conditions themselves would have been stricter, and, for the satisfaction of scientific readers, the whole circumstances of the experiments would have been fully described.

adds some comments of his own—comments which, he states, met with the approval of Mr. Varley and Mr. Crookes (who had also been present). Mr. Harrison maintains that the experiment proves that the figure seen outside the curtain could not have been that of the medium. That is not a legitimate inference from the facts stated in Mr. Varley's report. To make it so, it should have been shown, either that the wires attached to the medium were so arranged that it would have been impossible for her to leave her place without breaking the circuit, or that movements such as those made by the figure "Katie" would have involved, if "Katie" were actually Miss Cook, with the wires still attached, more violent oscillations of the needle than were actually observed. As to the first point, there is no indication in the report that the wires in any way restricted the medium's liberty of movement, at any rate, in the direction of the outer room. As to the second point, the needle oscillated, when "Katie" waved her arms, over twenty-one divisions of the scale; but the assumption made by Mr. Varley that the act of writing (during which, of course, the arms would experience no sudden or violent motion) would necessarily have involved oscillation, appears to have been purely gratuitous. There is really nothing in the record to forbid the supposition that Miss Cook left her seat and promenaded as "Katie" with the wires still attached to her arms.<sup>1</sup> Reading between the lines, we are forced to recognise that the confidence expressed by scientific witnesses in the genuineness of these "materialisations" is inextricably bound up with their confidence in the personal integrity of the medium, and Miss Cook's later career, at any rate, scarcely allows us to suppose that such confidence was ever well founded.<sup>2</sup>

A modification of the experiment was tried a year later by Mr. Crookes on another medium, Mrs. Fay. The investigators sat in Mr. Crookes' laboratory, in front of a curtain. In the library, immediately on the other side of the curtain (the exact distance is not given), the medium was seated in a chair, and two brass handles, wrapped in wet cloths, were given her to hold, the circuit being thus completed. The index of the galvanometer remained practically constant for some eight minutes, and during those eight minutes various articles, placed in the library at a considerable

<sup>1</sup> The *Spiritualist*, 20th March, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Corner (Miss Cook) was seized in January, 1880, when personating a spirit (see *Spiritual Notes*, Feb., 1880; *Spiritualist* for January and February of same year; and my *Studies in Psychical Research*, p. 23).

distance from the medium, are reported to have been moved, a hand was seen thrust through the curtain, a locked desk was opened, and so on. At the end of the eight minutes the index went to zero, and the medium was discovered in a fainting condition. In this form of the experiment the manifestations, if performed by the medium, would seem to have involved a movement to a considerable distance away from the battery, and if it may be assumed (for it is not expressly stated) that the length of the wires or their mode of attachment would not have permitted that, it seems clear either that the movements testified to were effected by some extra-corporeal agency, or that the medium did not really link herself with the circuit at all, but placed between the handles some connecting substance of a resistance approximately equal to that of her own body.

As Mrs. Fay, no doubt, knew of the earlier experiments with a similar apparatus, the supposition that she brought with her a small resistance coil and attached it to the handles presents no great difficulty.<sup>1</sup> As the circuit was actually broken before the conclusion of the experiment, everything depends upon the precautions taken at the outset to ensure that the medium's body was actually in the circuit. This is how the reporter, Mr. James Burns, the editor of the *Medium*, whose report is endorsed by Mr. Crookes himself, describes the precautions observed:—

“The library was left in darkness, except a little light from the fire. The spectators stood in a circle, round the apparatus, in the laboratory. Before the curtain in the doorway was drawn, Mrs. Fay was asked by Mr. Crookes to grasp the handles. She did so at fifteen minutes past ten o'clock. The streaks of light on the scale at once ran up from zero to two hundred and twenty-one divisions, and Mr. Crookes, assisted by Mr. Bergheim, read the amount of resistance at 5,600 B.A. units. Mr. Crookes returned for a moment to the library to see if Mrs. Fay was indeed in her proper place, and the report was satisfactory.”<sup>2</sup>

From this account it would not appear that any precautions were taken to ensure that Mrs. Fay's hands were actually in

<sup>1</sup> In his *Mechanism of Man* (vol. ii. p. 446) Serjeant Cox gives an account of a similar séance with the same medium, at which Messrs. Huggins, Galton, and Crookes were present. Cox does not give the date of the séance; but he distinctly states that the apparatus was *quite new* to the medium. If Cox's statement may be relied upon, the meeting described by him must have taken place before that described in the text, and Mrs. Fay must have come to the latter forewarned of the precise nature of the test to be imposed upon her.

<sup>2</sup> *Medium and Daybreak*, March 12th, 1875.

the circuit; if a resistance coil were attached to the handles, it would only have been necessary for the medium in the dim light to approach her hands close to them during Mr. Crookes' momentary inspection. To detect trickery of the kind probably practised, nothing less than a careful inspection in full light would have sufficed.

At the meeting of the British Association held at Glasgow in 1876, in the Anthropological Department, presided over by Dr. A. R. Wallace, a paper was read by Professor W. F. Barrett, F.R.S., entitled "On some Phenomena Associated with Abnormal Conditions of Mind." In this paper Professor Barrett described various experiments of his own and others tending to prove what the Mesmerists of the previous generation called "community of sensation" and "clairvoyance."<sup>1</sup> Professor Barrett expressed the opinion that the results arrived at were not to be entirely explained by hyperæsthesia or normal suggestion. In his own words:—

"When the subject was in the state of trance or profound hypnotism, I noticed that not only sensations, but also ideas or emotions occurring in the operator appeared to be reproduced in the subject without the intervention of any sign, or visible or audible communication. . . . In many other ways I convinced myself that the existence of a distinct idea in my own mind gave rise to some image of the idea in the subject's mind: not always a clear image, but one that could not fail to be recognised as a more or less distorted reflection of my own thought. The important point is that every care was taken to prevent any unconscious muscular action of the face, or otherwise giving any indication to the subject."

This presumed mode of communication between one individual and another, without the intervention of any known sense, Professor Barrett, arguing on electrical analogies, was inclined to suggest might be due to some form of nervous induction.

Passing on from these experiments, the reader of the paper referred briefly to the physical phenomena of Spiritualism. The more marvellous phenomena, such as levitation and the handling of red-hot coals—which, as he took occasion to point out, occurred generally in darkness or a subdued light—he was inclined to attribute to hallucination. But his own observation, he proceeded to state, tended to show that not all the minor physical phenomena, such as raps and movements of furniture, could be attributed to fraud. He had himself witnessed the raps in broad daylight, out of doors,

<sup>1</sup> See Book I. chaps. ix., x.

under conditions which seemed to him to make trickery impossible. Professor Barrett, in conclusion, urged the appointment of a committee of scientific men for the systematic investigation of the phenomena of Mesmerism and Spiritualism. In the discussion which followed not only Mr. Crookes and Dr. Wallace, but Lord Rayleigh and Colonel Lane Fox expressed themselves in favour of some further investigation, being convinced from their own observations that there was something to investigate.

No action was taken at that time on Professor Barrett's suggestion, a result for which the exposure a few days later by Professor Lankester of "Dr." Slade—a medium whose performances had been favourably referred to by more than one speaker in the discussion which followed the reading of the paper—was perhaps mainly responsible.

Professor Barrett, however, continued, as opportunity permitted, his investigations of the subject; and some years later, in January, 1882, a conference, as described in the next chapter, was held at his invitation in London. In the following month, as a result of this conference, the Society for Psychical Research was founded.

## CHAPTER X

### GENERAL SURVEY OF THE MOVEMENT

THE growth of Spiritualism in this country was by comparison gradual. We have already seen to what extremes the early devotees in America were led. The course of Spiritualism on the Continent, and more especially in France and Switzerland, though less extravagant than in America, was marked by the same unfettered speculation. In Catholic France Spiritualism naturally found itself under the ban of the Church, and hence its schools appear from the outset to have been non-Christian. Most French, and indeed ultimately, most continental Spiritualists—or "Spiritists," as they preferred to call themselves—followed the doctrine of Allan Kardec. M. Rivail, to give him his true name, had been a writer on educational subjects, and a prominent advocate of phrenology and Animal Magnetism. In 1862, or earlier, he became converted to Spiritualism, and soon received, through various clairvoyants, a full exposition of a new gospel, the leading tenet in which was the doctrine of Reincarnation. In a series of works, *Le Livre des Esprits*, *L'Évangile selon le Spiritisme*, etc., based upon these clairvoyant revelations, Allan Kardec taught the new doctrine with such success that his books sold by tens of thousands, and were translated into nearly every European language.

But not all those who believed in the phenomena were disciples of Allan Kardec. Count Agenor de Gasparin, whose experiments we shall have occasion to consider in the next book, writing from a Catholic standpoint, sought to prove that the physical manifestations were to be attributed to magnetism or some kindred force given off from the sitters. His friend Thury, professor in the Academy of Geneva, proposed for the hypothetical new mode of energy the name "ectenic" force. Du Potet, Szapary, and others of the old Animal Magnetists, appear also to have held

that the phenomena could be explained on purely physical grounds, though du Potet himself admitted that some of the manifestations required at least the agency of intelligent cosmic forces.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst German thinkers, neither the doctrines nor the phenomena won so ready acceptance as in France. But so early as 1861 Maximilian Perty, a doctor of philosophy and professor at the University of Berne, published a treatise describing the phenomena, and attributing them to the unconscious exercise of occult powers latent in the medium's own organism. To account for some of the mental manifestations, however, he is forced to assume the existence of planetary spirits (*Geodæmon*, *Heliodæmon*, etc.) with whom the spirit of the entranced medium may on occasion enter into communion.<sup>2</sup> A similar theory was propounded some years later by a more famous philosopher, Edward von Hartmann. Hartmann explained the physical phenomena as due to some force analogous to electricity or magnetism emanating from the medium's body; but held that the mental manifestations point to a transcendental origin. He suggests, in short, that in thought-transference or clairvoyance the mind of the seer is in connection with the Absolute, and through the Absolute with other individual minds.<sup>3</sup> Similar views, with various modifications, were advocated by other continental writers—Hellenbach, du Prel, Aksakof, d'Assier. Speaking generally, the crude views of the early American Spiritualists were transmuted and elaborated by European, and especially by German thinkers, the tendency being to bring the phenomena, as far as might be, into line with known scientific analogies by postulating new forces or new extensions of familiar forces, resident in the human organism, rather than to be content with adopting an explanation which is practically the negation of all explanations—the operations of spirits.

In this country, however, the movement was free alike from the practical extravagances which attended its beginnings in America, and for the first few years, at all events, from the speculative activity which characterised its progress on the Continent. Up till 1860, as already shown, the movement in this country was almost confined to the provinces; the only periodical which succeeded in establishing itself for more than a few months was published at Keighley: there

<sup>1</sup> *Traité Complet du Magnétisme Animal*, pp 480 et seq. Paris, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Mystischen Erscheinungen der menschlichen Natur*, etc. Leipzig, 1861.

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritismus*, by E. von Hartmann, English translation. London, 1885.

was no prominent centre of interest in London, nor had any publication of importance appeared, in the Metropolis or elsewhere. Towards the end of the decade 1850-60, however, a small group of literary men and others had become interested in the subject, and the *Spiritual Magazine*, which made its appearance in London in the latter year, continued until the end of 1875 to be the leading organ of English Spiritualism. The editors of the new periodical for the greater part of its career were Thomas Shorter and W. M. Wilkinson, and its chief contributor William Howitt. It was consistently conservative in tone, and held itself, as far as possible, aloof from the various reforming, humanitarian, and freethinking movements with which Spiritualism had been associated in America, and to some extent, at the outset, in this country. Under the scholarly guidance of William Howitt, the new review left Socialism, phrenology, and the marriage laws alone, and confined itself to recording the sayings and doings of mediums and the spread of the new movement in this and other countries. In its earlier years a large space was devoted to accounts of similar visitations in the past, especially in the history of the Christian Church down to the present day.

Throughout its career less stress was laid upon the physical marvels of mediumship than on the trance utterances and assumed revelations proceeding from similar sources, and on their eschatological implications. But here, again, William Howitt and his friends held different views from those generally favoured abroad, and later in this country also. By the London school the spiritual utterances were regarded as supplementing rather than as supplanting Christianity, the doctrines of Swedenborg serving to mediate between the old revelation and the new, and to unite them into one apocalyptic whole. The following passage from an article by Howitt will give a fair idea of the views held by the conductors of the *Spiritual Magazine* :—

“Spiritualism,” he writes, “has taught what the soul is; what becomes of it after death; that there are purgatorial or intermediate states; where these lie; that there is progression in them; that the dead seek for our prayers and sympathies; that the Communion of Saints is real, and far more extensive and precious than was ever before conceived of; that there is no cessation of miracles or prophecy . . . it has taught us not to fear death, which is but a momentary passage to life; that God is disciplining the human race for an eventual and universal restoration; that He is beginning to teach laws of matter hitherto unnoticed by the acutest men of ages

and crucibles; and that, above all, Spiritualism teaches us the authenticity of the Scriptures now so violently attacked, and their great law of the love of God and of the neighbour; that no Christianity but the *primitive* Christianity is worth a straw; and that the dry bones of the present death-in-life churches must receive His fresh breath of life if they are ever to live again. Finally, it teaches us to live in all purity of thought and deed, knowing that not only the ever-open eye of God is constantly upon us, but those of an innumerable company of angels and devils, to whom we are as well and as openly known as to our own consciences."<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt that the moderate views of this little band of Spiritualists and the culture and literary gifts of their leader did much to further the rapid growth of the new doctrine. But for William Howitt, it is doubtful whether the movement would have secured either so early or so favourable a hearing in this country.

For some years the *Spiritual Magazine* practically held the field. But the return of Home to this country in 1859 and the invasion of American mediums during the next few years had stimulated public interest in the whole question, and especially in the physical aspect of the phenomena. Moreover, the ferment of new ideas, which had produced such striking results in America, was not without its influence in England on minds less timid or less fastidious than the conductors of the *Spiritual Magazine*. Provincial Spiritualism, which had until the close of 1859 found expression in the *Spiritual Telegraph*, remained for some years after that date inarticulate. But the ferment was working in many provincial centres, notably at Keighley and in the Yorkshire manufacturing districts, in Manchester, Nottingham, and Glasgow. In 1865 a Convention of "Progressive Spiritualists" assembled at Darlington, and in the following year at Newcastle. The Secretary of the Convention on the latter occasion was Dr. Macleod of that city. Some of the speakers at these two conventions appear to have displayed marked hostility to Christianity; and, generally, the views expressed are reported to have represented "a pale imitation of the pagan phase of American Spiritualism."<sup>2</sup> In 1867 the Convention met in London, with James Burns as its secretary. In this same year Burns began to issue a new monthly periodical, *Human Nature*, to serve as a mouthpiece of the popular movement. The character of the new magazine can

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1865, p. 162. See also 1866, pp. 90 and 139; 1873, p. 529.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1866, p. 571.

be inferred from its sub-title, "A Monthly Journal of Zoistic Science and Intelligence, embodying Physiology, Phrenology, Psychology, Spiritualism, Philosophy, the Laws of Health, and Sociology." In later years "Popular Anthropology" was added to this comprehensive catalogue. A year or two later, so rapidly did the popular movement grow, Burns brought out a weekly paper, *The Medium and Daybreak*, absorbing in it the provincial paper, *Daybreak*, which had appeared in 1868 under the editorship of the Rev. Page Hopps.<sup>1</sup> *The Medium and Daybreak* for years had the largest circulation, chiefly in the provinces, of any English Spiritualist paper, and only came to an end a few months after the death of its publisher and founder in 1895. Lastly, by the irony of fate, during one or two of the latter years of its existence Burns also published the *Spiritual Magazine* in addition to his other literary ventures.

The popular movement, as represented by Burns and his publications, was frankly democratic and non-Christian. In the opening number of *Human Nature* he sneers at the *Spiritual Magazine* as being "of this world as well as of the next," and as endeavouring to preach Spiritualism "under circumstances with which it would be creditable for the priest and Levite to be connected." And throughout his career Burns fought manfully against conventions and respectabilities. He was in his own person a teetotaler, anti-tobacconist, dietetic reformer, phrenologist, and a sturdy champion with the pen and on the platform of these and many kindred movements. Whilst his enthusiasm for the social reforms which he advocated was genuine and fervent, it was impossible to doubt the sincerity of his belief in Spiritualism; but equally impossible to believe him as ignorant as he professed himself of the manifold wiles and trickeries practised by physical mediums within his doors and under his direct patronage and protection. But if, not once or twice only, his blindness to all evidence of fraud in any medium whom he had befriended may have seemed too deliberate, those who knew him best can believe that it was not altogether the hope of personal advantage or the reluctance of a sensitive egotism too deeply committed for retreat which closed his eyes. It must be admitted, too, that Burns was apt to regard and to denounce his rivals in business as renegades to the faith, and that his belief in the cause seemed inseparable

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Page Hopps had been converted a year or two previously. See his pamphlet, *Six Months' Experience at Home*, by "Truthseeker," published in 1867.

from his belief in himself as its champion. Again, according to the reproach of his enemies, he lived by the altar; but the living was not too luxurious, and the ministry was arduous and unremitting. I have eaten of Burns' salt—as a seasoning to Nichols's "Food of Health," or some other dietetic phantasy—and I cannot think hardly of him. With all his faults he radiated a contagious enthusiasm, and the dark little shop at 15, Southampton Row, dignified by the name of the "Spiritual Institution," remained for many years the chief meeting-place for Spiritualists in the Metropolis, and the centre of a propaganda the more active because it was troubled by no theological scruple or philosophic doubt.

It is needless to say that the columns of Burns' papers were always open, and his personal help always ready, for the spokesmen of minorities, the smaller the better, from the advocates of divided skirts to the exponents of the newest theologies. The grass-eating atheists of Ham Common, who are fabled to have slept with their toes out of window, would have found in him a sympathetic historian.<sup>1</sup> His taste in theology, and presumably the taste of his readers, was, it will be gathered, eclectic. Whereas Howitt and Shorter in their writings had sought for evidence of the workings of Spiritualism in the past, either amongst pagan faiths so ancient as to be respectable, or else in the history of the various Christian Churches and sects,<sup>2</sup> contributors to *Human Nature* and the *Medium* inquired by preference into the history of kindred movements in modern times outside the pale of the Churches. We find in those pages dissertations on the faiths of the Mormons and the Shakers; long discussions on the new reincarnation doctrine as expounded by Allan Kardec and his English disciple, Miss Anna Blackwell; reviews of the religious teachings of Andrew Jackson Davis; critical essays on serpent worship, oriental mythology and religious symbolism generally; and an *a priori* demonstration of the existence of God, by Mr. Gillespie, of Torbanehill. Much attention is also devoted to the mysteries of Buddhism. Further, as we have already seen, Burns was the publisher of *Hafed, Prince of Persia*. He also set about the reissue of the immortal *Anacalypsis* of Godfrey Higgins—an author who "will take his place in future ages with Socrates, with Plato, with Proclus."<sup>3</sup> It was Burns, again, who introduced

<sup>1</sup> Some account of this curious sect is given in *Light*, 1882, pp. 191 and 251.

<sup>2</sup> See Howitt's *History of the Supernatural* (London, 1863), and Shorter's *The Two Worlds*. London (no date).

<sup>3</sup> *Human Nature*, 1874, p. 49 (Feb.).

to an astonished world the *Book of God*, being the Apocalypse of Adam I-Oannes, a work which essayed to trace all the religions of the world to one common fount of inspiration, by demonstrating that the biblical book known as the Book of Revelation was actually the earliest divine message delivered by the man-fish O-an, and the foundation of the primitive world-religion, practised in the beginning by the twenty-four Ancients, or pre-Adamite sultans. The *Book of God*, which appears to belong to the same class of literature as Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, was published anonymously, but is understood to have been written by the late Dr. Kenealy.

With all its extravagances, there was much that was genuinely admirable in the popular movement represented by James Burns and those who gathered round him. It was a democratic religious revival, characterised, as such movements are wont to be, by the vigour of its emotional expression, rather than by the subtlety of its dialectic. This is how a thoughtful onlooker at this time, Mr. St. George Stock, writes of it :—

“The religion of the future is in our midst already, working like potent yeast in the minds of the people. It is in our midst to-day, with signs and wonders, uprising like a swollen tide . . . To its predecessors [Spiritualism] assumes an attitude not of hostility, but of comprehension. Though new in its form, it purports to have been ever in the world. Christianity it represents, not as a finality, but as one—the greatest, indeed, as yet—of those many waves of spiritual influx which have ever been beating in upon the shores of Time from the dim expanse of the Eternal. Christianity has spent its force, and now another revelation has succeeded it—a revelation suited to the needs of the time.”<sup>1</sup>

Again, Mr. Gerald Massey, another of the early converts, has given eloquent expression to the religious effects of the belief in communion with spirits of the dead :—

“Spiritualism will make religion infinitely more real, and translate it from the domain of belief to that of life. It has become to me, in common with many others, such a lifting of the mental horizon, and letting in of the heavens—such a transformation of faith into facts—that I can only compare life without it to sailing on board ship with hatches battened down, and being kept a prisoner, cribbed, cabined, and confined, living by the light of a candle, dark to the glory overhead, and blind to a thousand possibilities of being; and then, suddenly, on some splendid starry night allowed to go on deck

<sup>1</sup> *Attempts at Truth*, pp. 128, 133. London, 1882.

for the first time, to see the splendid mechanism of the starry heavens all aglow with the glory of God, to feel that vast vision glittering in the eyes, bewilderingly beautiful, and drink in new life with every breath of that wondrous liberty, which makes you dilate almost large enough in soul to fill the immensity that you see around you."<sup>1</sup>

As regards its tenets, what has been already said<sup>2</sup> of the beliefs of American Spiritualists will apply to the Spiritualist creed as represented in the *Medium and Daybreak*. The popular movement held the primitive faith in spirits of dead men and women as the agency behind the phenomena. The doctrines of Allan Kardec never obtained any real footing in England. His only prominent disciple appears to have been Miss Anna Blackwell.<sup>3</sup> Again, the belief in diabolism, so prominent in the early days of Spiritualism in this country, found later very few supporters.<sup>4</sup>

Another aspect of the movement found expression in the *Spiritualist*, a newspaper which appeared towards the end of 1869, under the editorship of W. H. Harrison, a journalist and a man of some scientific acquirements. The *Spiritualist* was avowedly intended to represent the scientific element. It essayed primarily to record the phenomena, to analyse the evidence, and discuss the explanations, and proposed to defer theological and Socialist speculations until a more convenient season. This paper, which was conducted with fairness and ability for some years, did in effect adopt a more critical standpoint than any of its predecessors or contemporaries, and did contrive to keep clear of theological controversy and irrelevant humanitarian enthusiasms. As we have already seen (chapter viii.) the editor took a prominent part in exposing the trickery practised in so-called spirit photography. The *Spiritualist* and its readers were associated with the two chief organisations formed in

<sup>1</sup> *Concerning Spiritualism* (1874?), pp. 77, 78.    <sup>2</sup> Vol. i. pp. 299-303.

<sup>3</sup> See the essay by her contributed to the Dialectical Society's *Report*, and various articles in *Human Nature*.

<sup>4</sup> For an exposition of the diabolic view see, in addition to the works quoted in chapter i. of the present book, *Spiritualism, the work of Demons*, by the Rev. John Jones (Liverpool, 1871); *Spirit-Rapping*, by a member of the Catholic Apostolic Church (London 1855?); *Popular Ideas of Immortality*, Rev. William Ker (London, 1865); *Spiritualism fairly tried*, Rev. E. Nangle (1861). These works are merely pamphlets, and none of them possesses any intrinsic importance. See also *Dialectical Report*, pp. 218, 220, and 223, evidence of Chevalier and Hain Friswell. It is noteworthy that T. L. Harris, in some of his writings, *Modern Spiritualism, its truths and its errors* (London, 1860) and the *Arcana of Christianity* (1867), taught that the spirits who communicated were vampires and devils, and their teachings "emanations from the hells."

the decade 1870-80 by the more educated section—the “British National Association of Spiritualists” and the “Psychological Society of Great Britain.”

The British National Association held its first public meeting on April 16th, 1874, under the chairmanship of Mr. S. C. Hall. Its aims are defined in its original prospectus as the uniting of Spiritualists of all shades of opinion for mutual aid and benefit, and the promotion of systematic research in pneumatology and psychology. Whilst “cordially sympathising with the religion of Jesus Christ,” the Association proposed to hold itself entirely aloof from all dogmatism, religious or philosophical. Its list of vice-presidents and council included most of the best-known names in contemporary Spiritualism, such as the Countess of Caithness, Benjamin Coleman, Thomas Everitt (husband of the medium of that name), Dr. Gully, Dr. Stanhope Speer, Mrs. Ross Church (Florence Marryat), Mrs. Makdougall Gregory (widow of the Professor), Dr. Maurice Davies, Sir C. Isham, Messrs. Jencken, Newton Crosland, Desmond Fitzgerald, George Sexton, the Secularist converted to Spiritualism and Christianity,<sup>1</sup> together with a list of distinguished foreigners. But there were a few prominent Spiritualists who held aloof, such as William Howitt, Acworth, and J. Enmore Jones, primarily on account of the non-Christian character of the Society. Howitt voiced his dissent in an eloquent letter in which he recounted the marvellous progress of Spiritualism, and claimed that it had conquered the world under patently divine guidance: “Spiritualism is a theocracy. By theocratic power and government it has hitherto prevailed”; and in seeking now a temporal organisation, Spiritualists were repeating the sin of the Jews when they asked for a king to reign over them.<sup>2</sup>

James Burns’ expression of dissent was more complex in character. He descried a spirit of time-serving in some of the advertisements issued by the new organisation, which avoided the word Spiritualism; “worldlyism” in the fact that a leading supporter of the Society dated his letters from the Reform Club; and, generally, hostility to himself and the Spiritual Institution in the mere proposal to found any other organisation in this country.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See his *God and Immortality Viewed in the Light of Modern Spiritualism* (London, 1874), and the series of tracts called “Seed Corn,” published by him in 1872, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1873, p. 529, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See the editorials in the *Medium* for 30th Jan., 27th Feb., 6th March, July, etc., 1874.

But notwithstanding some opposition, the new Association grew and flourished, and remained for some years the representative body in English Spiritualism. It established periodical lectures, discussions, and conferences; promoted séances for inquirers; and did its utmost, by means of its Research Committee, to advance the knowledge of the subject. In the last field of its labours it cannot be said to have met with conspicuous success, for it unfortunately appeared that the more stringent the tests the less striking the phenomena, until a point was reached at which, the precautions being complete, the phenomena ceased altogether.<sup>1</sup>

In April, 1875, was held the first meeting of the Psychological Society, with Serjeant Cox as its President and Mr. F. K. Munton as Hon. Secretary. Other prominent members were Mr. C. C. Massey, Mr. Stainton Moses ("M.A., Oxon."), Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood, Mr. George Harris, F.S.A., and Mr. W. H. Coffin.

The aim of the Society, as set forth in the president's inaugural address, was the scientific investigation of "psychology," which term Serjeant Cox violently appropriated to designate what has since, for want of a better name, been termed psychical research. The Society, it was proposed, should proceed "first, by the collection of facts, and secondly, by discussion upon their causes and consequences."<sup>2</sup> It did not, in effect, proceed far in either direction. Its founder and president was a man without any real knowledge either of psychology, as commonly understood, or the physical sciences. The *Proceedings*<sup>3</sup> of the Society, a thin volume with reports of the papers and discussions, contain little of permanent interest, and Cox's own book, as will be seen later, derives its chief value from its reflecting with tolerable fidelity the metaphysics of the man in the street. The Psychological Society came to an end with the death of its president in November, 1879.

The real significance of the Psychological Society consists in its representing a reaction against the slovenly acquiescence of the great body of English Spiritualists in the belief in spirits of the dead as the sufficient and exclusive agencies in the production of the phenomena. That reaction had indeed begun some years before the inception of the Psychological Society; just as in the American movement there had been from the outset a small body of men who,

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. *Spiritualist*, 1876, pp. 248, 249; 1877, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> *The Province of Psychology*, the inaugural address by Serjeant Cox. London, 1875.

<sup>3</sup> London, 1878.

whilst accepting the facts in general, were disposed to refer them to exclusively mundane causes. Many of the older Mesmerists took the view that the raps, the movements of furniture, and even the more elaborate manifestations of physical mediumship could be attributed to a neuro-vital or odyllic force radiating from the sensitive, and directed by his unconscious will. We have seen the germ of this theory in the attempts made by Sandby and Townshend to explain the table-rapping performances in 1853.<sup>1</sup> And fifteen or twenty years later we find similar views expressed by others who had been prominent in the mesmeric movement of 1840-50, notably J. W. Jackson, author of *Ecstasies of Genius*,<sup>2</sup> and H. G. Atkinson, the co-author with Harriet Martineau of *Letters on Man's Nature and Development*.<sup>3</sup> Similar views were held by some adherents of the rather shallow necessitarianism which prevailed in this country in the middle decades of the century. One of the earliest exponents of the agnostic doctrine was Mr. Samuel Guppy, a gentleman who has been already referred to as having had the singular good fortune to marry in succession two remarkable physical mediums. In 1863 Mr. Guppy published *Mary Jane; or, Spiritualism chemically explained*. The greater part of the book consists of a discursive and humorous exposition of the author's views on things in general, written from a crudely materialistic standpoint. When, as he tells us, the book was almost ready for the press, he became converted, through the mediumship of his first wife, to a belief in the phenomena of Spiritualism. Reluctant to admit the existence of discarnate spirits, but forced to recognise intelligence in the manifestations presented, he whimsically named the unknown entity—which answered questions, moved tables, and drew pictures at his bidding—"Mary Jane." He conceived that "Mary Jane" was but a temporary aggregate of odyllic vapours emanating from the sensitive—a person whose organism probably contained an excess of phosphorus; that this mass of odyllic vapours could think, feel, and perceive, rap and move tables and chairs; that its powers of perception

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> See his lecture before the Glasgow Association of Spiritualists, delivered on 11th May, 1868, reported in *Human Nature* and the *Spiritual Magazine* for that year.

<sup>3</sup> See his evidence before the Dialectical Committee (*Report*, p. 106) and his controversy with Jackson and others in *Human Nature* for 1868. Others were inclined to explain the apparent physical marvels as hallucinations produced by magnetic influence (see *Spiritualism and Animal Magnetism*, by G. G. Zerffi, Ph.D. London, 1871).

transcend those possessed by the human organism from which it proceeds, because the odylic entity possesses "electrical" powers, which enable it to see through brick walls and closed boxes; and that the high thought, philosophy, and profound knowledge revealed in the odylic responses point to the connection of the odylic fluid with "a general thought-atmosphere, as all-pervading as electricity, which possibly is in itself, or is in connection with, the principle of causation of the whole universe."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Guppy was not a professed metaphysician, but merely a garrulous and entertaining old gentleman. Any want of scientific precision, however, which the reader may find in the foregoing statement of the theory was fully remedied in the more elaborate exposition some years later of similar views by Mr. Charles Bray, author of the *Philosophy of Necessity* and other works.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Bray begins by premising the indestructibility of all force, and its convertibility. Heat, electricity, nervous force, and "thought or mind," are all modes of energy, and are therefore indestructible in quantity, and reciprocally convertible. But our bodies are continually giving off thought rays, just as they give off heat rays. These thought emanations, it must be inferred, are not lost to the universe; and, indeed, "many facts now point to an atmosphere or reservoir of thought, the result of cerebration, into which the thought and feeling generated by the brain are continually passing."<sup>3</sup> With this general thought-reservoir the persons called spirit mediums may be presumed to be in communication. Through the interchange of those abundant odylic emanations, which are the special characteristic of such persons, they receive specific impressions from other minds and become clairvoyant; or, again, they take cognizance of the general ideas floating about in the thought-atmosphere, and become "inspired." It is to be noted, says the author, in proof of this suggested source, that in clairvoyant revelations, whether of Andrew Jackson Davis or of Swedenborg, the knowledge displayed "in no case exceeds the combined intellectual power of the whole human mind"<sup>4</sup>—a proposition which there need be no hesitation in accepting. The same theory obviously affords a sufficient explanation of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, which Mr. Bray is inclined to accept as genuine in the main. For the thought rays, which probably began as heat or electric waves, can

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> See his book, *On Force, its mental and moral correlates, . . . with speculations on Spiritualism*. London, 1866. <sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 79. <sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

without difficulty, through the mediation of the sensitive's unconscious cerebration, be converted back again into such grosser modes of energy, and so discharge in "raps" or produce any other required physical effect, even to the levitation of the human body. 'Twere pity such an admirable machinery should be left without oats to grind!

But the most ambitious statement of the "animistic" view is to be found in Serjeant Cox's book, *The Mechanism of Man*.<sup>1</sup> Cox, like many other educated Spiritualists at this date, whilst convinced that the phenomena exhibited, whether physical or mental, transcended the normal faculties of the medium, refused to regard them as testifying to the action of spirits of the dead. His own theory on the matter may be briefly stated as follows: The universe consists of matter and non-matter, there being nowhere any void. Matter, as we know it, is made up of molecules. Molecules are themselves aggregations of still smaller particles known as atoms; but atoms, as such, make no impression on our senses. If molecular matter were disintegrated into its constituent atoms, it would be, as far as our physical perceptions are concerned, annihilated. It seems probable that the whole of the universe, outside this little island of molecular matter, is made up of free atoms—or of atoms combined in some other form than the molecular. But what is not matter is spirit; therefore spirit is atomic, or non-molecular substance, and matter can be changed into spirit, or *vice versa*, by a simple process of transcendental chemistry.

Now the mechanism of man is actuated by three forces or principles—Life, Mind, and Soul. Life he shares with the vegetable kingdom. Mind—which is to be strictly distinguished from Soul—is the expression of the activity of the brain. "Intelligence is not a visible and tangible entity: it is not a structure, it is only a function. Precisely as digestion is a function of the stomach, intelligence is a function of the brain."<sup>2</sup> But at this point Serjeant Cox claims to join issue with the materialists. They will admit nothing beyond Life and Mind. Cox is convinced of the existence of a third principle, the Soul, whose substance "is vastly

<sup>1</sup> London, 1876. The full title runs: *The Mechanism of Man: an answer to the question, What am I? a popular introduction to Mental Physiology and Psychology*. An earlier edition of the same work had been published under the title *What am I?* but the account given in the text of Cox's peculiar doctrines is based exclusively on the later and more fully considered work.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. i. p. 217. Serjeant Cox, however, elsewhere describes intelligence as the characteristic attribute of the soul, and of that alone (see e.g. vol. i. p. 52; vol. ii. pp. 309-11).

more refined than the thinnest gas," more refined even than the vapour of a comet's tail. It is the presence in man of this exquisitely rarefied substance which confounds the materialist, and lifts the human race above the brutes which perish. It would be tedious to recite Cox's proof of the existence of this cometary soul; one incidental item of evidence is found in the persistence of the feeling of a limb after the limb itself has been amputated.<sup>1</sup> From this and other considerations it is inferred that the soul is of the same shape as the body, and permeates every part of it. It is the virtue emanating from the soul—for which virtue Cox proposes the name Psychic Force—which is the effective agent in all so-called Spiritualist manifestations. In clairvoyance the soul takes direct cognizance of the world without and the thoughts of other minds. Sometimes, again, the soul-force will radiate from the finger-tips, and thus endow the organism with extra-corporeal perceptions. It can move objects at a distance, or neutralise the force of gravitation, and permit the psychic to float in the air. Or, again, it will surround the material body with an invisible envelope which will enable the psychic to handle in safety red-hot coals. And when released from the body this cometary soul can traverse all space with the rapidity of thought, and pass through solid walls as water flows through a sponge.

As a contribution to philosophy Serjeant Cox's work would scarcely be worth discussion. The real importance of the book, as already indicated, lies in its doubly representative character. On the one hand, though the author does not share their views, he gives articulate expression to the metaphysical conceptions current amongst Spiritualists generally, from the days of Andrew Jackson Davis onwards. What these conceptions were we have already seen in discussing early American Spiritualism.<sup>2</sup> To Ashburner's definition of a train of thought as "a current of globules of highly refined matter" we may now add Cox's dictum, "if the Soul is a refined Body, and it must be that or nothing," Cromwell Varley's hypothesis that thought is "solid,"<sup>3</sup> and Hockley's view that things seen in a crystal have a separate existence and are spiritual counterparts of the real objects.<sup>4</sup>

But Serjeant Cox also represented the reaction of the more intelligent Spiritualists—the name, singularly inappro-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 448. The argument is borrowed from a book, *The Seat of the Soul Discovered*, by one James Gillingham, a surgical mechanician. London and Chard, 1870.

<sup>2</sup> *Dialectical Report*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. i, pp. 301-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

priate in this connection, is the only one which the English language supplies—against the crude belief in spirits of the dead as the prime agents in the phenomena. Partly because of the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence offered for materialisation, partly through the failure of all so-called tests of identity, or, again, because of the limited nature of the intelligence shown in most so-called spirit communications, and their obviously subjective character, the more critical minds had begun to question whether the spirit of the psychic himself, aided, it may be, on occasion, by non-human intelligences of various kinds, would not furnish a more probable explanation of the matter.

This scepticism was no doubt reinforced by a revolt against the narrowness of the Spiritualist horizon. The revelations of Andrew Jackson Davis and the rhetoric of Mrs. Tappan had made heaven as familiar as Yarmouth beach, and about as alluring.

This reaction was further exemplified by the foundation from 1876 onwards of various schools of mystics, either originating directly in Spiritualism, or drawing the bulk of their adherents from that source. It may be inferred, from the numerous studies of contemporary religious movements, and, in particular, of Oriental mythology and the extant beliefs of India, contained in the earlier volumes of *Human Nature*, that Spiritualists in general were dissatisfied with the singularly uninspiring creed set before them by the majority of their teachers. So that when in 1876 Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky inaugurated in New York the Theosophical Society, they found many in this country ready to hear them. The new gospel professed to expound the esoteric tradition of Buddhism. Whether its claims in this respect could be substantiated or not is, from the present standpoint, immaterial. At any rate, it opened more spacious horizons. Its main tenet was the doctrine of reincarnation; but in the pages of the chief exponent of Neo-Buddhism in this country, Mr. A. P. Sinnett,<sup>1</sup> the cycle of death and life appears on a much vaster scale, and is described with much greater pretensions to scientific precision than in the *Livre des Esprits*. For the continual death and re-birth which make up the little life of man—"a watch or a vision, between a sleep and a sleep"—are, according to the Theosophist, but the representations in miniature of vaster cosmic pulsations, the systole and diastole of the universe. These are the days and nights of Brahm, when the whole creation slumbers and

<sup>1</sup> See his *Esoteric Buddhism*. London, 1883.

wakes again to renewed activity. And through the long-drawn chain of suns and circling planets, through all the stupendous cycle of the ages, throughout the waxing and waning of all things from life to nothingness, and back again to larger life, the human soul, a spark of the Central Fire, retains its identity, and bears with it in all re-births the inevitable burden of Karma, the fate which each man by his own acts and thoughts has ordained for himself. *Quisque suos patimur manes*. The man is the thing which he has made: he reaps now a crop of which the seed was sown in another age and a distant planet, and yet sown by himself.

This is not the place to give an account of the Theosophical movement, with its counterfeit miracles and chaotic apocalypses. The curious in such matters are referred to the report by Dr. Hodgson presented to the Society for Psychical Research.<sup>1</sup> In the period between 1876 and 1885 many Spiritualists were carried away by the glamour of Madame Blavatsky's singular personality, and the attraction of the Asiatic mysteries. Moreover, other societies, teaching somewhat similar doctrines, were founded in England about this time. There was a British Theosophical Society, under the presidency of Dr. George Wyld,<sup>2</sup> which united Theosophy with Christianity. There was the Hermetic Society, whose founders were the late Dr. Anna Kingsford and Mr. Edward Maitland. The Hermetic Society was chiefly concerned with Kabbalistic, Neo-Platonic, and Alexandrine mysticism.<sup>3</sup> There was also, and, I believe, still is, a Christo-Theosophical Society in London.

In January, 1882, Professor W. F. Barrett summoned a conference of persons who, without necessarily endorsing the Spiritualist conclusions, were satisfied that there was a *prima facie* case for the investigation of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, and such apparently kindred matters as ghosts, thought-transference, clairvoyance, and the manifestations of mediumship generally. At that conference, which met in the rooms of the British National Association of Spiritualists, it was resolved to form an association for

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. iii., 1885; see also *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, by V. S. Solovoyoff, translated by Dr. Walter Leaf (London, 1895), and my own *Studies in Psychical Research*, chap. vi.

<sup>2</sup> See his *Theosophy and the Higher Life; or, Spiritual Dynamics*. London, 1880.

<sup>3</sup> For an exposition of the doctrine see *The Perfect Way; or, the Finding of Christ* (London, 1882), a series of lectures delivered by Dr. Anna Kingsford in London in 1881; see also Edward Maitland's *The Soul, and how it found me*. London, 1877.

systematic inquiry into these phenomena, and the new Society was named the "Society for Psychical Research." It began its career under the presidency of the late Professor Henry Sidgwick, and its first council included, on the one hand, men like Edmund Gurney, Professor Barrett, Professor Balfour Stewart, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, Mr. Richard Hutton, who had not identified themselves with the Spiritualist movement; and, on the other, Messrs. Stainton Moses, Dawson Rogers, Morell Theobald, E. T. Bennett, Dr. George Wyld, and others who were at the same time members of the Council of the British National Association. The work of the Society from 1882 to the present time will be considered in some of its aspects in the next book. It is enough to say here that the avowed Spiritualists who joined its Council in the first instance have all since dropped off, and that, generally, the two bodies have moved on lines sufficiently distinct for the most part to prevent even the semblance of rivalry. The S.P.R. has consistently maintained its original attitude towards the subject; it has throughout endeavoured to work by scientific methods for scientific ends.

Of the public history of Spiritualism in later years there is not much which need for our purposes be recorded. As little as any other has it escaped the usual fate of small sects, internal dissension, and the clash of rival egotisms. After the storms which waited on its embarkation, indeed, the B.N.A.S. for a little time voyaged in smooth waters. The excitement of the new venture and the pressure of external events, such as the Slade prosecution and various exposures of public mediums, no doubt held the Society together. But four or five years later dissensions arose. The editor of the *Spiritualist*, W. H. Harrison, had, or fancied he had, occasion for quarrel with Stainton Moses, then and for many years the leading figure on the B.N.A.S. Council. In the middle of 1879 the quarrel became irremediable, and the advertisements of the Association with the reports of its public proceedings were transferred to a new paper, *Spiritual Notes*, which had been established in the previous year. *Spiritual Notes*, which was issued monthly, ran until the end of 1881 concurrently with the *Spiritualist*. In the same year, 1881, a new weekly, *Light*, also under the favouring auspices of the Association, was founded, and under the pressure of this competition Harrison's organ was driven from the field. *Light* has continued down to the present time the chief representative, and for some portion of this period, the only London organ of Spiritualism. It has been conducted

throughout with fairness and moderation. If in these latter days its pages furnish rather dull reading, the fault lies less with the conductors of the paper than with the uneventful career of the movement itself. There has of late years been little to record. The trance communications which interested and attracted the earlier Spiritualists have not indeed ceased, but they are no longer held of the same account. During the time of the incubation of the Theosophical and Hermetic Societies the columns of *Light* were filled with controversy and philosophical speculation. But that source of copy has also dried up. Most serious of all, there are now few phenomena, and especially very few physical phenomena to record. The Theosophical Society and the Society for Psychical Research led away many who were actually Spiritualists, or might, under other circumstances, have become so. The retirement and the subsequent death of Stainton Moses robbed the movement of one who had been its leading figure for many years. Others of the old champions have been carried off by death, and no new ones have risen to take their place. Ten years ago it seemed as if the Spiritualist movement was about to die out from sheer lack of leaders, of followers, and—most serious defect of all—of new evidence for its claims. Add to this that much of the old evidence had been seriously shattered by the investigations carried on by Mrs. H. Sidgwick, Dr. Hodgson, and other members of the S.P.R.

But within the last decade the whole aspect of the problem has changed: the Spiritualist movement has gained fresh energy, and the belief which it represents, if not more firmly established, can at any rate boast that its claims are better founded than at any previous period of its history. This result is mainly due to the prolonged and laborious investigation of Mrs. Piper's trance utterances conducted by Dr. Hodgson, the result of whose labours seems to him and others to render the hypothesis of spirit communication in this case highly probable. But a contributory cause is no doubt to be found in the séances of Eusapia Paladino, whose performances have been endorsed as genuine by several continental *savants*, including Charles Richet, Ochorowicz, Schiaparelli, and de Rochas, and are regarded favourably by more than one prominent man of science in this country. The consideration of this new evidence, of the best-known foreign experiments, and of some English items necessarily omitted from this brief historical sketch, will be the main theme of the next book.

**BOOK IV**  
**PROBLEMS OF MEDIUMSHIP**



# PROBLEMS OF MEDIUMSHIP

## CHAPTER I

### SOME FOREIGN INVESTIGATIONS

THE brief historical survey of the movement of Modern Spiritualism being now completed, it is time to address ourselves definitely to the questions which we put before us at the outset of the inquiry. Is the belief in spiritual communication justified? and, if not justified, how are its origin and persistence to be explained? The belief, as we have seen, purports to be based upon two distinct classes of facts, respectively psychological and physical. As regards the first class of evidence, our inquiries have shown that, whilst the recorded instances of trance and ecstasy may be regarded as in the main free from deliberate deception, the acceptance of them as demonstrations of spiritual agency rests largely upon a misconception. Granted that the ecstatic or hypnotic knows not what he does, and understands not what his hand indites, it does not follow that the action and the utterance are due to the promptings of an alien intelligence.

It has been shown, further, that the argument drawn from the involuntary nature of the subject's action has been reinforced by considerations of another kind. Those who have assisted at exhibitions of ecstasy, magnetic clairvoyance, or mediumistic trance, have, generation after generation, testified to the possession by the subject of supernormal powers of divining thoughts or perceiving things distant and things future. The mere existence of such a belief, descending to modern times from a nebulous past, no doubt in itself proves little. Mystical philosophers have never been at a loss for facts to justify their speculations; and in matters of this kind each man is apt to find what he seeks. Moreover, the

constant stimulus of suggestion from the spectators, aided by the greater acuteness of the senses frequently experienced in the trance, furnishes a sufficient explanation of much that at the time may well have seemed inexplicable. Nevertheless, the possible existence of new avenues of perception is not to be summarily dismissed. Some evidence has already been adduced which, partly from the intellectual distinction of the witnesses—Bertrand, Elliotson, Braid, de Morgan—partly from the excellence of the record, as in the case of Cahagnet, seems even now worthy of consideration. An estimate of the value of this evidence, augmented in recent times by the researches of the S.P.R., and a brief statement of the conclusions to which it seems to point, will be given below in chapter viii.

On the other hand, it has been shown that the so-called physical phenomena are a comparatively modern excrescence on the main growth. It is only within the last half-century that they have attained any considerable development. The faith in the communion and intervention of spirits originated before their appearance, and will probably outlast their final discredit. At the best, whatever effect they may have had in advertising the movement with the vulgar, they seem to have exerted only a subsidiary influence in inducing belief with more thoughtful men and women. It has been shown, moreover, that these physical manifestations are open to suspicion by reason of their pedigree and historical relationships; that they bear a strong resemblance to conjuring tricks; that similar phenomena have constantly been produced fraudulently; that in the few instances where the results recorded have so far resisted analysis, they are yet legitimately suspect as having been produced under conditions favourable to fraud, and in the presence of persons again and again convicted of fraud; that the precautions taken have been inadequate, and the qualifications of the witnesses in most cases not such as to inspire confidence in their ability to detect trickery of the kind probably practised; and that, generally, the strongest evidence yet considered for the genuineness of any of these manifestations falls far short of the standard of proof which is required before any such claim can be admitted.

Again, objections hardly less serious to the acceptance of these alleged marvels will be found in two considerations of a general kind. In the first place, if the physical effects claimed to have been produced are not due to known physical causes, we have to assume, not one new force capable of

acting upon matter, but several. *Entia non sunt multiplicanda præter necessitatem*; but it would be too scrupulous a parsimony to delegate to one new mode of energy all the marvels reported at Spiritualist séances. It must be something more than a simple push-and-pull force, or a new form of vibrating energy, which should account for transportations and levitations, the materialisation of the human form, the abnormal resistance to fire exhibited by Home and others, the introduction of objects into closed spaces or their withdrawal from the same, the production of lights and musical sounds, the elongation of the human body, the tying of knots in an endless cord, the alteration of weight in the balance, and so on. The *a priori* presumption of fraud as the unique and all-sufficient agent is enormously strengthened by a mere recital of the list of duties sought to be imposed upon the hypothetical psychic force.

The other general objection is of a purely negative character. It is briefly this: the annals of Spiritualism offer no physical phenomena which do not, in the last analysis, depend on the experimenter's unaided senses for their observation, and on his memory for their record. Sir W. Crookes, in a well-known passage, refers to this characteristic of the evidence in existence at the time when he wrote—a generation ago—and indicated the rules to which scientific proof of a new physical force should conform:—

“The Spiritualist tells of rooms and houses being shaken even to injury by superhuman power. The man of science merely asks for a pendulum to be set vibrating when it is in a glass case and supported on solid masonry.

“The Spiritualist tells of heavy articles of furniture moving from one room to another without human agency. But the man of science has made instruments which will divide an inch into a million parts, and he is justified in doubting the accuracy of the former observations if the same force is powerless to move the index of his instrument one poor degree.

“The Spiritualist tells of flowers with the fresh dew on them, of fruit, and living objects being carried through closed windows, and even solid brick walls. The scientific investigator naturally asks that an additional weight (if it be only the thousandth part of a grain) be deposited on one pan of his balance when the case is locked. And the chemist asks for the thousandth of a grain of arsenic to be carried through the sides of a glass tube in which pure water is hermetically sealed.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Researches in Spiritualism*, p. 6, by William Crookes, F. R. S.

In a word, the man of science demands that the alleged effect should be substantiated, and its extent precisely measured, by means of recording instruments, so contrived as to be proof against fraudulent manipulation—such as the locked chemical balance, the hermetically sealed tube, the self-registering thermometer, the photographic plate.

Now when Sir W. Crookes wrote—some thirty years ago—the absence of any evidence of this kind, though a serious defect, was scarcely in itself suspicious. The alleged phenomena had for the most part up to that time been investigated by persons without scientific training, who might be supposed not to be aware of the kind of proof required. The spirits, or the “ectenic” force, could not have failed to meet tests which had never been demanded. But in the generation which has passed since then, not only Sir W. Crookes himself, but other trained and capable investigators, have examined the subject, have witnessed the phenomena, have, on occasion, propounded tests of the exact kind indicated. And the evidence stands now where it stood when the words were written, but with a difference. Competent witnesses have seen things which neither they nor we can explain, but no one can yet point to the fulfilment of the simple test proposed. Eminent persons have vouched for movements and alterations in the weight of heavy bodies, but the balance in its locked glass case has remained unaffected. Flowers and fruit and Parian statuettes have continued to make their appearance in closed rooms, but the least particle of arsenic has not yet found its way through the walls of the hermetically sealed tube. Intense cold has been felt at a séance, but has never been recorded by a self-registering thermometer. Many novel substances have been seen, smelt, and handled by various investigators, but here also no permanent trace has been preserved. We are dependent on the observer’s recollection of fleeting glimpses of spirit lights, the rustle of spirit garments, and the touch of unknown bodies in the dark. Strange draperies, delicious scents, solid luminous bodies, even articulate human forms, have been produced out of the viewless air, and into the viewless air have returned unweighed, unanalysed, unrecorded on phonograph or sensitive plate, on balance or thermometer or resisting circuit.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There have, of course, been exceptions to this generalisation, and the exceptions furnish what is necessary, if anything more is needed, to clinch the conclusion. It would be superfluous to repeat here what we have learnt of spirit garments and spirit photographs, but, as will be shown later, attempts have

That however various the conditions, and however diverse the manifestations of the alleged new force, the evidence in all cases alike falls short in the one particular which alone could make it conclusive, furnishes a presumption against the genuineness of the phenomena which has in the course of two generations accumulated sufficient strength to be almost irresistible. Rigidly to exclude from consideration all evidence which fails to shift the burden of proof from the eyes and ears of the investigator to the dial of the instrument would perhaps be unwise, for we are dealing with forces which, whatever their nature, appear to depend for their successful working upon certain human organisms, and the mere propounding of such tests as those indicated may conceivably, even if the phenomena are genuine, by influencing the imagination of the medium act prejudicially upon the results. But assuredly the reality, whether of spirits or of psychic force, will never be substantiated except by evidence which conforms to this requirement. No other kind of evidence can be admitted to consideration except on sufferance, nor can any investigator claim a hearing who does not at least recognise such a standard as that at which all his observations and experiments should aim.<sup>1</sup>

again and again been made by scientific investigators to impose conditions which should dispense with the necessity for continuous observation, and those attempts have been foiled, as often as made, by the ingenuity of the medium. Thus Slade contrived to shirk the tasks of interlacing two solid rings cut out of different woods, of tying a knot in a continuous ring of bladder, of converting tartaric acid into its homologous racemic acid. He did, indeed, profess to tie knots in a sealed cord and abstract coins from a closed box, but only after opportunity for substitution had been afforded. Investigators have repeatedly left in Eglinton's possession double slates so fastened that they could not be opened without detection, and hermetically sealed glass tubes with tablets and pencil enclosed, but no writing has been obtained under such conditions.

<sup>1</sup> A homely illustration may serve to make the argument clearer. That the quarterly accounts from the grocer should reveal on scrutiny occasional mistakes in arithmetic would not necessarily reflect upon the tradesman's honesty. But if such mistakes should recur regularly, quarter after quarter, for more than half a century, and always in favour of the grocer, it would require a large charity to regard him as wanting only in mathematics. Physical mediums stand to-day in the same position as the dishonest grocer, with this difference, that they can retrieve, if not their own character, at least that of the phenomena, by presenting one flawless statement of account.

The paramount need for evidence of the kind indicated in the text has been generally recognised by the leading investigators of the physical phenomena. Sir W. Crookes' testimony has been already quoted. Dr. Lodge, in 1886, expressed himself as "agreeing with Mr. Gurney in considering that conditions which do not exclude the necessity for continuous close observation can never be completely satisfactory" (*Journal S. P. R.*, vol. ii. p. 290). See also Mrs. Sidgwick's discussion of the question (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. pp. 70-72) and Dr. Hodgson's criticisms, from this point of view, of the evidence generally, and especially of the evidence for slate-writing discussed in the next chapter.

Before, however, an adverse verdict is definitely recorded, it is proposed to give an account of some of the best-known foreign investigations, and to consider, at greater length and more critically than was practicable in the course of our brief historical survey, some items of English evidence.

Not merely will this further inquiry confirm, it may be anticipated, the conclusion already indicated—that the so-called physical phenomena are due wholly to fraud on the one hand, and misinterpretation or misrepresentation on the other—but undoubtedly it will help to throw light on the further problem how, being fictitious, these manifestations have yet won such widespread and enduring acceptance. The original source of the belief may no doubt be traced in mediæval superstitions and in the general proneness of the human mind to the marvellous. That intellectual indolence, remarked by Faraday, which prefers the easy solution of a miracle to the mental effort involved in the attempt to grapple with a problem is also no doubt largely responsible. And, further, the spread of the belief in the genuineness of these spurious marvels was, as we have seen, helped by their constant association with the genuine phenomena of the trance.

But these causes hardly seem in themselves adequate to account for the singular vitality of the belief, amongst even educated men, in face of repeated and flagrant exposures of trickery. There are, as will be shown, two special causes which are mainly responsible for a belief persistent often to the extent of infatuation: over-confidence in the testimony of the senses and over-confidence in the honesty of the medium. Some of the sources of error, almost peculiar to an investigation of this kind, ignorance of which begets over-confidence in the testimony of the senses, will be illustrated in chapters i.-iv. of this book, in the cases of Eusapia Paladino, Eglinton, and Home. On the other hand, the history of Stainton Moses, recounted in chapter v., will show us a man of good education, recognised social position, and unblemished repute, exhibiting to a circle of intimate friends feats which, to one who cannot share their confidence in the medium's integrity, must pass for some of the cheapest and most paltry miracles ever offered to human credulity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As there are several persons still living who were on terms of intimacy with Mr. Stainton Moses, one or two of whom have been good enough to extend some measure of friendship to myself, I think it well to anticipate the fuller discussion below (chap. v.) by stating here that, apart from these hardly even dubious manifestations, I know of no reason for doubting Stainton Moses' personal integrity. To myself, after as full a study of the case as I have been

In chapters vi. and vii. an attempt will be made to analyse the pathology of mediumship. Chapter viii. will give a brief estimate of the evidence, especially as exhibited in the trance utterances of Mrs. Piper, for thought-transference, clairvoyance, and communion with the dead.

In the first instance there fall to be considered, less however from their intrinsic value as evidence than because they have demonstrably had a marked effect on the growth of the movement at large, a few typical cases of testimony from foreign sources. Probably the earliest investigations, in Europe at any rate, by men of any scientific attainments, which resulted in a verdict favourable to the phenomena, were those conducted in the autumn of 1853 by Count Agenor de Gasparin.<sup>1</sup> De Gasparin, a late convert to Christianity, was concerned primarily to prove, in the interests of revealed religion, that the raps and movements of tables which were agitating the mind of Paris were due neither to angels nor devils, but to a physical force emanating from the human body and controlled by the human will. De Gasparin was hardly, perhaps, himself entitled to be called a man of science, but he was assisted in some of his experiments by M. Thury, a professor in the Academy of Geneva and member of the *Société de Physique et d'Histoire naturelle*. Thury generally confirms de Gasparin's conclusions, and proposes the name "ectenic force" for the agency presumed to be demonstrated.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the experiences of Thury and de Gasparin have been cited by Mrs. H. Sidgwick as amongst the best attested in the history of Spiritualism;<sup>3</sup> and that, more recently, Thury's monograph, reinforced by personal discussion with its author, has begot, in the mind of so acute a critic as M. Flournoy, a presumption in favour of the physical phenomena, entitles their work to our fullest consideration.<sup>4</sup>

The experiments which are regarded by the authors as crucial were of three types: (1) A table was suspended from one arm of a balance, with a counterpoise on the other

able to give, it seems hardly more difficult, in sole reliance on the medium's honesty, to believe in the phenomena than it is, on the sole ground of the phenomena, to impugn that honesty. The solution of the paradox will, no doubt, as indicated below, be found in the assumption of some abnormal division of consciousness.

<sup>1</sup> *Des Tables tournantes, du Surnatural en général et des Esprits*. Paris, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Tables tournantes considérées au point de vue de la question de physique générale qui s'y rattache*. Geneva, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Article "Spiritualism" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>4</sup> *Des Indes à la Planète Mars*, p. 356.

arm, in such a way that the force required to move the table upwards could be exactly measured.<sup>1</sup> Under these conditions upward movements of the table were observed, indicating on one occasion a pull of 4.27 kilos.

(2) After a table of the ordinary type had been set in violent rotation with the hands of the assistants resting on it, these would be suddenly removed and the table would be observed to continue its rotation for two or three revolutions, without apparent contact from those present.

(3) Or, again, the assistants would from the outset link their hands together above the surface of the table, near to it, but without actual contact, and movements of the table would be observed. The absence of contact would be assured, sometimes by sprinkling the whole surface of the table with flour from a vine-sprinkler, sometimes by the experimenters watching both above and below the table.<sup>2</sup>

It will be seen that the results depend for their acceptance on the sufficiency of the precautions taken to exclude action of the hands, feet, knees, and other parts of the person below the table. These precautions appear to me, so far as can be gathered from the scanty records, to have been wholly insufficient. The records of the experiments are extremely brief, and hardly any detailed accounts of individual experiments are given; the names of the assistants nowhere appear; but we learn that the persons present numbered on some occasions as many as twelve, that this number included several servants and children, and that, generally speaking, the children were found to be more successful operators than their elders.<sup>3</sup> Neither de Gasparin nor Thury appear to have sufficiently appreciated the possibilities of unconscious muscular action or of fraud; nor the extreme difficulty of detecting the kind of half-conscious fraud which later experience has shown that children and young persons are prone on such occasions to practise. One can only regret that an investigator so open-minded and so conscientious as Thury should not have had opportunities of pursuing his investigations, in which case it is possible that with wider experience he would have come to different conclusions.

An investigator of a very different type was Baron L. de Guldenstubbé.<sup>4</sup> He had been for some years interested in

<sup>1</sup> It was prevented from moving in a downward direction by a leg which just touched the ground.

<sup>2</sup> The most detailed account of the precautions taken will be found in Thury's pamphlet, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 28, footnote.

<sup>4</sup> *La Réalité des Esprits et le phénomène merveilleux de leur Ecriture directe*. Paris, 1857.

Animal Magnetism, but always from the Spiritualist standpoint; he laughs at Humboldt for denying that the conjunction of Saturn in 1789 influenced the course of events in France in that year; and at scientific men in general for refusing to believe that the will of the operator radiated from his body as a material effluence in the process of magnetism.<sup>1</sup> For some years he had sought an irrefragable demonstration of the immortality of the soul. When, in 1850, news first reached Paris of the American Spiritualist movement, de Guldenstubbé believed himself to have found what he sought. He lost no time in forming a circle at his own house, amongst the assistants being M. Roustan, the well-known magnetist. As it was one of the conditions that at these, the earliest Spiritualist circles held in Paris, the members of the circle should join hands, but the medium or mediums be left absolutely free, we are not surprised to read that remarkable phenomena were obtained, such as raps, mysterious noises, and movements of furniture.

But it was not until some years later that the Baron obtained the crucial proof which he had so long been seeking. In August, 1856, urged thereto not more by rumours of the recent doings at Stratford, Conn.,<sup>2</sup> than by the recollection of Belshazzar's feast and other biblical precedents, he determined to try for direct writing "*without the intervention of a medium.*"<sup>3</sup> He began by putting paper and pencil in a small locked box, of which he carried the key on his own person. On the thirteenth day he opened the box, and found some written characters on the paper; this experience was repeated ten times on the same day. Later, in company with the Comte d'Ourches and other friends, he visited churches, cemeteries, and public galleries, and obtained writing on pieces of paper left on tombs or on the pedestals of statues. The writings so obtained were in various languages—Latin, Greek, Russian, French, German, English, etc.—and proceeded not only from the spirits of deceased friends, but from such illustrious personages as Mary Stuart, St. Paul, Cicero, Melchisedec, Plato, and Juvenal. From the reproductions published at the end of the book it would appear that the French and German were commonly written in small, regular, and perfectly legible characters; in the Latin and Greek, however, the letters are large, irregular, and so badly formed that it is difficult to feel satisfied that the scribe was really acquainted with those languages.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. xvi., xvii.

<sup>2</sup> See above, vol. i. pp. 196-7.

<sup>3</sup> Page 67.

De Guldenstubbé gives no description of the circumstances under which these writings were obtained; and it might be inferred, from his silence on the point, and from the phrase already quoted, that he and his personal friends were alone at the time of the experiments. There is one significant exception, however. After relating that on the 24th November, 1856, at his own apartments, he and Baron de Brewern had obtained communications from Cicero and Plato, he remarks incidentally that before the commencement of the séance, whilst waiting for two other witnesses who failed to keep their appointment, the furniture had begun to creak, and that *the medium then placed herself at the piano, bidding them place an untouched packet of paper in a particular spot.* At the end of a quarter of an hour the medium stopped playing, the packet of paper was opened, and the productions of Cicero and Plato, together with some English writing signed "Spencer," were revealed. Later we learn that the spirits themselves frequently prescribed the place and time for the experiments.<sup>1</sup> From this incidental reference it may perhaps not unjustly be inferred that a medium may also have been present at the other experiments in churches and galleries.

In any case, it would be impossible to derive from experiences so meagrely and uncritically described any support for the Spiritualist hypothesis. Nevertheless, the publication of Guldenstubbé's book created a profound impression in Spiritualist circles, alike in France and in this country, and his experiments are constantly referred to by the earlier English Spiritualists as striking demonstrations of spiritual agency.

Twenty years later an investigation of a more elaborate character, and under the auspices of men of recognised scientific reputation, was undertaken in Germany. The medium in this case also was best known for the production in his presence of "direct" writing. But the conditions of the experiments are described in some detail, with the names and attestations of the assistants and with considerable display of scientific method.

Johann C. F. Zöllner, Professor of Physical Astronomy in the University of Leipsic, in the years 1877-88, with the occasional assistance of his colleagues, Professors Scheibner and Fechner, and of Professor Wilhelm P. Weber and others,<sup>2</sup> undertook an inquiry into the phenomena produced

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 83-5.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Wundt attended two or three of the sittings.

in the presence of "Dr." Slade. That Slade had been already convicted of fraudulent practices may be conceded to have but little bearing upon the matter one way or the other. The presumption in favour of fraud as the explanation of the physical phenomena is so overwhelming that it is not appreciably increased by a demonstration of fraud in any particular case. In short, Slade's past may be left out of account, and Zöllner's recorded observations may be considered on their merits.

Zöllner was at the time enamoured of the conception of space of four dimensions, and many of his experiments were designed to elicit some confirmation of his theory that the spirits lived in a world so conditioned. Thus, in four-dimensional space it should be possible to produce in an endless cord a simple knot such as under ordinary terrestrial conditions would require the use of the free ends of the cord. On the 16th December, 1877, accordingly, Zöllner took two pieces of new hempen cord and sealed the free ends of each on to a piece of cardboard. Two similar cords were prepared in like manner by Weber. On the following day—the 17th December—at 10.30 a.m., the investigators met in the séance-room, and, to quote Zöllner's own account—

"I myself selected one of the four sealed cords, and in order never to lose sight of it, before we sat down at the table I hung it around my neck—the seal in front always within my sight. During the séance, as previously stated, I constantly kept the seal—remaining unaltered—before me on the table. Mr. Slade's hands remained *all the time* in sight; with the left he often touched his forehead, complaining of painful sensations. The portion of the string hanging down rested on my lap—out of my sight, it is true—but Mr. Slade's hands *always* remained visible to me. I particularly noticed that Mr. Slade's hands were not withdrawn or changed in position. He himself appeared to be perfectly passive, so that we cannot advance the assertion of his having tied those knots by his *conscious* will, but only that they, under these detailed circumstances, were formed *in his presence* without *visible contact*, and in a room illuminated by bright daylight."

For, in effect, at the end of the séance the cord was found to have four knots in it of the precise kind required.<sup>1</sup>

Zöllner's account of the experiment, it will be seen, is fairly detailed. But there is one detail which he omits to give—that the experiment had frequently been tried

<sup>1</sup> *Transcendental Physics*, translated from the German of Zöllner by C. C. Massey, pp. 17, 18. London, 1880.

before and had failed. The real significance of this fact (which we only learn from an incidental reference in another volume of his work, and in a different connection) is that Slade knew what was expected of him, and had the opportunity of preparing duplicate cords. All that was then required at the séance would be to effect a substitution of his own prepared cord for that brought to the séance by Zöllner; a matter which to an expert conjurer would present little difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

Again, if we posit four-dimensional space, we can understand, by analogy with space of three and two dimensions, that substances could be removed from a closed (cubical) space "without disturbance of the three-dimensional material walls."<sup>2</sup> To test this hypothesis Zöllner had enclosed some pieces of money in small cardboard boxes, which were afterwards securely closed by gluing strips of paper round them. On the 5th May, 1878, in broad daylight, these boxes were placed on the table. In the course of the séance a five-mark piece and two smaller coins successively made their appearance on a slate held under the table, and the cardboard boxes on being opened were found empty except for two small pieces of slate pencil.

As a commentary on this performance it is only necessary to state that the experiment had been tried and had failed some six months previously; that the boxes had not been opened in the interval; and that Zöllner had kept no record of the values or the dates of the coins enclosed.<sup>3</sup> Again, opportunity for preparation on the part of the medium and for substitution was afforded.

Zöllner frequently explains that the phenomena were beyond either his or Slade's control, and that hence he could not ensure the success of the experiment which he had previously prepared, though the spirits generally gave him a test even better than that which he had devised. The following is one of the instances cited in proof of this claim. Zöllner had had two rings, one of oak and one of alder, turned from the solid wood, also a ring cut out of a piece of bladder. He had hoped that the spirits would tie knots in the ring of bladder, such as had been tied, as already described,

<sup>1</sup> See Mrs. Sidgwick's illuminating discussion of this point (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 65, footnote).

<sup>2</sup> A description at once humorous and intelligible to the non-mathematical person of the hypothetical properties of space of four dimensions is given in a little book called *Flatland: a Romance of many dimensions, by a Square*, published in 1884, and written, it is understood, by Dr. Edwin Abbott.

<sup>3</sup> *Transcendental Physics*, p. 155.

in the sealed cord, and that they would interlace the seamless rings of wood, in each case furnishing permanent and irrefragable proof of superhuman power. What actually happened was that, at the conclusion of the séance held on the evening of the 9th May, 1878, a small white mark was discovered on the bladder ring, and the two wooden rings, or two others like them, were found strung on the leg of a small wooden table, which it does not appear that Zöllner—he was alone with the medium—had examined before the séance.

Other tests were refused altogether. Zöllner had provided himself with spiral snail-shells, hoping that, in four-dimensional space, the direction of the spire might be reversed; with a tube of dextro-rotatory tartaric acid, to be converted into lævo-rotatory racemic acid; with a hollow bulb of blown glass, into which a piece of paraffin-wax was to be introduced by spiritual agency. All these and similar tests were evaded or declined.

In short, so far as we can judge from the printed records, the precautions taken throughout the whole series of performances were quite inadequate to exclude trickery, and the recital is so artless that we can often see, as we read, how the trick was probably done, and note the conjurer's familiar devices for distracting the sitter's attention at the critical moment.<sup>1</sup>

The so-called "experimental investigations" (which, seeing that the medium, as explained by Zöllner himself, constantly declined the experiment proposed and substituted something else, were never really experimental) are worth discussion only because of the scientific distinction of those who took part in them, and the credit which Zöllner's reputation inevitably gained for the manifestations which he records.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Note, for instance, the account (*Transcendental Physics*, pp. 91, 92) of the miraculous disappearance and reappearance of a small round table. Zöllner was sitting alone with Slade. The small table had inexplicably disappeared. They sat in intense expectation of the next phenomenon, when "suddenly Slade again asserted that he saw lights in the air; although I, as usual, could perceive nothing whatever of the kind, I yet followed involuntarily with my gaze the directions to which Slade turned his head, during all which time our hands remained constantly on the table resting on each other [*übereinander liegend*]. . . . Looking up in the air eagerly and astonished in different directions, Slade asked me if I did not perceive the great lights. I answered decidedly in the negative; but as I turned my head, following Slade's gaze up to the ceiling of the room behind my back, I suddenly observed, at the height of about five feet, the hitherto invisible table, with its legs turned upwards, very quickly floating down in the air upon the top of the card-table. This took place at half-past eleven on the morning of the 6th May, 1878." On page 89 Zöllner tells us that Slade generally saw lights in the air immediately before manifestations of this kind.

<sup>2</sup> In face of Zöllner's own descriptions and unconscious admissions, it hardly seems necessary to discuss the question whether or not he was, at the time of the

An investigation conducted by some American men of science a few years later tended towards very different conclusions. Mr. Henry Seybert left to the University of Pennsylvania a sum of money to found a chair of philosophy, with the condition that the University should appoint a Commission to investigate Modern Spiritualism. The Commission, which began its labours in March, 1884, included Dr. Horace Furness, acting chairman, Dr. Leidy, Mr. Coleman Sellers, Dr. Weir Mitchell, and Professor Fullerton, the secretary, to whose report on Zöllner reference has just been made. Each member of the Committee severally expressed at the outset his entire freedom from prejudice against the subject of the investigation, and his readiness to accept any conclusion warranted by the facts.<sup>1</sup> The Committee complain, however, in their preliminary report<sup>2</sup> that they were from the first hampered by the unwillingness of mediums to submit their phenomena to investigation. No private mediums could be found to offer their services, and many professionals either declined altogether to assist the Committee, or demanded exorbitant terms and freedom from restrictions such as would prevent fraud. Under these circumstances the Committee were practically reduced to attending sittings under the mediums' own conditions, and keeping their eyes open. They did, in effect, have sittings with Slade, Mrs. Maud Lord, Mrs. Patterson, Mrs. Fox Kane, Keeler, Dr. Rothermel, and a few others; and various

experiments, suffering from incipient mental derangement. That he was labouring under strong emotional excitement, that he was possessed with the idea of obtaining experimental verification for his hypothesis of four-dimensional space, that he was quite ignorant of any of the devices of conjurers, and that he accepted with childlike simplicity whatever Slade chose to show him—all this is evident from his own narrative. As regards the corroborative testimony of Professors Fechner, Scheibner, and Weber, Professor G. S. Fullerton, who visited Germany on behalf of the Seybert Commission, in 1886, had interviews with all three gentlemen on the subject, and learnt from their own lips that the first two, at any rate, though disposed to think that what they saw could not be attributed to jugglery, were not convinced of any supernormal agency in the matter, and that they both suffered from defective eyesight, and relied more upon Zöllner's powers of observation than their own. Professor Weber, indeed, maintained his belief in the phenomena as genuine; but in weighing his testimony it should be borne in mind that he was seventy-four years old at the time, and entirely ignorant, by his own admission, of the possibilities of jugglery (*Preliminary Report of the Seybert Commission*, pp. 104, 105).

<sup>1</sup> Spiritualists contend, however, and not apparently without justification, that the intentions of Mr. Seybert were never fairly carried out; and that the prepossessions of the Committee against the subject under investigation are demonstrated by their willingness to leave the inquiry unfinished, and to divert the funds entrusted to them to an object which was regarded by the testator as at most of secondary importance.

<sup>2</sup> Philadelphia, 1887. No subsequent report appears to have been issued.

members of the Committee attended singly, and for the most part anonymously, at séances with Mrs. Thayer, J. V. Mansfield, and other well-known professional mediums.

It would be unprofitable to recount at length the results of the Committee's labours. When they sought to impose such conditions as would render fraud impossible, they met either with a blank refusal on the part of the medium or with an acquiescence equally barren of results. The record, however, of what they saw, when thus reduced to passive observation of such marvels as the mediums chose to exhibit, has some interest. They detected without serious difficulty the methods by which Slade and other slate-writing performers produced their effects, and the nature of the imposture at some semi-dark séances with Keeler and Rothermel. Individual members of the Committee revealed the secrets of materialisation séances and the means by which sealed letters or closed pellets are opened and read.

With the exception of the last feat, for which some dexterity and ingenuity are required, the mediumistic performances described are remarkable chiefly for the puerile nature of the deception. It is difficult to realise that anyone could be taken in by such feeble devices as those employed at these latter-day materialisation séances, or by the clumsy legerdemain of Mr. Pierre Keeler, who, flanked on one hand by his wife, and guarded at a little distance on the other by two friendly sitters, contrived under the cover of semi-darkness to play a tambourine, ring a bell, and do various other things with his right hand whilst sitting in front of a black-curtained cabinet. Even Dr. Slade, the pioneer of slate-writing in this country, shows himself distinctly inferior in skill to Eglinton.

In the light of the experience already gained, it may now be found profitable to consider more in detail the special difficulties and fallacies incidental to the investigation of the so-called physical phenomena of Spiritualism. There are two main sources of error which are peculiar to this inquiry: darkness, and the difficulty of maintaining continuous observation even in the light.

From the beginning of the movement dark séances have been general. Darkness is not, perhaps, in itself an unreasonable condition. Light is, of course, a mode of motion; in photography, in bleaching processes, and other familiar reactions we can see that light produces permanent physical effects. It cannot therefore fairly be held as antecedently

improbable that light should prejudicially interfere with the operation of such an exquisite physical agency as is supposed to be at work in the production of spiritualistic phenomena. That darkness should also be a condition peculiarly favourable to fraud may be merely a regrettable incident of the investigation. In fairness it should be admitted that sensible Spiritualists very early recognised the objection to dark sésances, but they have hesitated to discard altogether a condition so constantly and imperatively demanded by the medium ; and have preferred rather to devise, or accept from the medium and his friends, precautions against trickery. Those precautions—when all tests have not been of set purpose omitted—have been of two kinds. It may be sought to prevent the medium's active participation in the production of phenomena, on the one hand, by placing him in a locked or sealed receptacle, by tying him to a chair, including him in an electric circuit, or otherwise securing his person. Of the value of precautions of this kind, especially as adopted at "materialisation" sésances, enough has perhaps been said in previous chapters. The example of the Davenport Brothers will serve to show how difficult it is to devise ligatures which will baffle an expert conjurer. Many Spiritualists themselves have recognised this difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

But another, and in the view of most investigators a more effectual safeguard, is for the medium to sit in the circle, and for one or more of those present to hold his hands and occasionally his feet. How convincing this test of "hand-holding" still appears even to the experienced Spiritualist may be learnt from the records of test sésances to be found in any Spiritualist newspaper.<sup>2</sup>

It is indeed practically impossible for the novice, and extremely difficult for the investigator who has profited by long experience, to realise the extraordinary ineffectiveness of the untrained senses in detective work of the kind required. Even in the case of slate-writing and other performances in the light, when the observer has, if he knows how to use them, the full use of his eyes, the lacunæ,

<sup>1</sup> For further illustrations of the ease with which the medium can evade almost any tests imposed whilst he or she remains in the "cabinet," see the *Seybert Report*, already referred to, and Mrs. H. Sidgwick's article, "Results of a Personal Investigation" (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 75).

<sup>2</sup> In some contemporary notes of a dark sésance with the medium Rita, which I attended in June, 1879, I find that the holding of the medium's hands by those on either side of him seemed to me a sufficient precaution against trickery. This estimate of my own no doubt faithfully reflected the views of Spiritualists generally ; as is indeed obvious from the fact that even to the present time most persons are content to take no other precaution.

as shown in the next chapter, are many, and the errors of interpretation almost incredible. But in the dim light demanded at the typical séance the eyes are at best all but useless, sometimes actively misleading.<sup>1</sup>

Again, the ear under the most favourable circumstances is an uncertain guide, as anyone knows who has tried to locate sounds in the dark, or to judge of their distance and origin. At the dark séance, then, the observer is left mainly to the guidance of the sense of touch. "Seeing is believing, but touching is the truth," as the popular adage has it; and because the sense of touch is occasionally in ordinary life called in to confirm or correct the judgment of the higher senses, its deliverances are commonly regarded as having a special and superior validity. In effect, the case is precisely the reverse of this. Except in rare emergencies, or in a few processes of handicraft, the normal man has not to depend for guidance or information on the unaided sense of touch. In the ordinary affairs of life it plays a limited and strictly subordinate part. When called upon to act alone it is ineffective, and knows not its own ineffectiveness. In civilised man, at any rate, tactile sensations, partly from organic defect, partly, it may be, from want of cultivation, are vague, of low intensity, and rarely susceptible of precise measurement or comparison. The judgments founded on them seem therefore peculiarly liable to be determined by the mental preoccupation of the percipient, or by suggestion from some other source; and, like all vague stimuli of low intensity, they may easily, under favourable circumstances, give rise to actual hallucination. Everybody knows the story of Sir Humphry Davy, or some other, exclaiming "How heavy it is!" when handling a piece of the newly discovered metal sodium; and the text-books furnish many illustrations of inadequate or erroneous inferences founded on tactile impressions, such as the single pea felt as doubled when placed between two crossed fingers, or the feeling, which persists long after the withdrawal of the actual coin, of the shilling pressed by the conjurer into the expectant palm.

It is, then, upon this unexercised and uneducated sense of touch that the investigator at a dark séance has to rely almost exclusively, not merely to inform himself of

<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that many of the "visions" seen at dark séances are due to hallucinatory misinterpretations of actual, but faint, visual sensations, whether of external origin or entoptic. The point will be referred to later, in chapter iv. A good example of an illusion conditioned by the dim light at one of Eusapia's séances is given by Miss Alice Johnson (*Journal S. P. R.*, Nov., 1895, p. 158).

what feats are being performed, but also to guard against the medium's complicity in the performance. How entirely inadequate for these purposes the sense of touch must be may be learnt from the recent history of the Italian medium, Eusapia Paladino.

Eusapia Paladino has been a medium for many years,<sup>1</sup> and has been the subject of experiments by several groups of observers, which have been reported at considerable length in the continental periodicals devoted to Spiritualism. Her name first came prominently before the English public in 1893, as a result of the investigations conducted at Milan in the previous autumn by a group of scientific men—Professors Schiaparelli, Brofferio, Finzi, Gerosa, and others. Charles Richet and Lombroso also attended a few of the séances. The chief manifestations observed in the light were the lifting of a fairly heavy table, with the medium sitting at one end of it, her hands being held and the lower portion of her body being under observation, and an oscillation—to the extent of some 17 lbs.—in the weight indicated by the balance when Eusapia was sitting on the platform of a weighing machine. The results obtained seemed to the Committee inexplicable, but neither form of experiment succeeded when stringent precautions were taken to prevent the contact of any portion of the medium's dress, with the leg of the table in the one case, with the floor on which the balance rested in the other. The Committee expressed themselves satisfied that the results were not due to mechanical artifices, but Richet, in a separate report, arrived at a more cautious conclusion.

It is, however, primarily the phenomena observed in the dark circle with which we are now concerned—movements of furniture and other objects, raps, the appearance and touch of hands, and other manifestations of familiar types. To the Milan Committee these also seemed all but conclusive; but Professor Richet again pointed out the weak spot in the evidence. The things would be inexplicable if we could be sure that Eusapia could not use her hands, but this is how her hands were secured:—

“ Dans les expériences, Eusapia n'a pas, en général, la main tenue de la même manière à droite et à gauche. D'un côté, on lui tient

<sup>1</sup> According to her own account, she was born in 1854. We read in the *Spiritual Magazine* of 1872, p. 287, of a physical medium named Sapia Padalino (no doubt a corruption of the Italian medium's name), who would write with her naked finger, leaving marks as if made with a pencil. The trick is a favourite one with Eusapia in recent times. See also *Spiritualist*, 1873, p. 140; *Human Nature*, 1872, p. 222, etc.

fortement le poignet et la main ; de l'autre côté, au lieu d'avoir la main tenue par le voisin, elle se contente de poser sa main sur la main du voisin, mais de la poser avec tous ses doigts, de manière qu'on puisse sentir très distinctement si l'on tient la main gauche ou droite.

"Voici alors ce qui passe : Au moment on va commencer le phénomène, cette main qui n'est pas tenue par le voisin, mais se pose sur sa main (je suppose qu'il s'agisse, pour simplifier, de la main droite d'Eusapia, quoiqu'elle opère ainsi tantôt à droite, tantôt à gauche), cette main devient très mobile, presque insaisissable : à chaque instant elle se déplace, et pendant une fraction minuscule de seconde on ne la sent plus ; puis on la sent de nouveau, et on peut constater que c'est toujours la main droite."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Richet was nevertheless so impressed by his experiences that eighteen months later, in the summer of 1894, he invited a small party of friends to a series of experiments with Eusapia at his own house, on the Ile Roubaud, near Hyères. Amongst those who attended the investigation were Dr. Ochorowicz, Professor Oliver Lodge, and Mr. F. W. H. Myers. The things observed were of the same general character as those recorded at Milan, and at hundreds of other séances with other physical mediums for the last fifty years ; that is, when the medium was sitting at an ordinary table, with the members of the circle ranged on each side of her and the room carefully darkened by her directions, a musical box would be wound up, small articles would be brought from distant parts of the room and placed on the table in front of the investigators, heavy pieces of furniture would occasionally be moved, the touch of hands would be felt, shadowy hands occasionally seen, and so on.

Apart from the scientific distinction of the investigators, the history of these seemingly trivial performances is worthy of note (1) because a contemporary record of the whole proceedings was kept by a note-taker stationed outside the room, but within hearing of all that took place ; (2) because the observers named—none of them without previous experience in such matters—professed themselves satisfied that the precautions taken to prevent Eusapia's physical participation in the production of the phenomena were sufficient.

Even if the medium had the free use of her hands, Professor Lodge and Mr. Myers, at any rate, considered that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for her without leaving her seat to have done the things that were done in their presence at the earlier sittings. At the later meetings

<sup>1</sup> *Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, Jan.-Feb., 1893, p. 14.

of the series, however, the character of the phenomena, by the general testimony of the observers, appears to have deteriorated, for Mrs. H. Sidgwick, who, with the late Professor Sidgwick, attended some of these later meetings, was of opinion that all the phenomena which she witnessed could have been produced by the medium if her hands alone had been free.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the proof of the supernormal agency in which Professor Lodge and other witnesses were disposed, on the strength of these manifestations, to believe, depended primarily on the effectiveness of the means adopted to secure the medium's body and limbs. For if the medium could free a hand, or even on occasion a foot, the question whether she could by the use of those limbs overthrow a heavy table, or take out a key from a distant door, could be satisfactorily determined only by exact measurements of a kind for which in the actual conditions there was apparently no opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

Now there is a time-honoured device, exposed in the seventies by Moncure Conway,<sup>3</sup> and afterwards by Maskelyne<sup>4</sup> and others, by which mediums at dark séances succeed in freeing themselves from the control of the sitter. It may be described briefly as the art of making one hand (or one foot) do duty for two. Thus, if the hand is to be freed, the medium will contrive that one at least of her neighbours shall

<sup>1</sup> *Journal S. P. R.*, Nov., 1894, p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lodge's report, together with some additional comments by Mr. Myers and Mrs. Sidgwick, and some excerpts from the detailed notes of the sittings, will be found in the *Journal S. P. R.* for November, 1894. From these notes it appears that most of the manifestations occurred within the immediate neighbourhood of the medium, and none can be said demonstrably to have taken place outside the radius of the possible action of her hand or foot, especially if either were armed with some instrument, such as a lazy-tongs. The amount of force exerted in some feats, such as overthrowing a heavy table, was no doubt very remarkable, but not more remarkable than the extraordinary muscular power of Eusapia's left hand, as demonstrated by Dr. Lodge's dynamometer. Eusapia sent the index to 210° (indicating a force of 168 lbs.); none of the rest of the party at the time got beyond 152°, though Dr. Lodge can, under favourable circumstances, register 170°=about 133 lbs. apparently (*Journal S. P. R.*, Nov., 1894, p. 326).

Again, the writing with a bare finger (in the light) and other feats of writing markedly resemble conjuring tricks; the lifting of a table by Eusapia standing could probably, as Dr. Hodgson pointed out and as Dr. Lodge admitted, have been effected by a simple mechanism (*Journal S. P. R.*, March-April, 1895, p. 66); the bulging (*gonflement*) of the curtain constantly observed at séances with Eusapia, taken in conjunction with the large, vague, semi-transparent shadowy faces seen at other séances, and the prolonged blowing of the medium *comme pour allumer du feu*, strongly suggest the employment of a collapsible bladder (see Fontenay, *Apropos d'Eusapia Paladino*, pp. 76, 77).

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1875, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup> See an interview with Mr. Maskelyne in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18th April, 1885. Mr. Maskelyne himself was for a time deceived by the substitution.

have control only of a part of her hand.<sup>1</sup> During the séance, by a series of convulsive movements, such as are commonly observed in the case of Eusapia, and, indeed, in mediums generally, before the outburst of the physical manifestations, she will bring her two hands into close proximity on the table, and then, at a favourable moment, will withdraw one hand, leaving the other in contact at the same time with the hand of each of her neighbours, who will each, of course, believe that they are touching a different hand. Some device of the kind, it may be inferred from the description already quoted from Professor Richet, Eusapia had employed at the Milan investigation. The investigators of the Ile Roubaud were not ignorant of this danger. Both hands and both feet of the medium were held or controlled, the hands as a rule being held by the hands of one or more of the sitters, the feet controlled either by the hands or feet of an investigator, or by a piece of mechanism devised for the purpose. Moreover, the investigators frequently took occasion to assure themselves, before or after the occurrence of a manifestation, that the sitters detailed to guard the several parts of the medium's person were not neglecting their duty. Nevertheless, when the notes of some of the sittings reached Dr. Hodgson, he pointed out that the precautions described therein did not expressly exclude trickery of the kind indicated. Briefly, Dr. Hodgson's contention was that mere general statements to the effect that Eusapia's hands and feet were held throughout the sitting give us no assurance that a hand or a foot could not be freed for fraudulent purposes. Effectively to guard against trickery at a dark séance it is essential that the investigators should fully realise the precise nature of the trickery to be guarded against, and should undertake and maintain throughout the séance express precautions against such trickery. That those dangers were exactly realised and those precautions continuously maintained, the report did not show; in place of explicit descriptions of the method of holding, the notes furnish, for the most part, bare statements to the effect that Eusapia's hands, feet, and head were held by one or other of the sitters. Nor could these defects in the contemporary records be remedied

<sup>1</sup> This partial control may be of various kinds: either, as described by Richet, the medium may place her fingers, or some of them, *on* the hand of the sitter; or, as in Williams' séances in London at the present time, the sitter may be allowed to grasp two fingers only of the medium's hand; or, as at some American séances, the medium may clasp both his hands upon the bare arm of the sitter, subsequently withdrawing one and making the remaining hand, widely outspread, do duty for both (see *Seybert Report*, pp. 23, 83, 90).

by an assertion given in general terms some months afterwards of the investigators' conviction that the hands were securely held.<sup>1</sup>

The next act was of a dramatic kind. Eusapia came to this country in the summer of 1895, and gave a series of sittings at Mr. Myers' house at Cambridge. At these sittings the investigators (including, at the end of the series, Dr. Hodgson himself) satisfied themselves that the medium did habitually, by devices similar to those above described, contrive to set free her hand or foot, or, on occasion, her head, and that the great bulk of the feats exhibited at Cambridge were to be explained in this way.<sup>2</sup>

As already said, it may fairly be contended that the demonstration of trickery on the part of a medium, even trickery of a kind which implies long and assiduous practice, ought not seriously to prejudice the results of any investigation in which it can be shown that adequate precautions had actually been taken to guard against such trickery, for it is not antecedently improbable, on the assumption that the medium is endowed with supernormal powers, that she should occasionally cheat.

The triumph of Dr. Hodgson's demonstration lacked, it must thus be admitted, something of completeness. His argument did not, and from its nature perhaps could not, convince the investigators of the Ile Roubaud.<sup>3</sup> Professor Richet and his colleagues believed, on evidence which seemed to them at the time sufficient and would no doubt equally have seemed sufficient to any other investigators who had not had previous personal experience of the kind of fraud probably employed, that the precautions taken were effectual. Unfortunately the record of those precautions, as shown, is incomplete. The evidence that the holding was effective and continuous, consists, essentially, in the recollection of a series of impressions of the least intellectual of our senses. Now tactile impressions, vague, faint, and nameless at the time, present in the retrospect no picture at all comparable in precision and intensity to the memories of things actually

<sup>1</sup> *Journal S. P. R.*, March-April, 1895, p. 56. Dr. Hodgson's criticism and the replies of the investigators are printed at length in this number.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal S. P. R.*, Oct. and Nov., 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Myers' belief was, indeed, shaken, if not actually overthrown at the time. Later, however, as a sequel to some sittings held with Eusapia in Paris, in December, 1898, at which both Myers and Richet were present, these two gentlemen and Dr. Lodge took occasion, at a general meeting of the S. P. R., held in the following January, to reaffirm their belief in the genuineness of some at least of the physical phenomena occurring in the presence of Eusapia (see *Journal S. P. R.*, March, 1899, pp. 34, 35).

seen; and how fallacious, at the best, are even our visual memories will be shown in the next chapter.

It seems a legitimate conclusion that all the feats which could be explained on the assumption that Eusapia had free use of any limb must be left out of account. The remainder seem neither sufficiently numerous nor sufficiently striking to justify suspension of judgment. The margin of error in circumstances so little favourable to exact observation is necessarily wide, and it is scarcely unfair to assume that a proved trickster may have other tricks as yet undiscovered.

In fine, if we decide to reject the evidence in favour of Eusapia's supernormal powers, that decision is in the last analysis justified, not by the completeness of the explanation offered by Dr. Hodgson, which is necessarily based largely on conjecture, nor by the apparent lacunæ in the evidence, nor by any specific distrust of the competence of the distinguished investigators of the Ile Roubaud. The justification is that the results attained, even when vouched for by such high authority, depending, as they do, on observation, and not on automatic record, are not sufficiently free from ambiguity to weigh against the presumption derived, as indicated in the early part of this chapter, from an examination of all previous evidence upon the subject. Furthermore, as will be shown in the next chapter, the presumption is strengthened, as regards these particular observations, by the reflection that other experimenters, inferior perhaps in general competence, but placed in circumstances much more favourable to observation, have been deceived again and again by devices not less obvious, when explained.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Not the least instructive feature in the history of Eusapia is the attitude of some other continental investigators who subsequently held sittings with her. In the autumn of 1895, immediately after the Cambridge fiasco, Messrs. Sabatier, de Rochas, Dariex, de Watteville, and others had a series of six sittings. They had been furnished by Mr. Myers with a full account of the manner in which Eusapia had produced fraudulent phenomena in this country; but they failed to profit by the lesson. Eusapia's feet were still "controlled," as a rule, by being placed on the feet of the investigator, or *vice versa*; and one of her hands was still allowed to be placed on, instead of being held by, the hand of her neighbour; the light was subdued in accordance with the medium's wishes; and the liberality of the investigators was rewarded by an abundance of the usual manifestations (*Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, Jan.-Feb., 1896). The chronicler of a still more recent series of sittings, M. de Fontenay, ostentatiously proclaims his contempt for the meticulous criticisms of Dr. Hodgson, and excuses himself from the intolerably tedious task of describing in detail the precautions taken. The reader is asked to accept his assurance that they were "more than sufficient" for their purpose (*Apropos d'Eusapia Paladino: les séances de Montfort l'Amaury, 25-28 juillet, 1897*, pp. 15, 23, 29, etc. Paris, 1898).

## CHAPTER II

### SLATE-WRITING

MOST readers will, it is likely, have little difficulty in accepting the conclusion indicated in the preceding chapter, that the physical phenomena in general were due to fraud. To many, indeed, the demonstration will, it is to be anticipated, have appeared superfluous. If we appeal to the scientific attainments and general intelligence of some of those who have vouched for the genuineness of the physical marvels, as proof that the trickery was not so obvious as, after the explanation, it may appear to have been, the rejoinder that men of general culture and even men of science are not specially qualified to detect conjuring tricks carries some weight. But it is pertinent to point out that conjurers—even eminent conjurers—have themselves admitted the genuineness of some of these suspected manifestations. Houdin's testimony to the clairvoyant powers of Alexis has already been quoted.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Maskelyne has put it on record that he has witnessed movements of the table which could not in his judgment have been produced by trickery or by unconscious muscular action, and which forced him to look for an explanation in some "psychic or nerve force."<sup>2</sup> And Samuel Bellachini, Court conjurer at Berlin, in December, 1877, executed a solemn declaration before a notary to the effect that not only had he failed to discover any mechanical means by which the phenomena occurring in Slade's presence could have been produced, but that he regarded it as impossible to explain these occurrences by prestidigitation of any kind.<sup>3</sup>

Of all the physical phenomena of mediumship, the slate-writing performances of such men as Slade and Eglinton

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> "A Chat with Mr. Maskelyne," *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 20th, 1885, and letter from Mr. Maskelyne, in the issue of April 23rd.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Zöllner's *Transcendental Physics*, English translation, by C. C. Massey, p. 261. London, 1880.

appear to have proved most baffling to the expert. Mr. Harry Kellar, after his first séance with Eglinton, was of opinion that the slate-writing "was in no way the result of trickery or sleight-of-hand."<sup>1</sup> Lord Rayleigh quoted at the British Association meeting of 1876 the testimony of a professional conjurer, who was unable to explain Slade's performances.<sup>2</sup> Dr. George Herschell, a well-known amateur conjurer, after some months of practice and many sittings with Eglinton, failed to rival the latter's performances, and expressed his opinion that they could not have been due to trickery or conjuring.<sup>3</sup> Further instances of professional or amateur prestidigitators being nonplussed by the slate-writing of Eglinton and others are quoted by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick and Dr. Hodgson.<sup>4</sup> Even Mr. Maskelyne admits that some of Slade's devices were new to him, and that it cost him "a few weeks' hard practice" to attain proficiency in them.<sup>5</sup> That Spiritualists in general failed to discover how these feats of sleight-of-hand were accomplished is not perhaps surprising; and that, so failing, they should immediately have postulated spirits or psychic force as the active agency, is of course in accordance with precedents sanctioned by some centuries of observance.

Slade, as already explained, was prevented from visiting England after 1876, and his performances were matter only for historical investigation. But he found in William Eglinton a competent successor. In the year 1886 about a hundred persons, professed Spiritualists and others, many of them men of distinction in various departments, sent reports to the Spiritualist newspaper, *Light*, testifying to the marvellous spirit-writing on slates produced in Eglinton's presence. In the history of the movement no physical manifestation ever won such universal recognition. The evidence, indeed, for this particular marvel seemed irrefragable. As Mr. C. C. Massey wrote in 1886: "Many, of whom I am one, are of opinion that the case for these phenomena generally, and for 'autography'<sup>6</sup> in particular, is already complete."<sup>7</sup> As evidence of the position which Eglinton held in the estimation of Spiritualists, it may be added that he was invited in the

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the discussion in the *Glasgow Herald*, Sept. 13th, 1876.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 97, and *Journal*, July, 1886, p. 354.

<sup>4</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. pp. 59 and 412.

<sup>5</sup> *The Supernatural* (?), p. 194, by Dr. Weatherly and Mr. J. N. Maskelyne. 1891; see also *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 20th, 1885.

<sup>6</sup> i.e. "direct" writing, of which slate-writing was the best-known form.

<sup>7</sup> See *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 98.

course of the same year, 1886, to read a paper before the London Spiritualist Alliance.

Slate-writing, then, as produced at Eglinton's séances, was by the general consent of Spiritualists ascribed to supernatural agencies. The manifestation offered special facilities for investigation as compared with most other kinds of physical phenomena, inasmuch as it was produced in full light; was fairly constant in its appearance, instances of completely unsuccessful séances being comparatively rare; and, from the nature of the experiment, the conditions presented, or seemed to present, the fullest opportunity for examination. The Society for Psychical Research had for some years been collecting from its own members and others accounts of Eglinton's performances, and the occasion seemed fitting for a crucial test of the pretensions of Spiritualism.

Antecedently, indeed, apart from the general presumption against the operation of any hitherto unrecognised agency in nature, there were special grounds for suspecting the results in this particular case to be due to trickery. Eglinton had on at least two occasions been detected in fraudulently simulating occult phenomena. In 1876, at a time when he was giving materialisation séances, Archdeacon Colley and Mr. Owen Harries had discovered in his portmanteau some muslin and a false beard, and had found further that these actually matched some fragments of drapery and hair cut a few days previously from the spirit form of "Abdullah," the medium's spirit guide.<sup>1</sup> Eglinton had also co-operated with Madame Blavatsky in manufacturing a theosophic miracle, the "astral" conveyance of a letter from a ship in mid-ocean.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, several observers claimed to have seen Eglinton actually writing on the slates with his own hands, the writing being afterwards exhibited by him as the work of spirits. The most complete record of the kind is that of Professor Carvill Lewis, F.G.S., who had two sittings in the winter of 1886.<sup>3</sup> By purposely turning his head away and pretending to divert his attention, Professor Lewis was able not only to hear Eglinton's doings as he wrote on the slates, unrolled a piece of paper on which a question was written, etc., but occasionally to see the movements of the tendons of the wrist in the act of writing, and other signs of muscular

<sup>1</sup> See *Journal S. P. R.*, June, 1886; *Medium and Daybreak*, 1st and 15th Nov., 1878; and *Spiritualist*, 14th Feb. 1879, p. 83, and 21st March, 1879, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> See *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iii. p. 254, and *Journal S. P. R.*, June, 1886, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> See his report, in *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. pp. 352, etc.

action on his part necessary for the performance of the trick.

But demonstration of occasional, or even frequent, trickery was not in itself sufficient. As already said, educated Spiritualists have, at least in the later years of the movement, been willing to admit sporadic trickery on the part of genuine mediums. One of the most acute and most candid of those who have professed their belief in the physical phenomena, Mr. C. C. Massey,<sup>1</sup> has put this contention in a form to which no exception can reasonably be taken. "As Eduard von Hartmann has pointed out," he writes, "occasional trickery is antecedently to be expected from the exigencies of professional mediumship, having regard to the uncertainty with which the true force is developed. And the whole theory of mediumship points to influences and conditions which must result sometimes in actual deception, sometimes in the mere appearance of it."<sup>2</sup> Even more striking is the testimony to the same effect of the well-known conjurer, "Professor Hoffmann" (Mr. Angelo J. Lewis). Professor Hoffmann was requested by the S.P.R. to report in his professional capacity upon Eglinton's performance. After attending twelve sittings (mostly blank) and studying the reports furnished by others, he pointed out many circumstances suggesting that trickery was occasionally, if not even systematically, employed. "On the other hand," he writes, "I do not believe the cleverest conjurer could, under the same conditions, use trickery in the wholesale way necessary to produce all these phenomena without exposing himself to constant risk of detection. . . . If conjuring were the only explanation of the slate-writing phenomena, I should certainly have expected that their secret would long since have become public property."<sup>3</sup>

Mr. C. C. Massey, in the article from which I have already quoted, puts the Spiritualist case at its strongest. The best mediumistic manifestations, he contends, are not comparable in their conditions to the performances of conjurers. The success of the conjurer depends upon his being able to dictate his own conditions, and upon the ignorance of the spectators of the result to be expected, and hence of the exact point or process which they have to observe. It is

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Massey, it should be pointed out, is not a Spiritualist in the strict sense of the term, *i.e.* he does not believe that such phenomena as slate-writing necessarily involve any other agency than the psychic force of the medium.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal S. P. R.*, Aug., 1886, p. 373.

because of this ignorance that the conjurer finds it so easy to divert attention from the movements essential to the success of the trick. At a mediumistic séance conducted by competent investigators, and especially, Mr. Massey claims, at a slate-writing séance, the investigators can dictate their own conditions; they consequently know beforehand exactly what they have to observe, and where to concentrate their attention. By well-contrived precautions, in fact, the task of observation can be reduced to "a single fact of sense-perception, or at most, to two or three such facts well within an average capacity of simultaneous or successive attention."<sup>1</sup> The things to be observed at a séance for slate-writing—such is the Spiritualists' contention—are so easy, the precautions to be taken are so simple, that a sane witness cannot be mistaken when he states that he did observe such facts, or did take such precautions. If we refuse to accept the testimony of such a witness, the refusal must logically imply that we think him dishonest, or that we think him imbecile. As an instance of the kind of testimony which imposes upon those who reject it the responsibility of choosing between these alternatives, Mr. Massey cites the following record of his own, written out on the evening of the day on which the sitting took place. Besides Mr. Massey and the medium the only other person present was the Hon. Roden Noel, who corroborates Mr. Massey's account:—

"Mr. Eglinton now laid one of two equal-sized slates (10½ inches by 7½) flat upon the other, the usual scrap of pencil being enclosed. Both slates were then, *as I carefully assured myself*, perfectly clean on *both* surfaces. He then *forthwith, and without any previous dealing with them*, presented one end of the two slates, held together by himself at the other end, for me to hold with my left hand, on which he placed his own right. I clasped the slates, my thumb on the frame of the one (⅓-inch), and three of my fingers, reaching about four inches, forcing up the lower slate against the upper one. We did not hold the slates underneath the table, but at the side a little below the level. Mr. Noel was thus able to observe the position. Mr. Eglinton held the slates firmly together at his end, as I can assert, because I particularly observed that there was no gap at his end. I also noticed his thumb on the top of the slates, and can say that it rested quite quietly throughout the writing, *which we heard almost immediately*, and continuously, except when Mr. Eglinton once raised his hand from mine, when the sound ceased till contact was resumed.

"We heard the sound of writing distinctly, yet it was not, I think,

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 77.

quite so loudly audible as I remember with Slade. When the three taps came, denoting that the 'message' was finished, *Eglinton simply removed his hand from the slates, leaving them in my left hand*, also quitting contact of his other hand with my left. I took off the upper slate, and we saw that the inner surface of one of them was covered with writing, 20 lines (118 words), from end to end written *from* the medium, and one line along the side by the frame, and 'good-bye' on the other side. The writing was in straight lines across the slate, all the lines slanting from left to right."<sup>1</sup>

We may agree with Mr. Massey that the long message was probably not written by the medium whilst the slate was held in the manner described. And probably not only to Mr. Massey himself, to Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood,<sup>2</sup> and other typical Spiritualists, but even to most of those more sceptical outsiders who were then engaged on a critical investigation of the subject, the task demanded of the sitter's faculty of attention may well have seemed absurdly easy. We may agree to put aside the possibility of trick-slates having been used—not because such slates were excluded by the conditions of the experiment, for Eglinton's own slates were used, and Eglinton himself placed the slates in position—but because from what we know of Eglinton's methods it seems unlikely that he would have exposed himself to the serious risk of detection which would have been involved in his possession of trick-slates of the kind required. Of the three assumptions—that so shrewd an observer as Mr. Massey had been mistaken in his definite statement that both surfaces of both slates were clean prior to the experiment; that the word "forthwith" covered an interval of time and movements on the part of the medium which gave him the opportunity of substituting a prepared slate; or that the late Mr. Roden Noel was a black magician—the last would to many of us at that time, and certainly to the present writer, have seemed hardly the most extravagant. That the two first suppositions are now seen to be not only possible, but actually to involve no high degree of improbability, is due mainly to the critical work done by Dr. Hodgson, and the admirable pseudo-mediumship of the late S. J. Davey.

The prime defect in the evidence for the physical phenomena

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. pp. 87, 88.

<sup>2</sup> "The facts are of so simple a nature that they could as well be observed by any ordinary intelligence as by the most scientific member of the Society for Psychical Research."—Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood, in the *Journal S. P. R.*, Nov., 1886, p. 457.

of Spiritualism pointed out in the preceding chapter, to wit, that so far it has rested exclusively on experiments demanding continuous observation from the investigators, and that all attempts made to dispense with this condition have ended in failure, receives further illustration from the history of slate-writing. Thus, though the trial has frequently been made, no observers have yet succeeded in obtaining writing on slates absolutely secure—*e.g.* by adequate sealing, or by being enclosed in glass or wire-gauze—against interference.<sup>1</sup> But to meet Mr. Massey's contention that, in a matter so simple as slate-writing, observation, even untrained observation, could hardly be at fault, the argument was now carried a step further. We are all aware how different will be the accounts of a conjuring trick given by one who knows the trick and one who does not. Dr. Hodgson gives a striking illustration of this. He had once watched a juggler in India performing a well-known piece of legerdemain. Seated on the ground with his legs crossed, he caused some small figures and coins, which were lying about two feet from him, to dance and jump about. One of the spectators, an English officer, drew a coin from his pocket, which, on being placed on the ground with the others, displayed like activity. In describing this incident that same evening, in Dr. Hodgson's presence, the officer stated that he took the coin from his pocket and himself placed it on the ground, and he was naturally much amazed at the agility which, without apparent cause, it straightway displayed. But Dr. Hodgson had seen that the officer's intended action had been balked of execution by the juggler himself, who leant forward and took the coin from its owner's hand before it reached the ground. In that unobtrusive movement lay, of course, the possibility of the trick. Here, it will be seen, a perfectly honest witness asserted—possibly, as Dr. Hodgson suggests, through mistaking his own imagination of the act intended for the memory of an act actually performed—that he had taken a definite precaution, which, as a matter of fact, he had not taken. But an isolated trick of a wandering juggler makes a far smaller demand upon the powers of observation than the events of a slate-writing séance, lasting perhaps a couple of hours. To observe and record the whole course of such a

<sup>1</sup> See Mrs. Sidgwick's article on the "Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism" (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv, pp. 70-2). The Seybert Commission made numerous attempts to obtain writing on sealed slates, but in each instance the experiment was either declined by the medium or remained barren of results (*Report*, pp. 17, 27, 49, 66, etc.).

séance, crowded with minute incidents, each equally irrelevant to the uninitiated, yet containing amongst them the key to the seeming miracle, can only appear an easy matter to those who have not mastered the first lesson of such an investigation—the knowledge of their own incompetence. Dr. Hodgson has put it on record that he has spent twelve or fourteen hours in recalling and writing out his notes of a single such séance, and even then found at the end of his task that in his first draft he had omitted one important incident.<sup>1</sup> Probably few of the writers whose reports he set himself to criticise had for their part spent a fifth, or even a tenth, of that time.

In short, it is quite clear that the Spiritualist witnesses had altogether underestimated the difficulty of the task which they had set themselves. Even the "single fact of sense-perception" of which Mr. Massey speaks—say, the picture of the conjurer's slate on the table—can, of course, be shown in analysis to be a highly complex structure, in which the momentary impression made upon the retina is fused with reminiscences of other sense-impressions, tactile as well as visual, and with innumerable subtler reverberations, into a compound not less difficult to resolve into its elements than any of the complex molecules which build up our physical organism.

But when we have to deal not with a single fact of sense-perception, but with a series of such, or rather with many simultaneous and inter-connected series, it becomes a task of almost insuperable difficulty to discriminate, in the retrospect, the actual data of sense in the final product as elaborated by our own processes of psychical chemistry. And the difficulty is the greater because for the most part unrecognised. As Ribot has put it: "Knowledge of the past may be compared to a picture of a distant landscape, at once exact and deceptive, since its very exactitude is derived from illusion."<sup>2</sup> But even this comparison is too flattering. If memory were a faithful register only of things actually heard and seen, the record of any series of events would be a mosaic of scattered fragments, many ill-defined and with broken edges, some with their relative positions not clearly fixed, and the whole interspersed with deplorable lacunæ. What the memory does present to us is a compact and finished picture, with smooth, unbroken surface, in which the ragged edges have been trimmed, the ill-preserved frag-

<sup>1</sup> See his article on "The Possibilities of Malobservation," etc. (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. pp. 387, 388, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> *Diseases of Memory* (English translation), p. 61. London, 1882.

ments have for the most part dropped out, and the lacunæ have been filled up, now by a process of compression, now by the intercalation of fragments detached from other parts of the picture, or even of new pieces manufactured for the purpose. It is to this thing of shreds and patches, this Wardour Street antiquity, that appeal is made by lovers of the marvellous.

In the course of his analysis of the various reports before him, some presented to the Society by its members and friends, others previously published in Spiritualist papers, Dr. Hodgson furnishes examples of these various fallacies of memory—omission, substitution, transposition, and interpolation. Thus, to take a few instances, "Professor Hoffmann" himself, in his original report of his sittings with Eglinton, omitted to mention the fact that Eglinton had in the course of a single sitting twice dropped his slate on the floor. It was not until he had given further study to the matter that he realised the significance of the incident and added it in the proof.<sup>1</sup> So Mr. Davey, whose own extraordinary conjuring performances will be described later, wrote, at an interval of a few weeks, two independent accounts of the same series of séances. Comparison of the two records reveals several important discrepancies. He omits in one account to mention that Eglinton left the room in the course of the proceedings; he variously describes the same incident as having occupied "upwards of a minute" and "a few seconds"; or, again, of another incident, "scarcely a minute" and "instantly"; he inverts the order of certain events; in one account he writes of the slates employed in such loose terms that the reader is led to infer that they were Davey's own, when in fact they were Eglinton's.<sup>2</sup> Once more, the independent accounts furnished by Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood and Miss Symons of the same sitting betray surprising discrepancies. Mr. Wedgwood omits altogether several incidents recorded by his colleague, notably the fact that at one period of the sitting Eglinton let the slate drop on the floor.<sup>3</sup> In short, by a careful analysis of the reports, Dr. Hodgson not merely demonstrates the untrustworthiness of memory, even the trained memory, in such matters, but by a comparison, where possible, of different accounts of the same séance, he enables us to obtain, so to speak, a stereoscopic view of the procedure. It thus appears that Eglinton habitually left the room during a sitting, or went to the door

<sup>1</sup> *Journal S. P. R.*, Dec., 1886, p. 518.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. and Nov., 1886.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, June, 1886.

to interview a visitor or receive a message; that he habitually dropped the slate on the floor; that he was subject to a distressing cold in the head, which betrayed itself now by a sneeze, now by a cough, now by the exhibition of his handkerchief; that he was restless, and frequently changed the position of his limbs, and especially of his hands. It further appeared that many of the sitters, intent upon higher things, or merely mindful of the dictates of good breeding, habitually ignored such trivial and irrelevant episodes. But in these seemingly insignificant happenings lay, it need hardly be said, the secret of Eglinton's success. A sneeze or a cough would drown the snap of a spring lock, or the rustle of an unfolded paper; a change of hand would cover a change in the position of the slate; dropping it on the floor would give the opportunity for substitution; and leaving the room would admit of the writing of a message or a hurried glance at an encyclopædia.<sup>1</sup> But to attempt to show in detail how the results were, or could have been, attained, would be tedious and unnecessary. It will be more profitable to follow Dr. Hodgson's analysis of a single case.

On June 11th, 1885, Mr. G. A. Smith and Mr. J. Murray Templeton had a sitting with Eglinton. This is an account of one of the most striking incidents of the séance taken from Mr. Smith's record, which was written on the following day:—

"We now expressed our desire to get something written which could be regarded as outside the knowledge of any of us—such as a certain word on a given line of a chosen page of a book. . . .

"I then went to the bookshelf, took a book at haphazard, without, of course, looking at the title, returned to my seat, placed the book upon the chair, and sat upon it whilst we were arranging the page, line, and word to be asked for. This point Mr. Templeton and I decided by each taking a few crayons and pencils from the table by chance, and counting them; Mr. Templeton had possessed himself of eighteen pieces of crayon, and I had seized nine pieces of pencil, we found on counting them. We therefore decided that the 'controls' should be asked to write the *last word of line 18 on page 9* of the book. This article I now produced, and laid it upon one of my slates, and Mr. Eglinton held the two close beneath the underneath of the table—the book, of course, being held firmly closed between the table and the slate. We then commenced conversing; in the midst of Mr. Eglinton's own remarks the writing was heard to

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes too hurried, as in the case cited by Professor Carvill Lewis, when the spirits after Mr. Eglinton's return from one of these brief absences gave *Albumina* (instead of Alumina), as one of the constituents of the mineral Idocrase (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 355).

commence. For about twenty-five seconds he was talking, and the writing continued a few more seconds before the three taps came indicating its conclusion. The message we found was as follows: 'This is a Hungarian book of poems. The last word of page 18 (page 9, line 18) is bunhoseded.'

"After we had observed that a mistake in the figures had been corrected in parenthesis, I opened the book at page 9, and we found that the last word on line 18 of that page was 'bunhoseded.'"

The word, it will be seen, was accurately given with the exception of the transposition of two letters; and we are almost inclined to agree with Mr. Smith's comment:—

"As a test experiment I think this may be regarded as a very successful and crucial one; for it is difficult to believe that Mr. Eglinton can have committed to memory the exact position of every word in every book on his bookshelves—containing some two hundred books, or more."

We are so inclined, that is, until we have read Mr. Templeton's version of the same incident:—

"Next, the final and most crucial test was proposed by Mr. Eglinton. It had been suggested to his own mind by a former test of my own, in which I had wished to preclude all possibility of any explanation such as thought-transference. We arranged that Mr. Smith should turn to the bookshelves behind him, choose a book at random, in which we could fix upon a certain word in a certain line of a given page—which word was to be written for us. On taking a book, Mr. Smith asked Mr. Eglinton if he knew what it was. Mr. Eglinton answered 'Yes,' and that as it was a rather trashy novel, it might be better to choose another. Mr. Smith then took a small red-covered book from the opposite shelf, and this Mr. Eglinton said he did not recognise. As the theory of the medium's mesmeric influence over the sitters had been more than once put before me as a not impossible explanation, I suggested we should fix the line by the number of crayons in a box before us, which gave us the eighteenth line; and in a similar way, from a separate heap of slate pencils, we obtained the number 9 for page. The last word in the line was chosen."

From Mr. Templeton's version it would appear (1) that the test was proposed by Eglinton himself; (2) that the book was not chosen entirely "at haphazard"; (3) that the line and page were determined, not by taking at random a handful of pencils and crayons from larger heaps, but by taking the actual totals of those articles present on the table. From Mr. Smith's account taken alone it would have appeared that

the success of the experiment depended on Eglinton's being able to open and read the book, and afterwards write down the word selected, whilst the book was actually being held under the table. That Eglinton did occasionally perform this trick—a favourite one at his séances—in this manner appears from the account by Professor Carvill Lewis, already referred to. But from Mr. Templeton's version it would seem at least equally probable that on this occasion the slate was prepared beforehand; that Mr. Smith's hand was guided to the red-covered book of his second choice by direction which he could not see;<sup>1</sup> and that the seeming chance-medley of pencils and crayons co-operated to the same predestined end.<sup>2</sup>

The effect produced by Dr. Hodgson's analysis was limited, however, by two considerations. In the first place, the amount of material for analysis was comparatively small. To reach its highest effectiveness the method required two independent accounts of the same séance, written by persons whose powers of observation varied. There can unfortunately be little doubt that with most of Eglinton's sitters the powers of observation showed similar deficiencies, not necessarily to a like degree, but certainly in the same particulars. Probably every conjurer's success depends on his ability to induce most persons on most occasions to overlook or forget the crucial incidents of the performance. It is matter for congratulation that even under such conditions Dr. Hodgson was able to demonstrate such numerous and important discrepancies. Again, it was open to those Spiritualists who championed the genuineness of the phenomena to claim that their own observations were free from these evidential defects, and that in any case the mere demonstration of minor discrepancies in the accounts given by some observers was not sufficient to prove that the results were in all cases due to trickery.

But if by means of pure legerdemain slate-writing and all the other phenomena of Eglinton's séances could be successfully produced, and produced under the same conditions, the proof of fraud might be held complete. Such proof had, indeed, been furnished in America some years previously by

<sup>1</sup> In *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 268-70, Dr. Hodgson describes the methods actually employed by Mr. Davey in "forcing" a book on the sitter for the purpose of this trick.

<sup>2</sup> I should perhaps state that I have known Mr. Smith for many years; that antecedently to this exhibition I should have described him as possessing powers of observation decidedly superior to those possessed by the average attendant at Spiritualistic séances, and that I am of the same opinion still.

Mr. J. W. Truesdell, as described in his *Bottom Facts of Spiritualism*.<sup>1</sup> At a séance with Slade Mr. Truesdell had detected the medium's foot in simulating the touch of a spirit hand; he had also discovered, before the séance began, a slate with a prepared message; had stealthily added another message of his own—"Henry, look out for this fellow; he is up to snuff.—Alcinda" (Alcinda being the name of Slade's "spirit wife"); and had enjoyed Slade's discomfiture when, at the appropriate moment of the séance, the unrehearsed message came to light. Thereafter Truesdell had given sittings on his own account; had written messages on the sitter's own slate in the full light, the messages being written in the handwriting of deceased friends and reproducing facts buried in the sitter's consciousness. How those marvels were accomplished Truesdell tells us in his book.

Amongst those who had been most impressed by Eglinton's performances was an associate of the S.P.R., the late Mr. S. J. Davey, to whose reports of his early séances with that medium reference has already been made. Davey soon, however, noticed suspicious movements on the medium's part, found out that he was being tricked, and thereafter, with practice, succeeded in imitating the slate-writing performance. Realising the importance of systematic experiment on the subject, Davey placed himself in the hands of the Society, and with Dr. Hodgson as "manager," came out as a quasi-professional conjurer, adopting an assumed name.<sup>2</sup> Davey worked, indeed, under one great disadvantage as compared with Eglinton. Probably nearly all those who gave testimony in favour of the medium had gone to the séance with some expectation that they might witness a genuine display of occult powers. "Professor Hoffmann," we have seen, half believed in the occult powers even after a course of twelve séances. Now an expectation of this kind, even if present only in a comparatively faint degree, unquestionably tells in favour of the performer. It was found impossible, without actual false statements, or an appeal to the emotions which would have been hardly less repulsive, to maintain any such mystical atmosphere about Mr. Davey. It is therefore probable that those who attended his performances were in a more critical mood than most of Eglinton's clients. In some cases they were definitely told beforehand that they were to witness simply a conjuring

<sup>1</sup> New York, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Davey's performance was, of course, entirely gratuitous; he received no money either from the Society or from his "sitters."

display; this was the case in the one séance with Davey which I personally attended. He came to my rooms one evening in the summer of 1886 and offered to give a séance, not to me—believing, though, I am satisfied, without justification, that I should detect the *modus operandi*—but to my brother. Mr. A. Podmore understood that he was merely to see some conjuring. This is his account of the matter, not written, unfortunately, until a few weeks after the incident:—

“July, 1886.

“A few weeks ago Mr. D. gave me a séance, and, to the best of my recollection, the following was the result. Mr. D. gave me an ordinary school slate, which I held at one end, he at the other, with our left hands; he then produced a double slate, hinged and locked. Without removing my left hand, I unlocked the slate, and at Mr. D's direction placed three small pieces of chalk—red, green, and grey—inside. I then relocked the slate, placed the key in my pocket, and the slate on the table in such a position that I could easily watch both the slate in my left hand and the other on the table. After some few minutes, during which, to the best of my belief, I was attentively regarding *both* slates, Mr. D. whisked the first away, and showed me on the reverse a message written to myself. Almost immediately afterwards he asked me to unlock the second slate, and on doing so I found to my intense astonishment another message written on both the insides of the slate—the lines in alternate colours and the chalks apparently much worn by usage.

“My brother tells me that there was an interval of some two or three minutes, during which my attention was called away, but I can only believe it on his word. AUSTIN PODMORE.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Davey allowed me to see exactly what was done, and this is what I saw. The “almost immediately” in the above account covered an interval of some minutes. During this interval, and, indeed, throughout the séance, Davey kept up a constant stream of chatter, on matters more or less germane to the business in hand. Mr. A. Podmore, absorbed by the conjurer's patter, fixed his eyes on Davey's face, and the latter took advantage of the opportunity to remove the locked slate under cover of a duster from under my brother's nose to the far end of the room, and there exchange it for a similar slate, with a previously prepared message, which was then placed by means of the same manœuvre with the duster in the position originally occupied by the first slate. Then,

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 416.

and only then, the stream of talk slackened, and Mr. A. Podmore's attention became concentrated upon the slate, from which the sound of spirit-writing was now heard to proceed.<sup>1</sup> To me the most surprising thing in the whole episode was Mr. A. Podmore's incredulity when told that his attention had been diverted from the slate for an appreciable period.

Of many similar records one more may perhaps be quoted. The following account is selected, not because the experiment was unusually successful, since Davey at many of his sésances carried out the "test" of reproducing a passage from a book selected by the sitter, but because the sitter, Mr. J. M. Dodds, was of all Mr. Davey's sitters perhaps the most acute and the most sceptical.

Mr. Dodds writes that after some preliminary experiments he was invited to choose mentally from the books lining the room (about a thousand in number) "any one with a clear title," to select a page and line by means of two random handfuls of slate-pencil, and then to wait whilst the pencil between the locked slates wrote the line indicated. Mr. Dodds explains that he did not touch the book mentally chosen, and was careful to give no indication of his choice. Nothing happened for some time. Then, he continues:—

"After a short rest it was suggested that I should name the book, and that the experiment should be resumed in a modified form. The problem was now: Given a certain book, viz. *Taine on Intelligence*, required to be written in a blank, locked slate, lying under our hands, a quotation unknown to anyone present, taken from a page and line known only to myself. The book, of course, remained untouched on the shelf. We sat as before, with the slate under our hands and eyes. I concentrated my thoughts. Mr. Davey soon appeared to reach a high pitch of exaltation; his arms and body became subject to a violent *frissonnement*. He again appealed to his ghostly helpers, and on this occasion his efforts were rewarded, for, in a few minutes, to my utter amazement—Mr. Davey's hands and your own<sup>2</sup> being well in sight and unemployed—I heard sounds of writing within the slate, which continued for half a minute or more. On unlocking the slate I found, legibly written, a quota-

<sup>1</sup> One of the most successful devices of the medium to divert attention from his *modus operandi* is the imitation of the sound of writing. The real writing was, it need hardly be said, alike by the medium and the pseudo-medium, either prepared beforehand or produced noiselessly at a moment when the sitter's attention was given to other matters. The "sound of writing," on which the Spiritualist writers lay so much stress, never probably coincided with the actual writing: it generally took place after the whole trick was safely accomplished. But it served its purpose.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* Dr. Hodgson's, to whom the account was furnished.

tion, almost, but not quite, verbally correct, from page 15 of Taine's book, beginning at the eighth line. Some "clear-obscure" remarks, which I at once interpreted as relating to a friend of mine, followed.

"I had thought of the eighth line of the twenty-eighth page. The correspondence was, therefore, not exact, the line only being correct. What struck me, however, was not the coincidence of the quotation, nor the gibberish about my friend, which hinted information easily ascertainable by anyone who, like Mr. Davey, had met him—it was the occurrence of what the evidence of my senses told me was writing by a piece of inanimate pencil inside a locked slate, with no conceivable means of explanation! For a moment I confess I was completely staggered; my notions of causation were turned topsyturvy; visions of 'magnetic force' and 'occult action' danced before my brain."<sup>1</sup>

In this case, of course, the writing on the slate had been prepared beforehand, and the book was "forced" on Mr. Dodds. I have watched Mr. Davey arrange the books in a bookshelf of my own in order to "force" some particular volume upon the sitter. If the conjurer is allowed—as we have already seen the spirit medium is allowed—a certain liberty in rejecting unsuitable books, the "forcing" of a book under such conditions is a feat which presents a fair chance of success, and which, of course, when successful, creates a profound impression.

Space will not, unfortunately, permit of further descriptions of Mr. Davey's marvels. The events of some twenty sittings, attested in many cases by more than one witness, are given at length in the *Proceedings S. P. R.*<sup>2</sup> It is enough to say that by the general testimony of those who witnessed his performances he rivalled, if he did not actually surpass, the most astonishing feats recorded of Slade, Eglinton, and all their tribe. He habitually produced "spirit" writing on the sitter's own slate; he wrote messages in double slates securely screwed together and sealed; in locked slates of which the sitter held the key; on slates brought to the séance carefully wrapped in brown paper and tied with string, the fastenings remaining apparently intact at the end of the experiment; he wrote messages in colours—green, blue, red, or white—chosen beforehand by the sitter; he wrote long answers on subjects selected by the sitter; passages from books taken by the sitter from the shelves, sometimes giving even the correct line and page. He wrote in German and Spanish for students of those languages; he gave an Oriental sitter

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 460.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. iv. pp. 416-87.

the Persian spelling of his own name; he exhibited a long message in Japanese for a Japanese marquis. He wrote down numbers in response to the sitter's mental request; and gave details of private family history. He made a tumbler walk across the table under the full glare of the gas; and small pieces of chalk to move of themselves and describe geometrical figures at the unexpressed wish of the investigator. At his dark séances musical boxes floated round the room, raps were heard, cold hands felt; the figures of a woman and a bearded man in a turban mysteriously appeared and saluted the company. And of none of these marvels could the witnesses find any plausible explanation, so much so that more than one found himself forced to invoke the mysterious agency of magnetism, electricity, or pneumatics.

For Mr. Davey enjoyed to the full that immunity from exposure which is claimed by Spiritualists, and regarded even by some conjurers, as evidence for the exercise by mediums of supernormal powers.<sup>1</sup> Davey, with one doubtful exception, was never detected in trickery by any of his sitters.<sup>2</sup> But, in fact, as he himself pointed out,<sup>3</sup> and as we have already seen in the case of Professor Lankester's attempted exposure of Slade, it is by no means easy to convict a slate-writing medium of trickery. If he dreads the acumen of his sitter, he can always give a blank séance, a privilege of which Eglinton freely availed himself in his sittings with many members of the S.P.R. And these same blank sittings, it should be noted, were often quoted in Eglinton's favour by his admirers, on the assumption that a conjurer could not venture to fail. Even if the medium entertains an expert unawares, the expert will find it difficult—at the first sitting, at any rate—to do more than conjecture how the thing is done. The discovery of a prematurely written message can always be passed off as a communication produced noiselessly by the spirits without the knowledge of medium or sitter. Even if the medium is seen writing and caught, as Slade was, with the message half finished, the proof is not of an overwhelming kind, and, as we have already seen, carries conviction only to those open to be convinced. For there is no permanent evidence of guilt, as in the materialisation fraud; the supreme excellence of slate-writing, from the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the remark already quoted from Professor Hoffmann's report.

<sup>2</sup> The exception referred to—the premature discovery of a slate with a written message—will be found at the end of Mr. Dodds' report. But even here, as Dr. Hodgson points out (*Proc.*, vol. iv. p. 493), a professional medium would probably have found it not difficult to satisfy his sitters that the writing was a genuine spirit production.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 410.

medium's standpoint, is that at its best it requires little trick apparatus, and that little of simple character and trifling bulk. The medium has little to fear, because he has little to conceal.<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly necessary to point the obvious moral. In the last chapter we learnt something of the treachery that lies in the dark séance, and the blind guidance of the sense of touch. From the present study we may gather indications of the less obvious and to many persons still incredible shortcomings of the most trusted and least untrustworthy of our senses. The untrained eye is no match for the trained hand of the conjurer. The kind of observation demanded of the investigators at a spiritualistic séance—an observation which is alive to the various artifices employed to distract it, and which, if not actually unremitting, is at least aware of its own lapses—is a quality not called for and not exercised in the investigations of the physical laboratory, and not to be acquired, even to a moderate extent, except by education of a very special kind. As we have seen, even professional

<sup>1</sup> A full description of the methods employed by Mr. Davey will be found in the notes contributed by himself and Dr. Hodgson to the reports of séances given in *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv., and in the article by Dr. Hodgson, "Mr. Davey's Imitation by Conjuring of Phenomena sometimes attributed to Spirit Agency" (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 253-310). Most of Mr. Davey's slate-writing was produced in one or other of two ways. Either (1), as in the two cases cited in the text, he substituted a slate with a message already written for the slate which the sitter had carefully cleaned and believed himself to have guarded intact. This was the method commonly employed for the production of long messages of a general character. Or (2) he would write noiselessly on the under side of a slate whilst it was actually being held under the table by the hands of the sitter and himself. In the latter case the writing would be produced by means of a fragment of pencil, fixed in a thimble, which he had slipped, unobserved, on one of his fingers. When the writing was completed an opportunity would be found for reversing the slate and bringing the written side uppermost. This naturally was the method used for producing relevant answers to the questions asked by the sitters. Mr. Davey rarely used trick slates, preferring to trust for his effects to sleight of hand. From Dr. Hodgson's analysis it would seem probable that the methods employed by Eglinton were closely similar to those described. But, of course, in the case of both performers the actual procedure was necessarily varied to meet the requirements of the moment, and Davey was specially skilful in taking advantage of any unsought opportunities which offered themselves.

Professional slate-writers, especially in America, whose sitters are for the most part less critical than those who attended Davey's séances, employ numerous devices: trick slates with loose flaps; removable coverings of slate-coloured silk; locked slates with sliding hinges; revolving surfaces covered with slate-coloured silicate paint; mirrors; trick tables; trap-doors in floor, table, door, etc., etc. Sympathetic inks may also be used to produce the writing. The best description of the various tricks employed by professional slate-writers will be found in a recent book, *Spirit Slate-writing and Kindred Phenomena*, by W. E. Robinson (New York and London, 1899). See also the *Seybert Report*, and an article in the *Journal S. P. R.* for January, 1901, by the Rev. Stanley Krebs, describing some slate-writing séances with the Bangs sisters in Chicago.

conjurers may prove deficient in this special qualification. The labours of Mr. Davey and Dr. Hodgson should compel us to admit that no evidence for the so-called "physical" phenomena of Spiritualism can be regarded as satisfactory, which at any point depends upon continuous observation on the part of the investigator.

It remains to add that Mr. Davey's consummate art earned the last tribute that its admirers could bestow—he was claimed by Spiritualists as a renegade medium.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Unless all (Mr. Davey's performances) can be so explained, many of us will be confirmed in our belief that Mr. Davey was really a medium as well as a conjurer, and that in imputing all his performances to 'trick' he was deceiving the Society and the public."—Letter from Dr. A. R. Wallace, F.R.S., printed in the *Journal S. P. R.*, March, 1891.

## CHAPTER III

### DANIEL DUNGLAS HOME

WE have seen in the last chapter how a juggler, aided by the mystery which surrounds a medium, and knowing how to take advantage of the infirmities to which human observation and testimony are liable, could mislead even experts into the belief that his tricks were due to powers beyond those of ordinary humanity. Now we have no reason to credit Eglinton with any peculiar aptitude for the profession which he had chosen. Such eminence as he attained seems to have been due as much to good fortune as to any special skill or astuteness of his own. He was, in fact, an impostor of a sufficiently commonplace type. We have now to consider a medium of another kind. Charlatan and adventurer, helpless sport of superhuman forces, or chosen emissary of the spirit-world, commonplace is the last epithet that could justly be applied to Daniel Dunglas Home. Whatever the explanation of the feats ascribed to him—and they are more varied, more striking, and better attested than any others in the history of the marvellous—it does not lie on the surface. In Home and in his doings all the problems of Spiritualism are posed in their acutest form; with the marvels wrought by or through him the main defences of Spiritualism must stand or fall.

Daniel Dunglas Home, or Hume, was, by his own account, born near Edinburgh in 1833.<sup>1</sup> Neither in his original auto-

<sup>1</sup> The materials for an account of Home's life and mediumship are extremely abundant. There are, in the first place, his own writings, of which the chief are the two volumes of *Incidents in My Life* (First Series, 1863; Second Series, 1872) and the *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, 1877. There are two works by Madame Home (the second wife), *D. D. Home; his Life and Mission*, 1888, and *The Gift of D. D. Home*, 1890.

Of other documents, the most important are *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, by W. Crookes, F.R.S., 1874 (a reprint of various articles which had appeared in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*), and *Notes of Séances with D. D. Home*, by the same author, published in the *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. vi. pp. 98-127; a privately circulated volume entitled *Experiences in Spiritualism*,

biography nor in the two biographical accounts written by his second wife is there any express mention of his father, and this omission, coupled with his own statement that he was adopted at an early age by his mother's sister, affords strong confirmation of the rumour that his birth was illegitimate.<sup>1</sup>

When Home was nine years old he appears to have been taken by his aunt to America, and to have lived with her and her husband until the end of 1850. Then the rapping epidemic which had broken out in Hydesville two years previously infected young Home, and he left his aunt's house and went out into the world. For the next five years he stayed in one household or another in New York and elsewhere, giving sances and apparently receiving hospitality and some measure of education in return. It does not appear that at this or any other period he ever accepted any definite payment in money for his services as a medium. Amongst those who attended his sances at this period were the poet

by Viscount Adare (the present Earl of Dunraven), with a preface by the late Earl, containing an account of seventy-eight sances held in the years 1867-8; the evidence included in the *Dialectical Society's Report*; the affidavits given at the trial *Lyon v. Home* in 1868; *Evenings with Mr. Home and the Spirits*, by Dr. J. G. Wilkinson, 1855; *Spirit Manifestations*, by J. Snaith Rymer, 1857; *Spiritualism: a Narrative with a Discussion*, by Patrick Proctor Alexander, Edinburgh, 1871; the correspondence in the *Morning Advertiser* (London) in October and November, 1855; and numerous articles in the *Spiritualist Press*, especially the *Spiritual Telegraph* (New York); the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* (Keighley), 1855-7; the *Spiritual Herald* (London), 1856; the *Spiritual Magazine*, 1860 and onwards; and *Human Nature*, 1867 and onwards. There are also references to Home in Hare's book on *The Spirit Manifestations*, New York, 1855; Cox's *The Mechanism of Man*, London, 1876; in Spicer's *Sights and Sounds*, 1853; and in many other works on Spiritualism. The *Journal* of the Society for Psychical Research for July, 1889, and May, 1890, contains some valuable additional evidence collected by the late F. W. H. Myers. Further, Mr. Myers was allowed by Madame Home to inspect the original letters and documents which are quoted in that lady's *Life* of her husband, and was able to satisfy himself, by his knowledge of the writing in some cases, and by other indications, that the letters are genuine and that they are accurately reproduced in the book.

Some of the facts given in the text as to Home's personal characteristics and manner of life are derived from information supplied to me by persons who had known him. Of these I desire especially to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Ion Perdicaris, who was kind enough to give me orally copious details of his own association with Home, and subsequently to correct and supplement my memoranda of our conversation. No one living is probably better qualified to speak with authority on Home's early life; Mr. Ogden and Professor Bush, who experimented with Home in New York prior to his departure for England in 1855, were friends of Mr. Perdicaris' family. He was also intimately acquainted with Home and with many of Home's circle of friends in this country, and for some years even undertook the expense of educating Home's young son.

<sup>1</sup> In a footnote to the *Incidents* (Second Series, p. 48), Home states that his father was a natural son of Alexander tenth Earl of Home. No proof is offered of this statement.

Bryant, Ward Cheney, Bishop Clark of Rhode Island, Rufus Elmer, S. B. Brittan (editor of the *Shekinah* and the *New York Spiritual Telegraph*), Judge Edmonds, Professor Bush, Mr. Ogden, and Mr. J. W. Carrington. The three gentlemen last named were in 1855 members of a small committee who subscribed a sum of money to send Home over to Europe, partly for the benefit of his health, partly, it would seem, as a missionary of Spiritualism.

Home arrived in England in the spring of 1855 and went to stay at Cox's Hotel in Jermyn Street, having brought introductions to the proprietor, a man of scientific tastes, from his friends in New York. He spent the spring and summer of this year as a guest, now of Mr. Cox, now of Mr. J. S. Rymer, a solicitor, at his house at Ealing, and gave numerous séances, Lord Brougham, Sir D. Brewster, Robert Owen, T. A. Trollope, Sir E. Bulwer Lytton, Dr. J. Garth Wilkinson and others being amongst the privileged witnesses.

In the autumn of this year he went to Italy, and spent the next few years on the Continent, quartered apparently for the whole period on various friends, mostly persons of rank and wealth, and repaying the hospitality which he received by the exercise of his marvellous powers. He was summoned during this period on several occasions to the Tuileries, to hold sittings with the Emperor and Empress; he also performed before the Czar of Russia and many other royal and noble personages. In the autumn of 1859 he returned to this country, bringing with him a young and charming wife, the daughter of a noble Russian family, and possessed of a moderate fortune. An account of his mediumship at this period will be found in the article written by Robert Bell, which appeared in the *Cornhill* in August, 1860.<sup>1</sup> For the next ten or twelve years Home seems to have resided chiefly in London, with intervals more or less prolonged spent upon the Continent. In 1862 his wife died; and Home, who appears to have been left in somewhat straitened circumstances, was forced to eke out his means by giving public lectures and recitations. In 1866 a new society, the "Spiritual Athenæum," was founded by his numerous friends, mainly in order to give Home, as salaried secretary, a fixed position and a livelihood. In the autumn of the same year he made the acquaintance of a wealthy and childless widow, Mrs. Lyon. Mrs. Lyon professed her desire to adopt Home, and presented him "as a free gift" with a sum of £24,000, following this up with still further

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 48-50.

benefactions. Home in return took the name of Home-Lyon. In the course of a few months Mrs. Lyon changed her mind, and desired to revoke her gifts. The matter came into court in April, 1868, the case being noteworthy from the Spiritualist standpoint because of the large number of affidavits filed by persons of distinction testifying to the reality of Home's power. No definite charge of fraud or illicit influence was proved against Home: but the court was not satisfied that Mrs. Lyon's gifts were "acts of pure volition uninfluenced," and judgment was given in her favour.<sup>1</sup>

In the years 1870-2 Home gave a long series of sittings to Mr. (now Sir William) Crookes. In the autumn of 1871 he had married for the second time, his wife being again a Russian lady possessed of some fortune. Shortly after this event Home seems to have broken with nearly all his friends in this country, and to have exercised his mediumship more and more rarely. He spent the rest of his life mostly on the Continent, and died after a long and painful illness in June, 1886, the immediate cause of death being pneumonia.

This brief sketch of Home's career, founded as it is, as regards the earlier years, mainly on material written or inspired by Home himself, needs a critical supplement. It seems certain that Home began life in extreme poverty, and probably as an illegitimate child. From the age of seventeen onwards he lived by the exercise of his mediumship, none the less if he never actually received payment in cash down. Throughout his life, first in the Eastern States of America and later in every country of Europe, he found wealthy patrons to welcome him to their homes, and lavish their hospitality on him. Such formal education as he received in his youth was paid for by the New York committee to which I have alluded. When Home was not actually a guest in their houses, his patrons, in one way or other—by taking tickets for his lectures, by commissioning busts from him, by subscribing to pay his debts, by making him presents of costly jewellery—managed to provide for his wants. Mr. Perdicaris for some years undertook the charge of educating his only son. Home thus lived not merely in comfort, but—a thing which to a man of his temperament was probably not less an object of desire—he lived in what is commonly called the "best" society, the society of persons of rank, wealth, and fashion, and occasionally of intellectual distinction.

<sup>1</sup> See the analysis of the proceedings by Mr. H. Arthur Smith, author of *Principles of Equity*, in the *Journal S. P. R.* for July, 1889.

It is to be noted that when Home first came to England he changed his name. Prior to that period it had been spelt Hume. Possibly the explanation of the change may be found in the claim already referred to, of kinship with the Earl of Home.<sup>1</sup>

Two other curious features in Home's career should be recorded as having some possible significance in their bearing on his character. Early in February, 1856, according to his own account, after due warning from his spirit guides, Home's mediumistic powers left him. Shortly afterwards he was received into the Church of Rome. He had an audience with the Pope, and was even at one time, as Madame Home tells us, on the point of joining a monastic order. He drew back, however, and in February of the following year, being then at Paris, he resumed his mediumistic performance, on the occasion of an invitation from the Tuileries.<sup>2</sup>

In December, 1855, shortly before the intermission of his powers, Home, returning at night through the streets of Florence, reported himself to have been attacked by a man who struck at him with a dagger, and succeeded only in inflicting a slight flesh wound.<sup>3</sup> Thirteen years later, at the time of the trial *Lyon v. Home*, the drama was repeated, but on a stage, it must be admitted, less happily chosen. The midnight assassin and the murderous stiletto may pass for topical melodrama in Italy, but they degenerate into farce when the theatre is Jermyn Street. Home, it remains to be said, in London as in Florence, was unaccompanied at the time of the outrage: the wound was on each occasion happily trivial, and the perpetrator was never discovered.<sup>4</sup>

In person Home is described as having been slight, fair, and, without being actually handsome, attractive and even distinguished-looking. A portrait of him is prefixed to the *Life* by Madame Home, and there is a threequarter-length

<sup>1</sup> Madame Home (*Life*, p. 31) states that the supposed change of name was a misconception; that Home himself had always spelt the name with an *o*, and that the spelling *Hume* was due to the ignorance of American journalists, who were misled by the sound ("Home" was pronounced *Hoom*). But it is difficult to reconcile this explanation with the fact that the name is spelt *Hume* in every document printed, whether in America or England, before 1855, and in many belonging to that year, even in the signature of the medium's own letters to newspapers. See e.g. the letter to the *Harisford Times*, reprinted in the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* for October, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Mission*, pp. 67-70.

<sup>3</sup> *Incidents* (First Series), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Mission*, p. 269. In recent times defaulting bank managers, occasional mail-cart drivers, and at least one lady of quality, have reported themselves as victims of outrages curiously similar. Shelley, it will be remembered, appears on one occasion to have had an hallucinatory experience of the kind.

oil painting in the rooms of the Spiritual Alliance. Here is a pen portrait of him by one of his earliest American friends, a Miss Ely, extracted from a contemporary letter written to her cousin: "He is but seventeen years old, tall for his age, fair complexion, hair neither red, brown, nor auburn, but a complete mixture of the three—like a three-coloured changeable silk—rather inclining to curl: and beautiful hair it is, as you can imagine: a large, broad forehead, well-developed, lively grey eyes, nose not remarkable, and a handsome mouth and teeth; easy manners; very intelligent for his age; perfectly artless and very affectionate."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Perdicaris described him to me as "not good-looking, though his face was as a rule pleasant to look upon; very vain of his personal appearance, with a quite innocent and not unpleasing vanity. Always pleasing manners, very affectionate towards all—men, women, and children alike."

Other testimonies which I have received orally from persons still living, or which are to be found scattered through the literature of Spiritualism, confirm generally this view of his character. There can be no doubt that he produced on most persons the impression of a highly emotional, joyous, childlike nature, full of generous impulses, and lavish of affection to all comers. That he possessed in full measure the defects of his temperament there can be as little doubt; affections so lightly given were liable to be as lightly recalled: vanity seems to have been the permanent element in his character; he basked in admiration; for the rest he showed throughout a disposition to take life easily, and to look out, in the American phrase, for "soft jobs." In short, as Mr. Andrew Lang has somewhere described him, "a Harold Skimpole with the gift of divination." The malignant side of his nature showed but rarely, and then chiefly in his attitude towards rival mediums. But it flashed out when his vanity was injured; and after his second marriage he treated many of his old friends with indifference, and some with marked ingratitude.<sup>2</sup>

Amongst Home's social accomplishments it must be mentioned that he was a good performer on the piano; and that his recitations, whether in the drawing-room or on the platform, are said by competent judges to have been dis-

<sup>1</sup> *The Gift of D. D. Home*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> The most careful and dispassionate account of Home's character which I have seen is contained in a letter from Miss Louise Kennedy—a lady who only knew him in his later years—written in July, 1891, to Mr. Lang, which appeared in the *Journal of the S. P. R.*, Jan., 1894.

tinguished by brilliant dramatic faculty and power of emotional expression. Even on those who were brought only into momentary contact with him he produced commonly the impression of frankness and sincerity:<sup>1</sup> in those who stood in more frequent and intimate relations with him the confidence which he inspired seems to have been unlimited. The belief in the honesty of the performer became for them hardly less instinctive than the belief in the trustworthiness of the senses which took note of the performance. The trust upon which other mediums relied was built up mainly by adventitious devices; with Home it was inspired and maintained by the charm of his personality.

But there were two other causes which contributed in no small degree to the confidence felt in Home's integrity. Home himself professed a fervent belief in his own mission as a teacher of the truth of immortality;<sup>2</sup> and in his trances habitually delivered discourses on religious themes. The late Lord Dunraven, in the preface to his son's series of letters on Home's mediumship, writes of the "high and pure morality" inculcated at Home's séances, and describes some of the trance utterances as "very touching and beautiful. A pure, lofty, and religious tone more or less pervades them." Other witnesses have written to the same effect.<sup>3</sup>

Again, the impression produced by Home's trance sermons was heightened by the frequent delivery of clairvoyant

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the testimony of Robert Bell, in the *Cornhill* article already referred to; Mr. P. P. Alexander (*Spiritualism, a narrative with a discussion*, p. 2). "The impression he made on me was, on the whole, favourable. . . . His manners were simple and quiet, and very much those of a gentleman." Subcommittee No. 5 of the Dialectical Society, which included Dr. Edmunds and Mr. C. Bradlaugh, had four sittings with Home. The sittings were fruitless, but the committee reported that "Mr. Home afforded every facility for examination, and appeared to be anxious to further the objects which the committee had in view" (*Dialectical Report*, p. 49). Mr. Bradlaugh gave independent testimony to the same effect (*Ibid.*, p. 279). On the other hand, Hamilton Aidé (*Nineteenth Century*, April, 1890, article "Was I Hypnotised?") could find "no glamour of esoteric power," nor "subtle fascination" about Home; and thought him "entirely unimpressive in any way."

<sup>2</sup> Thus, in speaking of the effect produced on T. A. Trollope by a séance at Ealing, Home writes: "When at length the light did beam upon his soul, and the chords of his spirit vibrated in unison with the celestial harmonies that ushered in the birth of faith through the shadows of his old unbelief, the result was too much for his stoicism, and the tears of holy joy coursed down his manly cheeks. . . . It was an impressive scene, and an occasion of deep interest. There are many such in the life of a spirit medium." (Letter from D. D. Home to the *Hartford Times* (U.S.A.), quoted in the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, Oct., 1855).

<sup>3</sup> See also Home's own writings, e.g. the article in the *Spiritual Magazine* for February, 1860, comparing the rise of Spiritualism to that of Christianity; and the chapters on the "Higher Aspects of Spiritualism," in his book *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*.

messages, purporting to proceed from dead friends of one or other of those present, and often showing an intimate knowledge of the past history of the persons addressed. Amongst the English and American witnesses who have testified to receiving messages of this kind which gave details of a private nature, presumably unknown to the medium, are S. B. Brittan, Ward Cheney, Dr. Garth Wilkinson, Dr. Gully, Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, Mrs. Nassau Senior, Mr. P. P. Alexander, Mr. J. S. Rymer, the present Earl of Dunraven, Dr. Hawksley, and others. Mr. Perdicaris has furnished me with two or three additional instances in his own experience of a very remarkable character. I have not space to consider the evidence for this clairvoyance, nor the possibilities of the information having been obtained by normal means. The whole subject of these alleged communications from the dead will be dealt with in a later chapter. The evidence, at any rate, in the case of Home, is far less complete than in the case of the later medium, Mrs. Piper, or than the evidence already considered in the chapter on Cahagnet's somnambules.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps sufficient, however, to raise a presumption of Home's possession of supernatural powers. But our concern here is primarily not with the authenticity of these communications, but with the undoubted effect produced by them at the time in predisposing those present to accept Home's physical manifestations as genuine.<sup>2</sup>

Before we proceed to consider the physical manifestations one preliminary remark needs to be made. Home was never publicly exposed as an impostor; there is no evidence of any weight that he was even privately detected in trickery.<sup>3</sup> On

<sup>1</sup> Book I. chap. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Many of these trance communications are quoted at length in Madame Home's biographical notices of the medium. But the more important were published at the time, in the Spiritualist periodicals, especially, in this country, the *Spiritual Magazine*, and the various works of Alexander, Wilkinson, Rymer, etc., already referred to.

<sup>3</sup> The late F. W. H. Myers (*Journal S. P. R.*, July, 1889) has carefully examined this question. Mr. Browning personally explained to Mr. Myers that he had never detected Home cheating, and that the only definite evidence which he could show for his opinion that Home was an impostor was based upon a second-hand rumour that Home was once caught in Italy experimenting with phosphorus. No testimony has ever been adduced which even remotely approached first-hand for the alleged exposure at the Tuileries.

Mr. Myers also prints a letter from a gentleman known to him, written in 1889, in which the writer relates that at a séance held in 1855 he saw plainly that the alleged "spirit hands" were supported by and in obvious connection with Home's arms. The matter was not, however, mentioned at the time, and rests now on the unsupported memory of events which took place thirty-four years before the account was written (*Journal S. P. R.*, July, 1889, p. 121).

the assumption—an assumption which the whole course of our inquiries up to this point compels us to make—that the alleged physical marvels were fraudulent, this unique immunity from the common lot of mediumship certainly calls for explanation. Mainly, no doubt, it was due to Home's peculiar position as a non-professional medium; to the fact that his sitters were, in a sense, his guests; and that he himself in effect selected those before whom he would consent to perform. Again, we cannot exclude the possibility that there were cases in which imposture was actually detected by persons who refrained, out of consideration for the feelings of their friends, or from the fear of ridicule, from making their discovery public. But whatever deductions are made on this score, Home's immunity is not the least remarkable feature of his career, and may no doubt fairly be considered as weakening to some extent the general assumption referred to.

But though more fortunate, or haply more deserving, than his fellows, it is important to note that none of Home's manifestations seem to have been peculiar to himself. At the outset of his career, indeed, he appears to have won no special distinction as a medium. Raps were heard at his séances; tables and chairs were moved about; the room was shaken, bells, accordions, and guitars were played under the table or even at a distance from the circle, with no hand near them; spirit voices would speak through the medium; spirit hands were felt under the tablecloth, and occasionally seen above it; spirit lights made themselves visible; and the medium himself would be levitated. But all these performances were the common property of the guild; the Fox girls, Gordon, Cooley, E. P. Fowler, Abby Warner, and even Willis, the Harvard divinity student, were Home's rivals, and apparently, in the estimation of his contemporaries, at least his equals in all these feats. It is noteworthy that Home appears to have attracted comparatively little attention in the American Press before his journey to England.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are, however, a few notices in the New York papers before 1855, some of which are quoted in the *Incidents*. See especially the account of a séance from the *Shekinah*, New York, vol. i. p. 289, quoted in the *Incidents* (First Series), p. 24. See also *Telegraph Papers*, vol. iii. pp. 211, 212; vol. vii. pp. 182, 261, 287; vol. viii. p. 293. That Home's séances attracted less attention than those of Gordon, the Foxes, or the Koons family was no doubt largely due to the fact that his performances were never given in public or to promiscuous circles. It should be noted, as bearing upon Home's relations to other mediums, that after his second visit to this country (1859-60) he associated himself for some time with another American medium, Squire, and that they even gave joint séances (see *Spiritual Magazine*, 1860, pp. 75, 88, 232, etc.). See above, pp. 51-2, for some account of Squire's mediumship.

His séances in this country followed for the most part on the lines sketched above. The room was commonly illuminated by one or more candles, a single gas-burner, or a shaded lamp, so that, in comparison with the almost complete darkness insisted on by other mediums, it could honestly be described as well lighted. The manifestations would then usually begin with raps, followed shortly by a quivering movement of the table, which is described by one witness as like the vibration in the cabin of a small steamer when the engine begins to work ;<sup>1</sup> by another as resembling "a ship in distress, with its timbers straining in a heavy sea";<sup>2</sup> and in a finer flight of imagination is characterised by another witness as "literally trembling, as if every vein of the wood was a human nerve."<sup>3</sup> The table would then tilt up, move about, or "float" suspended in the air; musical instruments would perform in the convenient obscurity afforded by its shelter; hands would be felt clasping the knees of the sitters and pulling portions of their dress; handkerchiefs, flowers, and other light articles, and even heavy bells, would be handed about the circle, under the table, by the same means. The performance would be interspersed with messages rapped out by the spirits, or delivered through the mouth of the entranced medium.

At this point the sitting would commonly terminate. But if the conditions were judged favourable to the higher manifestations, the lights would be turned out, the fire screened, and the table drawn up to the window, the company sitting round three sides, leaving the side next the window vacant, with Home sitting at one end of the vacant space. Hands would then be seen, outlined against the faint light proceeding from the window, to rise over the vacant edge of the table, move about the papers lying on its surface, or give flowers to the sitters. Afterwards the medium would be levitated. An account of a typical séance of this kind, extracted from the *Cornhill* article by Robert Bell, will be found above.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1861, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritualism*, by P. P. Alexander, p. 37. This imaginary resemblance was, as will be seen from Mr. Alexander's account, afterwards worked up into a striking test of "identity."

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1861, p. 431.

<sup>4</sup> Pages 48-50. Other instances of séances at which hands appeared under these conditions—conditions, it should be remarked, which appear always to have been punctually observed—are given in *Spiritual Magazine*, 1860, pp. 233, 266, 338, 370, 524; *Evenings with Home*, by J. G. Wilkinson; *Dialectical Report*, p. 139; *Spirit Manifestations*, by Rymer; *The Spiritual Herald*, p. 108, account of a séance by "H. C." (Mrs. Helen Clarke), etc., etc.

Now as described it must be admitted that many of the phenomena which took place at Home's séances seem inexplicable: more inexplicable than in the case of other mediums. This difference is no doubt largely due, as already indicated, to the fact that Home's manners and appearance, his aloofness from the professional medium, and the atmosphere of smart society which encompassed him, inspired a confidence which encouraged the witnesses of his marvels to "let themselves go." The discerning reader will not need to be told that Robert Bell's mood when he sat in the dark and saw the spirit hands, was not that of dispassionate observation; and that he was, alike at the time and in retrospect, incapable of distinguishing between what he saw, heard, or felt, and what he inferred from those sensations. But Robert Bell was a much better witness than most. He admits that the room was very dark, and that Home's hands were visible only as a "faint white heap"; and he did not, like many of Home's sitters, profess to recognise the spirit hands which clasped his knees, or appeared as a transitory gleam of white at the far edge of the table. Nor would he, it is likely, have regarded as a proof of spirit intervention an incident recorded at this time by Mr. Enmore Jones. At the close of a dark séance, part of a bronze idol, which had been taken to pieces by the spirits and thrown about the room, was missing, and could not, after prolonged search, be discovered. Home came to the rescue and asked the spirits to guide his hands to the hiding-place of the missing article. The request was complied with. Enmore Jones comments on the incident, "It confirmed me in the belief that our spirit friends are more keen-eyed than we, that they hear our words, and can control even our physical organism."<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, though we have abundant evidence of the intellectual condition of the witnesses, we can rarely find independent accounts given in sufficient detail to enable us to prove such errors of interpolation and transposition, etc., as Dr. Hodgson was able to point out in the accounts of Eglinton's performances. One case may, however, be quoted. The account which appears in the left-hand column below is taken from J. S. Rymer's pamphlet, *Spirit Manifestations*, published in 1857; it professes to have been based on notes taken at the time, and as it is quoted by Home,<sup>2</sup> it may be presumed to have his endorsement. The date of the sitting,

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1861, p. 480.

<sup>2</sup> *Incidents* (First Series), p. 69; see also *Gift of D. D. Home*, pp. 82, 83.

it will be seen, is not given. The account of the same sitting given in the right-hand column is by Mr. Thomas Dalling Barlee, of Ealing, and is quoted from a letter dated 23rd October, 1855, which was published in the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*.<sup>1</sup>

#### MR. RYMER'S ACCOUNT.

"One evening I found seated at my long table my wife, my second son, Mr. Home, and two friends. I was passing through my room to my chamber. I stood for a few moments at the end of the table—my attention was immediately arrested by sounds; it was stated to be my little boy, who had passed away some years ago. I asked if he recollected how pleased he was when on earth to place me a chair on my return home. The chair was immediately moved round the corner of the table, and, by no visible agency, it was placed behind me, and I sat down upon it."

\* \* \* \* \*

(Here follows half a page of argument aimed at proving that the manifestation could not have been due to deception or illusion. The account then continues as given below).

"We were told through the alphabet that my little boy was present in spirit. I had heard of spirit-writing in America. Mr. Wolf, of Athens, co. Ohio, writes: 'Writing is done without human hands; the hand of the spirit is visible while the writing is done.' I asked if the unseen boy could write as on earth; he answered that he would try. I then took from my wife's writing-desk a sheet of notepaper, clean, and without any writing on it of any description. I borrowed a pencil from a lady friend who was at the table—the table had its usual cloth; on the cloth I placed the paper and pencil; both moved as

#### MR. BARLEE'S ACCOUNT.

"At Mr. Rymer's, on the 8th May, Mrs. Barlee and I formed part of a circle of fourteen. Very soon after we had all been seated round a heavy mahogany dining-table, large enough for a party of twenty, many different kinds of raps were distinctly heard, and presently the brass fastenings which held the parts of the table together beginning to make a rattling noise, Mr. Hume exclaimed, 'The spirits are actually trying to take the brass fastenings out, and to move this heavy table,' which was really the case. For soon after, hearing the brass fastenings fall, we looked under the table, and there found two of them which had thus been taken out, and then the table began to move about.

"At the time all this was going on, the hands of Mr. Hume and all present were, as usual, laid upon the table, and I am convinced that if he or any of the party had attempted to deceive us or had tried to take out the brass fastenings, and throw them under the table, the attempt and deception must have been discovered. Soon after the brass fastenings had thus been taken out, and the table had been moved about, without any human handling, many more distinct raps were heard, and as they were known by Mr. Hume and those present to be little Watty (a son of Mr. Rymer's, who died when about thirteen years old), Mr. R. said, 'Dear little Watty knows papa is always delighted to hear his merry little raps, and does Watty think he could write some-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iii. pp. 21, 22.

if by a breath of air; the brass fastenings of my table were then displaced one by one, and fell to the ground; the table was opened or pulled out, and by no human agency; everyone in the room was seated at the table, and had their hands on its surface. I then asked if I should place the pencil and paper on the table near the opening under the cloth—three sounds (yes); I did so, and immediately the form of a small hand was seen under the cloth; it was felt by some who placed their hands upon it; the paper and pencil were then removed, the form of the hand disappearing at the same time. In a few minutes the same form of hand was again seen replacing the paper and pencil; the alphabet was called for: 'Dear papa, I have really done my very best.' I removed the paper and pencil, and on the paper was written, 'Dear papa, dear mama,' and signed 'Watt.' Watty was the name of my child. No one was aware that I intended to ask for this to be done. It was not pre-arranged even by myself; it was the thought of the moment."

thing for papa, who would so like to have some of dear Watty's writing?'—when the raps answered 'yes.'

"Mr. Rymer then put a sheet of notepaper and a pencil over the tablecloth, and presently I saw the paper and pencil begin to move without any visible handling, and soon after I saw the shadow of a finger on that part of the paper which was nearest to me, just about the time when an accordion which was on the table began to play. Some who were present saw a whole hand trying to take the pencil and paper up, but as my attention at that moment was turned to the music, I did not see the hand. Mr. Hume then said, 'As the spirits seem inclined to give us some music, let us hear that first, and in the meantime, if the paper and pencil are put under the cloth, I have no doubt little Watty will have written something before the music is finished.' Mr. Rymer then placed the pencil and paper under the tablecloth, and the accordion soon, without any visible handling, played 'Home, sweet Home.' (Here follows a description of the music). After the accordion ceased, Mr. Rymer said, 'Now let us see whether little Watty has written anything for papa,' when instantly five raps came calling for the alphabet, and then there was spelt, 'Dear papa, I have done my very best,' and on Mr. Rymer's taking up the paper he found written on it, 'Dear papa, dear mama, Watt,' and on comparing the handwriting with that contained in one of his last letters before he died, it was found to be exactly resembling the writing there, particularly the capital letters."

It is not necessary to point out all the discrepancies in these two accounts; it will be sufficient to indicate some of the most important. Mr. Rymer has apparently com-

bined the events of two separate sésances; this will account for the discrepancy in the number reported to be present.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Rymer's account of the order of the manifestations differs materially from Barlee's—the incident of the brass fastenings in one account precedes, in the other follows, the request for writing. Rymer omits the whole business of the accordion playing, a device, no doubt, for diverting attention from the writing. Barlee makes no mention of the incident recorded by Rymer, the removal and replacing of the paper and pencil. Again, according to Rymer, he himself suggested that the paper and pencil should be placed under the cloth; but Barlee tells us that the suggestion came from Home. There are, of course, other and by no means unimportant discrepancies.

In view, then, of the mental condition of the sitters and the fallibility of ordinary testimony on these matters demonstrated in the last chapter, it is not difficult to guess how most of Home's manifestations were accomplished. It may be conceded that many of the performances were held in a better light than was commonly the case with his rivals; and that the medium's hands were frequently at rest on the table during the performance, even though the only proof offered of this latter fact may have been the presence of "a faint white heap" where his hands should be. The medium's feet were probably responsible in most cases for the playing of bells and guitar under the table, the spirit touches, spirit hands, peregrination of chairs, floating of tables, and the rest of it. His knees and other parts of his person could give substantial help in the feats where more muscular action was required.<sup>2</sup> The hands seen at the edge of the table after the lowering of the lights and other preparations, call for no special explanation. Similar hands have been exhibited again and again by fraudulent mediums in America and England, and have been exposed to the public gaze in Dr. Monck's portmanteau. It is to be noted that Mr. Crookes, as he then was, appears never to have been favoured with this particular manifestation. At the sésances of which he has published notes hands were frequently felt and occasionally seen by one or more sitters, but never so

<sup>1</sup> Home, in quoting Rymer's account in the *Incidents*, inserts the words, "on another evening."

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Edmunds, who examined Home on the occasion of his sittings with the Sub-Committee No. 5 of the Dialectical Society, reported to the Committee "that Mr. Home possessed an extremely muscular and elastic frame" (*Dialectical Report*, p. 47). J. E. Boehm, the sculptor, writes of Home's "delicately formed hands, feet, and limbs in general" (*Life of Home*, p. 223).

unequivocally, or under such circumstances of elaborate preparation, as at Home's séances in 1860 and 1861 with observers of less scientific acumen.

It is to the experiments and observations made by the distinguished physicist that we must now turn our attention. In an article published in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* for July, 1870, Mr. Crookes, as already mentioned,<sup>1</sup> announced that he had been for some time past engaged in investigating the manifestations commonly called spiritualistic. Though by no means prepared to accept the Spiritualist hypothesis, he had seen enough to satisfy him of the occurrence of certain physical phenomena, not explicable "by any physical law at present known." But he pointed out that the precautions hitherto taken against fraud, and the methods adopted for ascertaining the extent and the reality of the effects produced, were alike insufficient. What those methods and precautions should be he indicated in a passage already quoted.<sup>2</sup>

A year later he was able to announce that he had succeeded in experimentally demonstrating the existence of a hitherto unknown force, and had measured the effects produced.<sup>3</sup> In justification of his claim he gave a detailed description of one series of experiments conducted in his own laboratory in the presence of four other persons, two of whom, Dr. (later Sir William) Huggins and Serjeant Cox attested the accuracy of his report, based upon notes made at the time. The "medium" of the new force was Daniel Dunglas Home. The apparatus employed in the chief experiment is thus described :—

"In another part of the room an apparatus was fitted up for experimenting on the alterations in the weight of a body. It consisted of a mahogany board 36 inches long by  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide and 1 inch thick. At each end a strip of mahogany  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide was screwed on, forming feet. One end of the board rested on a firm table, whilst the other end was supported by a spring balance hanging from a substantial tripod stand. The balance was fitted with a self-registering index, in such a manner that it would record the maximum weight indicated by the pointer. The apparatus was adjusted so that the mahogany board was horizontal, its foot resting flat on the support. In this position its weight was 3 lbs., as marked by the pointer of the balance.

"Before Mr. Home entered the room the apparatus had been arranged in position, and he had not even the object of some parts explained before sitting down."

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Above, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> *Quarterly Journal of Science*, July 1871.

When, after some preliminary experiments with an accordion, attention was turned to the apparatus, Mr. Home placed his finger lightly upon the extreme end of the mahogany board furthest from the balance, Dr. Huggins and Mr. Crookes sitting one on each side and watching; under these conditions the index of the balance moved several times, the greatest downward pull registered being 6 lbs.<sup>1</sup> It was particularly noticed, Mr. Crookes tells us, that Home's fingers were not at any time advanced more than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches from the extreme end of the board—that is, not outside the point of support—so that it was physically impossible for any pressure of his fingers to have produced the downward movements of the board shown by the index. Moreover, "his feet as well as his hands were closely guarded by all in the room."

The few scientific men who ventured any public criticism on these experiments contented themselves for the most part with pointing out possible defects in the apparatus employed, or some source of error in the actual conduct of the experiments. Some of these criticisms appear to have been founded on a misunderstanding of the facts; some, in themselves perhaps no better founded, Mr. Crookes endeavoured to meet by modifications of the apparatus.<sup>2</sup> But there were a few men who, equally disinclined apparently to believe, on the evidence adduced, in the genuineness of the alleged manifestations, or in the incompetence of the distinguished physicist who conducted the experiments, propounded yet another solution of the difficulty. Professor Balfour Stewart, in reviewing in *Nature*<sup>3</sup> Mr. Crookes' article, refers to the illusions produced by Mesmerists and electro-biologists, and conjectures that in the present instance the observers may have been hallucinated. Again, Mr. E. B. Tylor, enlarging an idea put forward by Dr. A. R. Wallace, that the were-wolf superstition might have been due to mesmeric influence exercised by certain persons, extended it to spiritualistic marvels in general, and suggested that D. D. Home and Mrs. Guppy might be were-wolves, endowed with the power of acting on the minds of sensitive spectators.<sup>4</sup>

There are perhaps amongst the marvels recorded by credible witnesses, including Mr. Crookes himself, cases in

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* the index showed a total weight of 9 lbs.

<sup>2</sup> See Carpenter's article in the *Quarterly* already referred to, the letters from Sir C. Wheatstone, Sir G. G. Stokes, and others, and Mr. Crookes' replies, quoted in his *Researches*; a letter in *Nature*, August 3rd, 1871, from J. P. Earwaker, etc., etc. <sup>3</sup> July 27th, 1871. <sup>4</sup> *Nature*, 29th Feb., 1872.

which a modified form of this hypothesis would seem to be the only alternative to believing in the manifestation of a new physical force.<sup>1</sup> But such a drastic solution is hardly required to explain the recorded movements of the balance. The experiment as it stands, even without the modifications introduced later by Mr. Crookes in deference to his scientific critics, seems, indeed, conclusive against the possibility of Home's affecting the balance by any pressure on his end of the board. But, tested by the canons laid down by Mr. Crookes himself at the outset of his investigations, we shall find the conditions of the experiment defective in one important particular. Mr. Crookes had shown that it is the province of scientific investigation not merely to ascertain the reality of the alleged movements and measure their extent, but to establish their occurrence under conditions which render fraud impossible. In the passage quoted on page 183 it is implicitly recognised that such conditions are to be secured by eliminating the necessity for continuous observation on the part of the investigator. The proof of the thing done should depend upon something else than the mere observation of the experimenters, however skilled.

Now in the experiment quoted these conditions were not fulfilled. On the contrary, we are expressly told that all present guarded Home's feet and hands. It is pertinent to point out that a duty for which the whole company were collectively responsible may well at times have been intermitted. Moreover, Dr. Huggins and Mr. Crookes had to watch the balance also, and Mr. Crookes had to take notes. Again, the experiment described was not the first of the kind; it occurred in the middle of a long series. It is indeed stated that Home was not familiar with the apparatus employed. But as similar apparatus had been employed, probably at previous trials by Mr. Crookes himself, certainly by earlier investigators—amongst them Dr. Hare,<sup>2</sup> with whose published writings on Spiritualism we cannot assume that Home was unacquainted—the statement carries little weight. Further, a point of capital importance, there had apparently been many previous trials with various modifications of the apparatus and many failures; in Mr. Crookes' own words, "the experiments I have tried have been very numerous, but owing to our imperfect knowledge of the conditions which favour or oppose the manifestations of this force, to the apparently capricious manner in which it is exerted, and to

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion on this point in the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See above, vol. i. p. 234, for some account of Hare's experiments.

the fact that Mr. Home himself is subject to unaccountable ebbs and flows of the force, it has but seldom happened that a result obtained on one occasion could be subsequently confirmed and tested with apparatus specially contrived for the purpose."<sup>1</sup>

The real significance of this statement is that Home—a practised conjurer, as we are entitled to assume—was in a position to dictate the conditions of the experiment. By the simple device of doing nothing when the conditions were unfavourable he could ensure that the light (gas in the present instance) was such and so placed, the apparatus so contrived, and the sitters so disposed, as to suit his purpose, and that in the actual experiment the attention of the investigators would necessarily be concentrated on the wrong points. Under such conditions, as ordinary experience shows, and as the experiments described in the last chapter have abundantly demonstrated, five untrained observers are no match for one clever conjurer.

The word "untrained" in this connection may seem to require justification. Of Sir William Crookes' high distinction in many branches of physical science there is no need to speak here. But his previous training did not necessarily render him better qualified to deal with problems differing widely from those presented in the laboratory. To put it bluntly, if Home was a conjurer, Mr. Crookes was probably in no better position for detecting the sleight-of-hand than any other man his equal in intelligence and native acuteness of sense. Possibly even in a worse position; for it may be argued that his previous training would prepare the way for Home's efforts to concentrate attention on the mechanical apparatus, and thus divert it from the seemingly irrelevant movements by which it may be conjectured the conjurer's end was attained.

Moreover, the record of the experiments is obviously incomplete. The date is not given. We only know that it took place before June 8th, 1871, the date of Serjeant Cox's attesting letter. Again, the amount of light is not stated. There is only a brief prefatory statement that the experiment took place in the evening and that the room was

<sup>1</sup> *Researches*, p. 10. Further on he remarks with reference to the various experiments recorded in the article: "Although space will allow only the publication of the details of one trial, it must be clearly understood that for some time past I have been making similar experiments with like results. The meeting on the occasion here described was for the purpose of *confirming previous observations* by the application of crucial tests, with carefully arranged apparatus, and in the presence of irrefragable witnesses" (*op. cit.*, p. 17).

lighted by gas. If we turn to the detailed notes of selected experiments undertaken about this time which Mr. Crookes contributed to the *Proceedings of the S. P. R.*,<sup>1</sup> we shall find that this particular experiment indeed is not included, but that at a similar experiment which took place a few weeks later (June 21st) the light, by Home's order, was so diminished that at the first trial "there was scarcely light enough to see the board and the index move."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as Lehmann has pointed out in his criticism of this experiment,<sup>3</sup> it seems probable from reading these fuller notes that the account published in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* represents only a part of what took place at the séance. Mr. Crookes selected, as he had a perfect right to do, and published only those details (including the temperature of the room) which to the man of science seemed relevant. But, as we have already seen, in investigating the performances of conjurers even the most intelligent witness is apt to reject as irrelevant precisely those details which would give the clue to the trick.

For us, I am inclined to think, that clue may be found in a very early manifestation of Home's, which he seems to have been chary of repeating in his later years, and which Mr. Crookes—I infer from his published writings on the subject—had never seen. In the accounts of the early physical phenomena in America I have quoted a description of a séance with Home, during which the table was tilted at a precarious angle, without the displacement of various small objects which rested on its polished surface.<sup>4</sup> Lord Adare (the present Earl of Dunraven) was favoured with one—and only one—unequivocal example of this manifestation.<sup>5</sup> But I can remember no other detailed account of a similar feat in all the records of Home's séances in this country.<sup>6</sup> This extremely effective exhibition was, I take it, dropped from Home's repertory for prudential reasons. The articles were probably, it may be suggested, held in position when the table was tilted by means of hairs or fine threads attached to Home's dress. If the illumination and background are properly arranged, a dark thread is practically invisible in such a case, even to eyes that know what to look for. Mr. Davey used to employ a hair or thread to move bits of

<sup>1</sup> Vol. vi. p. 98, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *Aberglaube und Zauberei*, pp. 271-3. Stuttgart, 1898,

<sup>4</sup> Vol. i. pp. 242-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Experiences in Spiritualism*, pp. 1, 2. A similar manifestation is briefly described by Madame Home as having taken place in Paris (*Life*, p. 92).

<sup>6</sup> In the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, vol. iii. p. 22, Mr. Barlee briefly refers to a similar manifestation.



towards Mr. Walter Crookes, rose up in the air to the height of about ten inches. The other end then rose up to a height of about five inches, and the lath then floated about for more than a minute in this position suspended in the air, with no visible means of support. It moved sideways and waved gently up and down, just like a piece of wood on the top of small waves of the sea. The lower end then gently sank till it touched the table and the other end followed.

"Whilst we were speaking about this wonderful exhibition of force, the lath began to move again, and rising up as it did at first, it waved about in a somewhat similar manner. The startling novelty of the movement having now worn off, we were all enabled to follow its motions with more accuracy. Mr. Home was sitting away from the table at least three feet from the lath all this time; he was apparently quite motionless, and his hands were tightly grasped, his right by Mrs. Walter Crookes and his left by Mrs. William Crookes. Any movement by his feet was impossible, as, owing to the large cage<sup>1</sup> being under the table, his legs were not able to be put beneath, but were visible to those on each side of him. All the others had hold of hands."<sup>2</sup>

The sittings were held in Mr. Crookes' dining-room, and the assistants sat round the dining-room table. The occupation of the sitters with the balance apparatus immediately before the manifestation would have afforded Home an opportunity for adjusting the loops of thread over the gaselier, whilst the injunction to join hands secured him from any serious risk of interruption.

It seems possible, therefore, to explain the great bulk of the marvels recorded of Home by a combination of trickery on the one side and unconscious misinterpretation on the other. But it is not easy to see how the investigators of a generation ago could have been deceived, and repeatedly deceived, by any device of the kind suggested; and if we find ourselves unable to accept Mr. Crookes' testimony, we are guided to an adverse decision less perhaps by any defects which have been demonstrated in the particular evidence here presented than by that general presumption against the operation of the supposed new physical energy which, as already shown, inevitably follows from an analysis of all the cognate evidence accumulated down to the present day.<sup>3</sup> Even so there remain a few manifestations which the hypothesis of simple trickery does not seem to fit. Some of these marvels—the levitations, the elongations, and the fire-ordeal—will be dealt with in the next chapter.

<sup>1</sup> An upright cylinder of about two feet in diameter used in these experiments to isolate the accordion.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. vi. p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 185.

## CHAPTER IV

### WAS THERE HALLUCINATION?

TO persons familiar with the effects of suggestion on hypnotised subjects the idea naturally presented itself that the more marvellous phenomena reported by attendants at spiritualistic séances might be ascribed to hallucination. As we have seen in the last chapter, such views were advanced, among others, by Professor Balfour Stewart and Dr. E. B. Tylor to explain Mr. Crookes' experiences with Home. Later, at the British Association Meeting of 1876, the theory was again put forward tentatively by Professor W. F. Barrett. If we are to take some of the accounts given by witnesses of credit and intelligence as accurately representing what they saw, the only alternative to a wholesale surrender to the occult forces would be to postulate a not less wholesale state of hallucination on the part of the witnesses. But the problem is never, of course, put before us in such clear and unmistakable terms. However brief the interval between the event and its record, it is sufficient, as we saw in a previous chapter, to allow scope for the action of the constructive faculties. The document with which we have to deal is in no case the photographic record which it purports to be, but a work of art of more or less originality. In many cases we can recognise that the interval is of sufficient length to allow the prodigy to mature. Thus, as we have already seen in the Wesley case,<sup>1</sup> and as we may see in any modern Poltergeist story, the farther events recede in time the larger they loom in the imagination. Many of the records of Home's séances appear to be of this kind. Dr. Thomas Hawksley, in an undated letter quoted by Madame Home,<sup>2</sup> states that he and a friend visited Home

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. pp. 32 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, pp. 186-9; see also *Journal S. P. R.*, July, 1889, p. 122. The letter is said by Madame Home to have been written for the purpose of being included in her book, published in 1888, and therefore many years after the events which it relates.

one day in broad daylight, that his friend stood on a heavy centre claw table, and that table and man were lifted eight inches in the air, whilst Dr. Hawksley satisfied himself by passing his hand under the castors that the table was clear of the ground. So Mr. Perdicaris told me that at his first sitting with Home, which took place in 1868, in his mother's house in London, Mr. Perdicaris himself, his mother, Mrs. Mowatt Ritchie (an invalid on sofa), and an old housekeeper were sitting round a table with Home, there was a gaselier over the table with three jets lighted; "suddenly table, sofa, chairs, and sitters were all moved several feet off," apparently by supernormal power.

In such cases as these, however sober-minded and conscientious the witnesses, it is easier to find the explanation of the marvel in a fallacy of memory than in a fallacy of sense.<sup>1</sup> "I want to ask your advice," said a patient to Professor Janet, "how can I distinguish between a memory and a dream?" and, indeed, as Janet remarks, the question raises a very delicate problem.<sup>2</sup> For the differences between memory and imagination, all-important to the historian, to the psychologist may be trivial or irrelevant. Where doubt on the subject is possible it is not by introspection that we shall learn to decide between them.

But when the interval between event and record is very brief, the assumption of a fallacy of memory of this extreme kind cannot seem an altogether satisfactory solution. Take, for instance, the following narrative by the Rev. Thomas Colley (afterwards Archdeacon Colley). Mr. Colley was present at a séance on September 25th, 1877, and wrote out his account of it the same evening. The medium was Dr. Monck, and the sitting apparently took place in a private house:—

"Dr. Monck, under control of 'Samuel,' was by the light of the lamp—the writer not being a yard away from him—seen by all to be *the living gate for the extrusion of spirit forms from the realm of mind into this world of matter*; for standing forth thus plainly before us, the psychic or spirit form was seen to grow out of his left side. First, several faces one after another, of great beauty,

<sup>1</sup> The question asked by Hamilton Aidé, in his article, "Was I Hypnotised?" (*Nineteenth Century*, April, 1899) may no doubt be answered in the negative. If we were forced to take Mr. Aidé's narrative as an accurate representation of what he saw at a sitting with Home, we might be hard put to it for any better explanation. But the article was written twenty years after the events which it records, and, though the author speaks of "referring to his note-book," bears internal evidence of being founded mainly on memory.

<sup>2</sup> *Neuroses et idées fixes*, vol. ii. p. 168.

appeared, and in amazement we saw—and as I was standing close up to the medium, even touching him, I saw most plainly—several times a perfect face and form of exquisite womanhood partially issue from Dr. Monck, about the region of the heart. Then after several attempts a full-formed figure, in a nebulous condition at first, but growing solid as it issued from the medium, left Dr. Monck, and stood a separate individuality, two or three feet off, bound to him by a slender attachment as of gossamer, which, at my request, 'Samuel,' the control, severed with the medium's left hand, and there stood embodied a spirit form of unutterable loveliness, robed in attire spirit-spun—a meshy webwork from no mortal loom, of a fleeciness inimitable, and of transfiguration whiteness truly glistening."

Later in the evening, when the time came for the form to retire, the gossamer filament again appeared, and Mr. Colley tells us that he saw the spirit figure sucked back, as by a psychic waterspout, into the body of the medium, and watched the angel face fade and finally disappear.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Colley does not state how much light the lamp gave, but at a later séance, held at Dr. Monck's own rooms, with Mr. and Mrs. Colley and Mr. Stainton Moses present, the latter describes the light as faint.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to believe that the exquisite spirit form which presented itself to Mr. Colley's glowing imagination was merely a confection of masks, stuffed gloves, and muslin, actuated by a jointed rod, but we cannot help remembering, if Mr. Colley did not, that articles of this kind had, a twelve-month previously, been found, under compromising circumstances, in the possession of Dr. Monck.<sup>3</sup>

More impressive, because written with greater restraint, and by an observer of a more critical temperament, is the record by Mr. St. George Stock of one of his early experiences. Mr. Stock narrates that in March, 1872, he was persuaded by an Oxford friend to take part in a séance at which several choir-boys were the mediums. Bits of paper and stones were thrown about the room, and one or two of the mediums spoke in the trance. The impression left upon Mr. Stock's mind by this first séance was that the phenomena were genuine, though not necessarily of spirit origin, and that the boys were innocent of trickery. A few days later

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, Oct. 5th, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> "Faintly lighted by a very small paraffin lamp, which was placed in a corner of the room and shaded" (*Spiritualist*, Oct. 26th, 1877).

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritualist*, Feb. 9th, 1877.

he had a second séance, with eight choir-boys, in his friend's room, the host, however, not being present :—

“We took tea together as before. Whilst the boys were still seated round the table I rose and walked to the mantelpiece, turning over in my mind how I should broach to the boys my intention of examining their pockets. There were four candles burning on the mantelpiece, by the side of which I took my stand. The boys, as I have said, were still seated round the table, which was at a considerable distance, and were chatting together about some game of cricket. Such was the position of affairs in the room, when a shower of folded papers descended upon me, floating gradually down, as if dropped very gently. One of them alighted on my hand, and so called my attention to the rest. They did not seem, as the stones did [on the previous occasion] to come from or through the ceiling, but rather to start into sudden existence in the air above me. It was physically impossible for these papers to have been thrown at me by the boys at the table, and I thought it perfectly ludicrous after this to propose the examination I had intended, a test having been given me far more satisfactory than any I could have devised.”<sup>1</sup>

The account is based upon a detailed report written on the following day.<sup>2</sup>

In both these cases—unless we are to suppose that angelic forms did really grow out of Dr. Monck's body, and bits of paper did really fall from nowhere before Mr. Stock's eyes—it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we have to do with something more than a mere fallacy of memory. In other words, we have to suppose that Mr. Colley and Mr. Stock were hallucinated. The hypothesis of hallucination in such circumstances requires, no doubt, some justification. To most persons, it may be surmised, the word “hallucination” represents a rare psychical catastrophe, a kind of volcanic eruption from subterranean depths, symptomatic at the lowest of a profound disturbance of the personality. But whilst, on the one hand, the work of the Census Committee of the English Society for Psychical Research has shown that sensory hallucinations are compatible with ordinary health and sanity, and so far from being uncommon that about one adult Englishman in ten can recall such an experience; on the other hand, modern psychology recognises in such sensory fallacies only the product of familiar mental processes pushed to extremes. For it can be shown that, even in normal per-

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, Oct. 20th, 1876.

<sup>2</sup> As I learn from a private letter from Mr. Stock.

ception, part only, and it may be a small part, of what we "perceive" is due to the impression actually made on the external sense-organ; another, and it may be a larger part, can be definitely traced to the reproduction of previous sensations, some similar, some disparate, aroused by sub-conscious processes of association. In other words, a considerable and essential part of all that we claim to see and hear is due to our own imagination; or, to quote a well-known paradox of Taine's: "Au lieu de dire que l'hallucination est une perception extérieure fautive, il faut dire que la perception extérieure est une hallucination vraie."<sup>1</sup> And modern psychologists generally incline to the view that between what we call true perception and those false perceptions which we call illusion and hallucination there is no psychological difference at all comparable in importance to the practical difference between fact and fancy; that the false perception represents in many cases merely a slightly anomalous reaction to sensory stimuli; a perception in which the associative processes have summoned up the wrong ideas.<sup>2</sup>

The cause of this anomalous reaction of the brain to the impression made upon the external sense organs (let us say, the retinal impression, since we are here concerned mostly with visual hallucinations) is to be sought commonly in the condition of the brain itself at the moment. Either there is some general dissociation of consciousness—a dissociation which may range from acute mania down to hypnosis or the drowsiness which precedes sleep—or there may be some local disturbance of equilibrium leading to the undue prominence of certain ideas, that is, in terms of psycho-physiology, to tension of a particular group of cells. It is this last condition, familiarly known as expectant attention, which is probably responsible for most of the sense deceptions of normal life. When the mind is full, as we say, of a particular idea, very

<sup>1</sup> *De l'Intelligence*, 4th edition, vol. ii. p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Whether there are or are not any hallucinations in the old sense of the term, *i.e.* sensory perceptions originating without any sensory stimuli, is for the present purpose immaterial. One of the latest writers on the subject, Edmund Parish, in his *Hallucinations and Illusions* (English translation, London, 1897), claims that all hallucinations may be reduced to the type of illusion in the old sense, *i.e.* as started from without by an actual sensory stimulus. Binet, by a different line of reasoning, arrives at the same conclusion. W. James (*Principles of Psychology*, vol. ii. p. 115) admits that hallucinations are often only extreme cases of the perceptive process, in which the secondary cerebral reaction is out of all normal proportion to the peripheral stimulus which occasions the activity; but he is inclined to believe that some hallucinations are centrally initiated. In the text I have, for the sake of convenience, used hallucination in Parish's sense, as practically equivalent to illusion of an extreme kind.

slight, and otherwise indifferent, sensory stimuli are liable to call up that idea; the slighter and more ambiguous, indeed, the sense impression, the more liable is it to be misinterpreted in accordance with the dominant idea. Thus, when expecting to meet a friend, we constantly see resemblances to him in the faces of casual strangers; or again, as we have already seen, in the dim light of a materialisation séance the sitters are ready to recognise in any white-robed figure the spirit of mother, sister, or wife.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of the sense deceptions which we meet in the investigation of Spiritualist records are no doubt of this type—quasi-hallucinatory faces superimposed upon the faint outlines presented or suggested to the sense of sight at a dark séance or in a spirit photograph.<sup>2</sup> There is a professional medium now (1901) performing in London, at whose séances spirit faces are reported constantly to be seen. The performance takes place, of course, in the dark; the faces are shown in profile against the background of a faintly illuminated slate, and few would appear to pass without the tribute of recognition from one or other member of the circle. From various letters which have appeared in *Light*,<sup>3</sup> it would seem that the female faces which are seen at this medium's séances generally have the lower part of their faces veiled by drapery, so as to conceal the mouth and chin. But this circumstance does not appear materially to affect the recognition.<sup>4</sup>

That in some cases an hallucinatory image is actually presented to the senses of the witness seems probable. The clearest illustration of the kind known to me is furnished by some recent exhibitions given by a non-professional medium. The lady in question allows certain favoured persons to look into a crystal, inclosed in a small open box, which is not as a rule allowed to leave the medium's own hands. At the back of the crystal, *i.e.* at the bottom of the box, the seer discerns a face apparently drawn rather sketchily in outline, in black and white. So far the performance would seem a rather transparent trick. But it is the case that some persons have recognised in these sketchy outlines the unmistakable portraits of friends. There is no verbal suggestion from the medium; nor, indeed, could verbal suggestion be directly helpful, since the likenesses seen are

<sup>1</sup> See W. James, *op. cit.*, vol. ii. p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> See Book III. chaps. vi. and vii.

<sup>3</sup> See *s.g.* letter from "T. S.," 9th March, 1901.

<sup>4</sup> The medium, it should be stated, is a man.

sometimes of persons long dead, of whom the medium would, it is likely, never have heard.<sup>1</sup>

Illusory impressions of this kind represent, it seems probable, the simplest form of hallucination, the form which implies the least disturbance of ordinary consciousness, and is often hardly to be distinguished from the normal process of perception.

At dark sésances we frequently find a more pronounced form of sense deception, approximating to the type of "pure" hallucination. Some of the most favoured attendants at Home's circle would see shadowy figures, which were unmistakably of an hallucinatory character.<sup>2</sup> Similar apparitions are recorded by other witnesses with other mediums. The clearest account of the phenomenon which I have seen is contained in an article by Professor Harlow Gale, "A Study in Spiritistic Hallucinations."<sup>3</sup> The subject of the study, Dr. S., a private medium and, apparently, an honest man, gave dark sésances at which he and others habitually professed to see figures, sometimes of sacred personages, sometimes of deceased friends, standing near them. On some occasions they even claimed to shake hands with the figure, and to feel the material contact. Flowers were also seen and lights. The room at these meetings was in almost complete darkness; and each seer described at once the figure which he professed to see. It is likely that the starting-point for the hallucination was furnished by the patches of light which came through crevices in the door and window, or by the retinal light or other sensation proceeding from the eye itself; and that the image was completed, as is probably the case in nearly all hallucinations of this kind, under the influence of direct verbal suggestion from the medium or the original seer. A dim light seems to be essential for sense deceptions of this nature; and the emotions cultivated at a sésance prove no doubt powerful auxiliaries in their production.

A good illustration of similar illusions engendered by expectancy, and conditioned by darkness, is given by Robert Louis Stevenson. In his voyages in the South Seas he describes how, one dark night, having got out of their reckon-

<sup>1</sup> Amongst those who have described to me this performance, and have assured me that they have "recognised" faces in the box, are the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers, and Mr. C., a Cambridge graduate. In the latter case, at any rate, the visions were not emotionally inspired; one of them represented a mere casual acquaintance, another a college tutor, and so on.

<sup>2</sup> See the references quoted at the end of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> *S. P. R. Proc.*, vol. xv. p. 65.

ing, all on board were anxiously looking out for the coral island which was their goal:—

“Islands we beheld in plenty, but they were of ‘such stuff as dreams are made on,’ and vanished at a wink, only to reappear in other places; and, by-and-by, not only islands, but refulgent and revolving lights began to stud the darkness; lighthouses of the mind or of the wearied optic nerve, solemnly shining and winking as we passed.”<sup>1</sup>

Again, we meet occasionally, in more normal circumstances, with sensory fallacies of a marked type, where the imagination, filled with a dominant idea, reacts upon some slight or ambiguous sense impression so as to construct a complete hallucinatory drama. Thus, in a case published in the S.P.R. Report on the Census of Hallucinations, a lady, on hearing a sound like that of a latch-key in the front door, straightway saw an hallucinatory figure of her father, accompanied by his dog, crossing the hall.<sup>2</sup> The following case, quoted in the same report, is an even better illustration of the hallucinatory development and embellishment of a slight and fugitive sense impression:—

“Some years ago a friend and I rode—he on a bicycle, I on a tricycle—on an unusually dark night in summer from Glendalough to Rathdrum. It was drizzling rain, we had no lamps, and the road was overshadowed by trees on both sides, between which we could just see the skyline. I was riding slowly and carefully some ten or twenty yards in advance, guiding myself by the skyline, when my machine chanced to pass over a piece of tin or something else in the road that made a great crash. Presently my companion came up, calling to me in great concern. He had seen through the gloom my machine upset and me flung from it. The crash had excited the thought of the most likely cause for it, and . . . this involved a visual perception of the mind, faint, but sufficient on this occasion to be seen with sufficient distinctness when not overpowered by objects seen in the ordinary way through the eyes.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *In the South Seas*, edition of 1900, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> *S. P. R. Proc.*, vol. x. p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> “On the Limits of Vision,” by Dr. J. G. Stoney, *Phil. Magazines*, March, 1894. Sir John Herschel gives a case of hallucination experienced by himself, which admirably illustrates the action of long-established association. He had been watching with some anxiety the demolition of a familiar building. On the following day at evening, but whilst the light was still pretty good, he passed the spot where it had stood. “Great was my amazement to see it as if still standing, projected against the dull sky. . . . I walked on, and the perspective of the form and disposition of the parts appeared to change . . . as they would have done if real” (*Familiar Lectures on Scientific Subjects*, p. 405).

Again, Beard has described how a steamer in which he was crossing the Atlantic collided with a sailing vessel. It was night, and the cry went forth that the steamer was stove in and the bow sinking. All eyes were turned to the bow, and to all it appeared to be sinking. "I shall never forget," writes Beard, "how it gradually lowered in the darkness." But in fact the vessel was uninjured.<sup>1</sup> Hallucinatory misinterpretations of distant objects such as occasionally occur at sea furnish another illustration of the same principle. Thus, when the French frigate *La Belle Poule* was searching for a missing consort, the watch signalled a disabled vessel, and the whole crew in full daylight saw a raft and boats crowded with men. A boat was sent to the rescue, and found only a few floating branches of trees.<sup>2</sup> Many of the recorded apparitions of the sea-serpent have, no doubt, a like explanation.

I should be disposed, then, to interpret the experiences of Mr. Colley and Mr. Stock quoted above as illusions or hallucinations of this last type. Both witnesses were certainly under the influence of expectancy. Mr. Colley had seen materialised figures in Dr. Monck's presence before; Mr. Stock, as we have read, had witnessed at the previous séance bits of paper and stones thrown about the room, and had inclined to the belief that these movements were not due to trickery. Both, no doubt, at the séance which we are now considering saw something for which they could not account; and the imagination, supplementing the imperfect data of sensation, as *the imagination supplements sensation in every act of perception*, filled in the picture on these occasions on lines predetermined by the previous experiences of the witnesses.

Probably some of the more marvellous feats described at Home's séances can be analysed into sensory deceptions of this nature. The circumstances were peculiarly favourable for illusion of the kind supposed. The minds of the witnesses were attuned, by previous exhibitions of minor feats, to the proper degree of receptivity. The nature of the marvel to be looked for was indicated beforehand, so that the imagination would have less difficulty, when the rough sketch was supplied, in completing the picture, much as Dr. Stoney's friend constructed, on the hint of a noise, a complete picture

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J. N. Langley in a lecture on "The Physiological Aspect of Mesmerism," given before the Royal Institution, March, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des Foules*. Paris, 1895. Le Bon quotes the incident from the *Revue Scientifique*.

of a tricycle accident. Again, this last illustration presents a near parallel in another respect to Home's séances. The light was in most cases extremely faint. There can be no doubt that a sensory deception of the kind supposed occurs much more readily when the original sensation is vague and ill-defined, as anything seen in a dim light must be.<sup>1</sup> The so-called "levitations" of Home offer probably the clearest examples of the process.

The earliest instance of Home's "levitation" occurred in the summer of 1852, at the residence of Mr. Ward Cheney, in the State of Connecticut. An account of this levitation will be found on page 245, vol. i. of the present work. It will be seen from the instances there cited that the feat was not peculiar to Home; at least one professional contemporary, Gordon, had given exhibitions of the same kind. In Home's case it will be seen that the performance took place in a room previously darkened, ostensibly for another purpose; and the evidence that the medium was levitated consisted in his own statement to that effect, corroborated by the palpable demonstration of his boots suspended in the air. Later, we have a very full and candid account, by Robert Bell, of a levitation which took place in 1860.<sup>2</sup> In this case also the room had been carefully darkened before the feat was attempted; and the evidence for the fact of levitation consisted in the sound of Home's voice in the air, his own descriptions of his movements, contact with his boots on the back of a chair, and an appearance as of his person, or some part of it, projected against the dim, grey light which came through the blind drawn down across the window.

Most of the recorded levitations of Home are of this character. After various minor manifestations had educated the witnesses to the proper frame of receptivity, the lights would be extinguished, and the room reduced to almost complete darkness. Home would then explain that the spirits were lifting him up; his voice would be heard as if high in the air; some favoured guest would be allowed to grasp his hand or foot; and perhaps a dim silhouette of his legs would be seen against the window-blind. Thus, to take a few instances, "J. G. C.," in an account of a séance which took place apparently early in 1860, records:—

"Shortly after this a very curious affair took place . . . Mr. Home remarked, 'I feel as if I am going to rise.' The room was quite

<sup>1</sup> For the psychological explanation of the superior power of weak sensations to give rise to hallucination see W. James, *op. cit.*, vol. ii. pp. 83, 123, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Cornhill Magazine*, Aug., 1860. The account is quoted above, pp. 49-50.

dark. He said, 'I am getting up,' and as I was only a few feet from him I put out my hand to him. I indubitably felt the soles of both his boots, some three feet above the level of the floor. On my doing so he said, 'Don't touch me, or I shall come down.' Of course, I instantly desisted, but down he came. In less than five minutes after this he remarked, 'I am again ascending,' and from the sound of his voice we could not but infer that he was actually rising towards the ceiling of the ante-room."<sup>1</sup>

At another séance, after the lights had been put out and the blinds drawn down, a similar performance took place in the dark, but in this case, at the request of one of the sitters, "he was floated with his feet horizontally into the light of the window, so that we all saw his feet and a part of his legs resting or floating in the air like a feather, about six feet from the ground."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, recorded by Mr. Wason, the main evidence for the levitation consisted in the fact that the witness held Home's hand in the dark and moved along with the medium for about six paces until he fell over a stool.<sup>3</sup>

Of levitations which are said to have taken place in the light we have two accounts by Mr. Enmore Jones. He records that on one occasion, by the light of a single gas-burner and a bright fire, Home rose vertically in the air until he was a foot above the floor. No details are given, not even the date of the séance.<sup>4</sup> In his evidence before the Dialectical Society, Mr. Jones stated that in a large, well-lighted room in his own house, he and all his family saw his aged mother, together with the chair she sat on, rise in the air until her knees were level with the rim of the table.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Crookes, in his detailed notes of sittings, records two cases of levitation at which he was present. On July 30th, 1871, shortly after the gas had been turned out and spirit lamps [*i.e.* lamps burning spirit] substituted:—

"Mr. Home walked to the open space in the room between Mr. I.'s chair and the sideboard, and stood there quite upright and quiet. He then said, 'I'm rising, I'm rising,' when we all saw him rise from the ground slowly to a height of about six inches, remain there for about ten seconds, and then slowly descend. From my position I could not see his feet, but I distinctly saw his head, projected against the opposite wall, rise up, and Mr. Walter Crookes,

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Magazine*, 1860, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1860, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1860, p. 525.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1861, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Dialectical Report*, p. 145. In a letter recounting the incident which appeared in the *Spiritual Magazine* (Sept., 1868), Mr. Jones gives the date of the séance as 17th July, 1868. He omits, however, to date his letter.

who was sitting near where Mr. Home was, said that his feet were in the air. There was no stool or other thing near which could have aided him. Moreover, the movement was a continuous glide upwards."<sup>1</sup>

On April 21st, 1872, we have the following record. After various minor phenomena had occurred :—

"A message was given, 'Try less light.' The handkerchief moved about along the floor, visible to all. Mr. Home nearly disappeared under the table in a curious attitude; then he was (still in his chair) wheeled out from the table, still in the same attitude, his feet out in front off the ground. He was then sitting almost horizontally, his shoulders resting on his chair. He asked Mrs. Walter Crookes to remove the chair from under him, as it was not supporting him. He was then seen to be sitting in the air, supported by nothing visible."<sup>2</sup>

If Mr. Enmore Jones' testimony almost constrains us to believe in hallucination, in the instances recorded by Mr. Crookes it seems more reasonable to suppose that Home may have found opportunity, in the intentionally subdued light, to introduce some mechanical support.

The most noteworthy of all the cases of levitation is that which took place on December 16th, 1868, at 5, Buckingham Gate, London, in the presence of the Master of Lindsay (now the Earl of Crawford), Viscount Adare (now the Earl of Dunraven), and Captain Wynne. The fullest account is that of the Master of Lindsay, written on July 14th, 1871. It is as follows :—

"I was sitting with Mr. Home and Lord Adare and a cousin of his. During the sitting Mr. Home went into a trance, and in that state was carried out of the window in the room next to where we were, and was brought in at our window. The distance between the windows was about seven feet six inches, and there was not the slightest foothold between them, nor was there more than a twelve-inch projection to each window, which served as a ledge to put flowers on. We heard the window in the next room lifted up, and almost immediately after we saw Home floating in the air outside our window. The moon was shining full into the room;<sup>3</sup> my back was to the light, and I saw the shadow on the wall of the window-sill, and Home's feet about six inches above it. He remained in this position for a few seconds, then raised the window and glided into the room feet foremost and sat down."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. vi. pp. 118, 119.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> The séance took place, as said, on the 16th December, 1868, *two days after new moon.*

<sup>4</sup> The letter from which this account is taken originally appeared in the

Lord Adare's account of the central incident is as follows :—

"We heard Home go into the next room, heard the window thrown up, and presently Home appeared standing upright outside our window ; he opened the window and walked in quite coolly."

Lord Adare adds an account of an incident at which he was the only spectator. After the levitation he had, at Home's request, shut the window in the next room, out of which Home purported to have been wafted by the spirits. On returning to the séance-room, Lord Adare continues :—

"I remarked that the window was not raised a foot, and that I could not think how he [Home] had managed to squeeze through. He arose and said, 'Come and see.' I went with him ; he told me to open the window as it was before ; I did so ; he told me to stand a little distance off ; he then went through the open space, head first, quite rapidly, his body being nearly horizontal and apparently rigid. He came in again feet foremost, and we returned to the other room. It was so dark I could not see clearly how he was supported outside. He did not appear to grasp, or rest upon the balustrade, but rather to be swung out and in. Outside each window is a small balcony or ledge nineteen inches deep [*i.e.* apparently nineteen inches wide], bounded by stone balustrades eighteen inches high."<sup>1</sup>

In a letter written to Home, dated 2nd February, 1877, Captain Wynne, referring to this occasion, states : "The fact of your having gone out of the one window and in at the other I can swear to."<sup>2</sup>

*Spiritualist* newspaper, and was afterwards republished in a pamphlet entitled *Psychic Power—Spirit Power: Experimental Investigation* (London, 1871). In July, 1869, Lord Lindsay gave an account of the incident to the Committee of the Dialectical Society, which runs as follows :—

"I saw the levitations in Victoria Street when Home floated out of the window. He first went into a trance and walked about uneasily ; he then went into the hall. While he was away I heard a voice whisper in my ear, 'He will go out of one window and in at another.' I was alarmed and shocked at the idea of so dangerous an experiment. I told the company what I had heard and we then waited for Home's return. Shortly after he entered the room. I heard the window go up, but I could not see it, for I sat with my back to it. I, however, saw his shadow on the opposite wall ; he went out of the window in a horizontal position, and I saw him outside the other window (that is the next room) floating in the air. It was eighty-five feet from the ground" (Report, p. 214).

The discrepancies between this and the account given in the text may perhaps be explained as due to inaccurate reporting. It will be seen that both accounts suggest, without expressly stating, that Home floated outside the window in a horizontal position, whereas Lord Adare states that Home stood upright.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Adare's testimony to this incident, in its original form difficult of access, will be found quoted in Mrs. Home's *Life*, p. 301.

*Life of D. D. Home*, p. 307.

It is to be noted that, as we learn from Lord Adare's account, there was no light in the room during the séance, except such as came through the window (from a moon two days old); that Lord Lindsay had, at an earlier period of the evening, seen an apparition of a man sitting in a chair; that one of the spirits before the performance had announced what it was proposed to do; and, finally, that on a previous occasion a few days before, in presence of two of the same witnesses, Home had opened the same window, stepped on the ledge outside, and remained standing there, to the great alarm of Lord Lindsay, looking down at the street some eighty feet below.<sup>1</sup> The medium had thus, as it were, furnished a rough sketch of the picture which he aimed at producing.

Whatever the nature of the complex illusion, however, whether of sense or of memory—or, as seems likely, of both—it is certain that it was shared in the retrospect by all the three persons present.<sup>2</sup> Actually, however, the collective part of the illusion is seen in analysis to have been of a comparatively unimpressive kind. From Lord Lindsay's account, the most detailed record which we have of the actual levitation, it would seem that Home, probably after having announced that the spirits were about to carry him through the air from one window to another, left the room. A sound was heard, which may or may not have been due to the cause which it suggested, the opening of the window in the next room. Shortly afterwards, Lord Lindsay, who had his back to the window, saw on the opposite wall a shadow, thrown by the faint moonlight, which suggested to him that Home was outside the window; and he appears to have accepted the assurance of the "spirits" that in fact the medium had been conveyed to that point through the air from the window-ledge of the adjoining room. Whether Lord Adare or Captain Wynne had their eyes turned towards the window, or, generally, upon what impressions of sense they based their conviction that Home had actually been levitated, does not appear. Remembering that the room was lighted only by a moon two days old, we are clearly not justified in attaching more weight to their general statements

<sup>1</sup> The last quoted incident rests on the authority of a letter from H. D. Jencken, printed in *Human Nature*, vol. iii. p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Carpenter, with that disastrous defect, whether of candour or care, which distinguished so many of his public utterances on the subject of Spiritualism, assumed that the third witness, Captain Wynne, had not shared in the illusion (see his article in the *Contemporary Review* for Jan., 1876). This drew from Captain Wynne the corroborative testimony quoted in the text.

than to the detailed record of Lord Lindsay. How much that record is worth, as evidence for a miracle, the reader, with the depositions before him, may judge for himself.

The other incident presents a somewhat different problem. The room was again dark, the action was momentary, and the solitary witness, who had been told to keep his distance, was still labouring under the strong excitement induced by the previous performance. It would be impossible to lay much stress upon an observation made under such circumstances.

Unlike levitation, the phenomenon of elongation was a late product of Home's mediumship. I can find no record of its appearance before 1867. During that and two or three succeeding years several exhibitions were given, amongst the witnesses being Mr. H. D. Jencken, General Boldero, Mr. Ion Perdicaris, Lord Lindsay, and Lord Adare. The manifestation generally took place in a very subdued light. But Mr. Perdicaris has given me from memory an account of an occasion on which he saw Home elongated in a good light. The medium, however, on this occasion stood behind a chair, with his hands resting on the back, and the elongation amounted to a few inches only. Moreover, we have no contemporary record of the incident. So, in a case described by H. D. Jencken ("Honestas"), when Home held a candle in his hand whilst undergoing elongation, the apparent increase of stature amounted only to about four inches.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Adare, in his *Experiences*, gives several instances of elongation, some in fairly good light; but his description of the manifestation and of the means taken to ascertain the reality and measure the extent of the elongation is not such as to produce conviction. The most striking account of the phenomenon is furnished by Lord Lindsay, in his evidence before the Dialectical Society's Committee, but the narrative was written some time after the event, and does not appear, since the dates and other details are wanting, to have been based upon contemporary notes.

The following is an extract from a paper written by Lord Lindsay, read before the Committee on the 6th July, 1869:—<sup>2</sup>

"On another occasion I saw Mr. Home, in a trance, elongated eleven inches. I measured him standing up against the wall, and

<sup>1</sup> *Human Nature*, vol. ii. p. 611. See also *ibid.*, vol. i. pp. 427 and 578; vol. ii. pp. 29 and 30. In vol. iv. p. 140 is a diagram showing the elongation of Home's hand. See also the accounts by Dr. Hawkins Simpson and General Boldero (*Journal S. P. R.*, 1889, pp. 123 and 125).

<sup>2</sup> *Dialectical Society's Report*, p. 207.

marked the place; not being satisfied with that, I put him in the middle of the room and placed a candle in front of him, so as to throw a shadow on the wall, which I also marked. When he awoke I measured him again in his natural size, both directly and by the shadow, and the results were equal. I can swear that he was not off the ground or standing on tiptoe, as I had full view of his feet, and, moreover, a gentleman present had one of his feet placed over Home's insteps, one hand on his shoulder, and the other on his side where the false ribs come near the hip-bone."

Later, in answer to questions, Lord Lindsay supplemented his evidence as follows:—<sup>1</sup>

"The top of the hip-bone and the short ribs separate. In Home they were unusually close together. There was no separation of the vertebræ of the spine; nor were the elongations at all like those resulting from expanding the chest with air; the shoulders did not move. Home looked as if he was pulled up by the neck; the muscles seemed in a state of tension. He stood firmly upright in the middle of the room, and before the elongation commenced I placed my foot on his instep. I will swear he never moved his heels from the ground. When Home was elongated against the wall, Lord Adare placed his foot on Home's instep, and I marked the place on the wall. I once saw him elongated horizontally on the ground; Lord Adare was present. Home seemed to grow at both ends, and pushed myself and Adare away."

I cannot identify in Lord Adare's account of his experiences either of the occasions referred to in the passages last quoted.

The phenomenon of elongation was not peculiar to Home. As we have already seen, Herne and J. J. Morse are said to have been elongated in 1870.<sup>2</sup> Lord Adare tells us that at a séance at which Home was present he saw a young lady elongated to the extent of about three inches.<sup>3</sup> And I have lately received an account of an elongation, the medium being a professional clairvoyant named Peters, which took place so recently as May, 1900. The witnesses, who have all signed the account from which the extracts below are taken, were the Rev. C. J. M. Shaw, his wife, and brother. Peters was staying in Mr. Shaw's house, and at a sitting in the afternoon hopes had been held out of some remarkable manifestation in the evening. At the evening sitting, by direction of the "control," the shaded standard lamp by which the room was lighted was turned down very low.

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, pp. 213, 214.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Experiences*, p. 23.

Mr. C. Shaw and his brother sat in easy-chairs (seats fourteen inches from the ground) on either side of the medium, who was standing. Mrs. Shaw sat opposite, facing the medium. Mr. C. Shaw's account continues:—

"My brother placed his right foot on the medium's left foot, and I placed my left foot on the medium's right foot. (The medium was wearing ordinary boots.) And then my brother placed his right hand and I my left hand on the medium's waist, our other hands grasping (at first) the medium's hands.

"The medium's height, as measured by myself against the wall of my room, is 5 feet  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches. The medium began to sway backwards and forwards (his face was towards Mrs. Shaw), sometimes falling so far backward that the back of his head nearly touched the ground. He then began to sway sideways—first one side, then the other—disengaging his hands from ours and placing them (below ours) above his hips. He then stretched his hands, with palms open, towards Mrs. Shaw, and fingers extended, straight out above his head, and with his head thrown back, the motion from side to side becoming less and less till it ceased altogether, appeared to be drawn upwards by his hands.

"Both my brother and I looked to see that we were still on his feet, and that our hands were on his waist; we were both conscious that the hands we had placed on his waist were being carried up as the elongation gradually took place. Keeping our eyes upon him, we found that we had to stretch our arms to their *fullest* extent (without rising from our seats) to retain their position on his waist. On my attempting to rise from my chair the 'Indian' requested me to remain seated. At last a point was reached when I called to my brother, 'If he goes any higher I can't reach,' my arm being stretched to its very fullest extent; at the same time I was conscious, and so was my brother, that our feet were still on the medium's feet. The Red Indian (who was controlling) called to us then to observe his hands, one arm (the hands and fingers were open and extended) being quite six inches longer than the other; from our position this was difficult for my brother and me to see, but was quite apparent to Mrs. S. Again our attention was directed to the fact that the shorter arm had been elongated to match the other. We had now arrived at the limit of our own powers of extension, and with a warning from the Indian the medium collapsed on to the floor. He subsided in a sitting position on the floor at the same point at which he was standing. Mrs. S., sitting (in front), had a good view of the whole process, and was able to note the elongation with reference to the background. When the medium's hands were first raised she saw them against the background of the red curtains of the bow window; she then noted their passing the line which marks a difference of six inches between the ceiling of the bow window and that of the room

(the ceiling of the bow window being that much lower), and finally remarked his hands against the background of the ceiling itself. Taking into consideration the distance we had to extend our arms to keep our hands on his waist, one would judge the elongation to have been at the very least a matter of eighteen inches.

"There was no breach of continuity in the clothing apparent which one might have expected. After the sitting the medium appeared much fatigued, still, he endeavoured to show us another curious phenomenon. Rubbing his face violently with both hands, long streaks of light became visible through his fingers; this I clearly remarked, but it was not noticed by the others.

"We have tried since on two occasions to obtain a repetition of the phenomenon of elongation, but without success.

"I have written this account of the matter as it presented itself to my observation, and it is difficult to see how we can have been deceived.

"I may say that the medium himself drew our attention to the unusual length of his arms, and that, as far as our knowledge of him goes, we have never had anything to cause us to doubt his integrity. The medium laid down no conditions whatever (beyond requesting that the lamp be turned down) before commencing the séance.

"When the séance commenced at 9.30 the medium occupied the chair in which Mrs. Shaw afterwards sat. At about 10.15, for the experiment in 'elongation,' he changed his position and stood.

"The only chair near I pushed away when the medium began to sway backwards and forwards, fearing he would knock himself against it.

"The curtains of the bow window follow the shape of the bow, and were distant from the medium at his back quite eight feet, and on his left side a distance of about five feet, a small inlaid writing-bureau with sloping lid separating him from the edge of the curtain on his left.

"After the medium fell, which he did in a sitting position on the floor, with his knees near to his chin, he complained of discomfort, etc., and stiffness, and asked if 'they had been elongating him.'"<sup>1</sup>

How far the supposed elongation in this case was pure illusion, and how far it may have been due to trickery, it is difficult to conjecture. But the description of the medium's violent swaying movements, and, still more, his attitude at the termination of the experiment, are consistent with the view that the "elongation" was effected by some simple mechanism, such as steel stilts, concealed in his boots and

<sup>1</sup> I received an account of this incident verbally from Mr. C. J. M. Shaw in November, 1900; the written account above quoted is dated 6th February, 1901.

trousers. That Home, however, used concealed apparatus of the kind is, I should think, improbable. The evidence in his case, either from want of detail, length of time between event and record, or the attendant circumstances, such as feebleness of illumination, is so defective that it is easier to attribute the results recorded to illusion, which Home may no doubt have eked out on occasion by such devices as slipping his feet half out of his boots and standing on tip-toe, or supporting himself on convenient articles of furniture.

I have reserved for the last what is at once the least readily explicable and the best attested of all the phenomena presented by Home. The evidence for the fire-ordeal is abundant; it is in some cases of high quality; and, from the nature of the experiment, the illumination of the room was generally more adequate than in the case of the levitations and elongations.

Mr. Crookes thus describes two occasions on which he was a witness of the fire-ordeal. The first account is extracted from a contemporary letter to Mrs. Honywood, describing a séance which took place on April 28th, 1871:—

“At Mr. Home’s request, whilst he was entranced, I went with him to the fireplace in the back drawing-room. He said, ‘We want you to notice particularly what Dan is doing.’ Accordingly I stood close to the fire and stooped down to it, when he put his hands in. He very deliberately pulled the lumps of hot coal off, one at a time, with his right hand, and touched one which was bright red. He then said, ‘The power is not strong on Dan’s hand, as we have been influencing the handkerchief most. It is more difficult to influence an inanimate body like that than living flesh, so, as the circumstances were favourable, we thought we would show you that we could prevent a red-hot coal from burning a handkerchief. We will collect more power on the handkerchief and repeat it before you. Now!’

“Mr. Home then waved the handkerchief about in the air two or three times, held it above his head, and then folded it up and laid it on his hand like a cushion; putting his other hand into the fire, he took out a large lump of cinder red-hot at the lower part, and placed the red part on the handkerchief. Under ordinary circumstances it would have been in a blaze. In about half a minute he took it off the handkerchief with his hand, saying, ‘As the power is not strong, if we leave the coal longer it will burn.’ He then put it on his hand and brought it to the table in the front room, where all but myself had remained seated.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. vi. pp. 103, 104.

The next account is from Mr. Crookes' detailed notes of a séance which took place on the 9th of May, 1871. At the beginning of the séance the room was lit by four candles; a wood fire, somewhat dull, was burning in the grate. After various manifestations, two of the candles were extinguished. Mr. Home went to the fire, took out a piece of red-hot charcoal, which he placed on a folded cambric handkerchief, borrowed for the purpose from one of the guests. He fanned the charcoal to a white heat with his breath, but the handkerchief was only burnt in one small hole.<sup>1</sup> After this exhibition—

“Mr. Home again went to the fire, and after stirring the hot coal about with his hand, took out a red-hot piece nearly as big as an orange, and putting it on his right hand, covered it over with his left hand, so as to almost completely enclose it, and then blew into the small furnace thus extemporised until the lump of charcoal was nearly white-hot, and then drew my attention to the lambent flame which was flickering over the coal and licking round his fingers; he fell on his knees, looked up in a reverent manner, held up the coal in front, and said, ‘Is not God good? Are not His laws wonderful?’”<sup>2</sup>

Amongst the other persons who have left on record their testimony to this manifestation are Lord Lindsay, Lord Adare, H. D. Jencken, W. M. Wilkinson, S. C. Hall, W. H. Harrison, Mrs. Honywood, and Miss Douglas.<sup>3</sup>

From the several accounts published it would appear that an exhibition of this kind, in this respect indeed resembling the levitations and the elongations, was only vouchsafed to a few privileged and, if the word may be allowed in this connection, “trained” witnesses. The experiment was obviously a delicate one, and peculiarly liable to miscarriage. Thus, it was checked on one occasion by one of the witnesses starting in alarm from his chair;<sup>4</sup> on another by the irruption of two uninvited witnesses;<sup>5</sup> it failed on two occasions at Glasgow because the conditions were “too positive,” or the witnesses had too little faith.<sup>6</sup>

It is to be remembered, further, that though Home was the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Crookes tells us that he tested the handkerchief afterwards in his laboratory, and found that it had not been chemically prepared to resist the action of fire.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. vi. p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> See especially the *Dialectical Society's Report*; letters from “Honestas” (H. D. Jencken) in *Human Nature*, vols. ii., iii., iv.; *Journal S. P. R.* for July, 1889; *Spirit People*, by W. H. Harrison; *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, by Dr. A. R. Wallace, p. 166, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Home*, p. 388.

<sup>5</sup> “Uninvited,” that is, by the medium (see *Journal S. P. R.*, July, 1889, p. 126).

<sup>6</sup> *Human Nature*, vol. iv. pp. 91 and 132.

chief exponent of this feat in modern times, it was by no means peculiar to him. In the annals of Spiritualism there are several records of similar manifestations through other mediums, chiefly in America. In England rivals in this line were rare; but I have come across a case more recent than any of Home's. In a letter dated June, 1882, Mrs. William Tebb wrote to me:—

“Only on Friday I was in a circle with five others, when one fell apparently in deep trance, and put his hands over a flame and held them for some time without apparent injury. He also held the flame close to his eyes, to our horror, and we had to beg for the fire test to be stopped. It seemed too much to risk the eyesight in such a way. The burning of the hands we had been able to bear. The man afterwards was apparently no worse.”

But outside the ranks of spirit mediums there are many recorded instances. We need not go back to the Middle Ages for parallels. In the eighteenth century similar portents were exhibited both among the Cevennois<sup>1</sup> and the Convulsionnaires of S. Medard.<sup>2</sup> In more recent times there have been, and no doubt still are, European jugglers who can handle red-hot iron, and play almost incredible tricks with burning substances. Their immunity from injury is understood to be due to careful preparation, the use of alum and other chemical substances, and, generally, to the nice adaptation of means to ends. But besides these stage performances, which are obviously mere feats of skill and endurance, there is, as Mr. Andrew Lang has shown, abundant evidence in modern times of fire-ordeals of a very surprising kind amongst uncivilised, or differently civilised races. We have the testimony of educated Europeans, who have not only seen, but in some instances have actually themselves undergone the ordeal. The chief evidence comes from the Society Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, Japan, and Southern India. In some of these instances, according to the descriptions given

<sup>1</sup> Mr. John Cavalier, who tells the story, was present with a great multitude and saw one Clary, habited in a white straight frock, mount upon a pile of wood, light it himself, and remain there, the flames rising above his head, until the wood was quite spent and there were no more flames. There was no mark of fire on his hair or clothes (*A Cry from the Desert*. London, 1707, p. 51).

<sup>2</sup> Marie Sonet, called the Salamander, on several occasions, in the presence of Carré de Montgeron and others, stretched herself on two chairs over a blazing fire, and remained there for half an hour or more at a time, neither herself nor her clothing being burnt. On another occasion, however, she thrust her booted feet into a burning brazier, until the soles of both boots and stockings were reduced to a cinder, her feet remaining uninjured (P. F. Mathieu, *Histoire des Miraculés*, etc., pp. 262-6. Paris, 1864).

by the European witnesses, the heat was very great, and the period during which the subjects were exposed to it relatively considerable. The insensibility even to severe pain which accompanies states of trance and ecstasy would no doubt account for the subjective immunity of the devotees; but it will hardly explain why the skin of the bare feet and legs was not scorched by the heat which, in some cases, according to the observers, kindled green leaves and melted solder on a thermometer case. A recent account, however, of the fire-ordeal in Tahiti witnessed by Professor Langley, of the Smithsonian Institution,<sup>1</sup> suggests that the marvellous elements in the descriptions given by previous witnesses were possibly due mainly to defective observation. In Professor Langley's presence a native priest, followed by many other natives and ultimately by several Europeans, walked over a shallow pit filled, to the depth of about two feet, with stones, the lower layers of which were unquestionably red-hot and glowing. But Professor Langley observed that the topmost layer was far from being red-hot; that some of the stones could even be touched lightly with the hand; and that, as a matter of fact, the performers carefully picked their way, choosing apparently the coolest places. The stones were too hot for the Europeans to walk over barefooted, but not hot enough, it would seem, to injure the soles of their boots or the hardened native skin. Professor Langley's conclusion is that it was "a most clever and interesting piece of savage magic, but not a miracle"; and that the success of the performance largely depended upon the chief priest's choice of the stones, a porous basalt, which formed an extremely bad conductor of heat. This last observation is of interest in connection with Home's feats, for wood, coals, and coal-cinders form also very bad conductors, as anyone can satisfy himself by actual experiment. A coal, red-hot and blazing at one end, may be held in the bare hand without serious inconvenience, and may be placed on paper without burning it.<sup>2</sup> It is certainly noteworthy that the particular feat of Home's mediumship which is best attested and most difficult to explain should meet with corroborative testimony outside the pale of professional mediumship, unless we stretch that word to include Shamans, medicine-men, and Brahmin priests. But it is to be feared

<sup>1</sup> Letter in *Nature*, Aug. 22nd, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> From the pages of "Uncle Remus," no mean authority, it may be learnt that negroes will take up a live coal in their hands to light their pipes withal.

that the evidence points rather to a skilfully staged illusion than to a new fact in Nature.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole then, while the evidence at present adduced must, I submit, be held insufficient to substantiate the preter-human or, at lowest, preternormal power over material nature claimed for Home and other mediums, it seems possible that the marvels reported were in some cases something more than mere conjuring tricks. At a conjuring performance the spectator's judgment is fooled, but his actual perceptions are probably unimpaired; there is fallacy, but it is of inference and interpretation, not of the senses.<sup>2</sup> In the performances, especially of Home, there appears at times to have been an actual sense-deception, of the type which is commonly known as illusion rather than hallucination; a sense-deception, that is, in which the foundation is laid by impressions received from the world without, though the superstructure may be of imagination all compact. When Lord Lindsay and his friends saw Home elongated or levitated, their perceptive faculties, it is suggested, were misled, in much the same way as Dr. Stoney's friend was misled, when he saw the imaginary tricycle accident, or the spectator at a materialisation séance when he greets the medium dressed up in a white sheet and a nightcap as his grand-

<sup>1</sup> For the evidence as to the fire-ordeal in modern times see Mr. Lang's *Modern Mythology* (1897), chap. xii.; *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xv. p. 2, article by Mr. Lang on "The Fire Walk," and the references there given. See also *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* for July and August, 1899, article by Dr. Pascal on "Les Dompteurs du Feu"; and *Journal S. P. R.*, November, 1900. The latter contains several descriptions of the feat as performed in India; and, in one or two of the instances there described, it would appear that the apparent immunity of the devotees may have been due to careful training and the use of certain skilfully devised precautions. But it is difficult to account in this way for Colonel Gudgeon's experience, who walked in a leisurely way and barefooted with three other Europeans over twelve feet of stones hot enough to bake bread; or for the ceremony at Fiji described by Dr. T. M. Hocken, F.L.S. (both these cases are quoted in Mr. Lang's article above referred to). In an article by R. C. Caldwell on "Demonolatry and Devil Worship" (*Contemporary Review*, Feb., 1876) a case is recorded in which the fire test failed. The priest in this case poured a cauldron of molten lead on his head, and died a few days later from the effects.

<sup>2</sup> It is possible, however, that even in an ordinary conjuring trick there may be sensory hallucination. Thus, when the conjurer pretends to throw the borrowed ring across the stage, he moves his arm as in the act of throwing, and straightway a responsive tinkle is heard from the basin in which the ring is supposed to fall. That at the time the more suggestive spectators actually see the flash of the jewel in its imaginary transit would be difficult to prove; but it is certain that many of them will be found afterwards to have the fallacious memory of having seen it. See Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, p. 117, and the article by Mr. Triplett on the "Psychology of Conjuring Deceptions" there quoted. Mr. Triplett found that 78 children out of 165 whom he tested had the hallucinatory memory of seeing a ball thrown up in the air and disappear.

mother, or as the French sailors were deceived when they mistook the branch of a tree for a raft crowded with their shipwrecked comrades.

The conditions—the subdued light, the emotional stress and expectancy of the sitters—were propitious for sense-deceptions of this kind; and one other factor, illustrated by the example last quoted, may also have contributed to the result. The group of French sailors no doubt assisted and encouraged each other in the erroneous interpretation of what they saw, each contributing some fresh item of confirmation or enlargement. Something of the kind seems liable to occur in any group of persons occupied with common objects of thought or dominated by a common emotion. The ingenious French writer from whom the illustration is borrowed has propounded the theory that in any such group of human beings there is a psychic contagion at work which tends to produce uniformity in action and judgment. And not only, he argues, will the resulting acts and beliefs tend to be uniform, but they will represent the instinctive and subconscious rather than the rational elements of the individual minds composing the group. That a crowd is always more impulsive, more credulous, and more readily suggestible than the average of the individuals composing it is proved by the epidemic enthusiasms and epidemic hallucinations which are recorded at various periods of the world's history to have seized upon large groups of persons, most of whom probably if left to their individual initiative would have been shrewd enough or inert enough to resist the impulse.<sup>1</sup> M. Le Bon's theory was not apparently suggested by experience of spiritualist séances; but such experience certainly lends support to his speculations. After hours of waiting in the semi-darkness, in strained expectation, the hesitancy of the more cautious sitters may, it is conjectured, sometimes be overborne, and the unanimous testimony to the ensuing marvels reflect the hasty inferences and irresponsible judgment of the least critical of the spectators.

If such quasi-hallucinations did in fact occur at Home's séances, his unusual success in producing them may have been due to one of two causes, or to both in combination: to his own impressive power, or to the impressibility of his sitters. As regards the second point, it has already been remarked that the spectators of these higher marvels were

<sup>1</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des Foules*. Paris, 1895.

few, and obviously selected with great care. The success of the fire-ordeal in particular appears to have depended very closely on the quality of the spectators. Moreover, there is a good deal of evidence to show that those who were admitted to Home's séances were highly susceptible to suggestions of various kinds, occasionally taking the form of actual hallucination. Both Lord Adare and the Master of Lindsay constantly saw figures which were unquestionably not material in the dim light of the séance-room. The Master of Lindsay and others saw the successive colours of the rainbow, and afterwards the picture of a landscape, in a crystal placed on Home's head;<sup>1</sup> it is noteworthy that at one of the sub-committee's séances with Home the Master of Lindsay's left arm became quite rigid.<sup>2</sup> Others of the attendants at Home's séances appear to have been hardly less impressible. The Hon. Mrs. E. and others saw at a dark séance troops of phantom figures, lights, and spirit eyes, all of which were invisible to another witness, Mrs. Honeywood.<sup>3</sup> Lady D. is reported to have seen the apparition of a magnificent white flower, as large as a dinner-plate, with long purple stamens.<sup>4</sup> H. D. Jencken mentions having seen strangers to Home entranced at his séances.<sup>5</sup>

There are, then, some grounds for supposing that the habitués of Home's séances exhibited a suggestibility and a tendency to hallucination above the common. Partly this was due, it is likely, to peculiarities of temperament in the witnesses. But it seems possible that in part it may have been due to some power possessed by Home in common with other mediums. Madame Blavatsky appears to have possessed on occasion the power of causing the persons in her train to see visions and dream dreams.<sup>6</sup> And two or

<sup>1</sup> *Dialectical Report*, pp. 206, 259.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49. Note also that in his evidence the Master of Lindsay stated that in youth he had at one time been subject to the hallucination of a black dog (*Report*, p. 216).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 367.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328. The evidence in this case is second-hand.

<sup>5</sup> *Human Nature*, vol. ii. pp. 88 and 144. H. D. Jencken elsewhere states that on one occasion Home, after passing into the trance, went round the circle "mesmerising" the sitters. He then announced that he was about to be elongated, and they saw him elongated accordingly (quoted in Home's *Incidents in my Life*, Second Series, p. 177). At Mr. Crookes' séances some of those present saw hands which were invisible to Mr. Crookes himself; and General Boldero, in a letter to his wife, describing a séance with Home, writes that the ladies said they saw hands, "I myself saw something, but cannot exactly describe what it was" (*S. P. R. Journal*, July, 1889, p. 125).

<sup>6</sup> See a *Modern Priestess of Isis*, Solovoyoff, translated by Walter Leaf, pp. 79-81.

three persons have testified to having seen hallucinatory figures and heard sounds, which may also have been hallucinatory, in company of Miss Freer.<sup>1</sup> There is, then, some evidence for the view that a medium's equipment may include a faculty of inducing false perception in his clients.

<sup>1</sup> See instances given in *The Alleged Haunting of B— House*. London, 1899.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MEDIUMSHIP OF STAINTON MOSES

IN the last chapter an attempt has been made to show that, whilst the grounds for inferring, from the phenomena observed in the presence of so-called mediums, the operation of a new physical force or forces are manifestly insufficient, the effects produced in certain cases, notably by D. D. Home, surpassed those which can reasonably be attributed to conjuring, as that word is commonly understood. We have already glanced at some of the special conditions which, in the exceptional cases referred to, probably helped to generate the illusion apparently experienced by the spectators. But the first and the most potent of these conditions remains to be considered—a condition present at nearly all mediumistic performances and, if not indispensable, at least by the testimony of Spiritualists themselves,<sup>1</sup> conducive to successful results—the predisposition, to wit, to believe in some marvellous power. As already indicated in the discussion on Eglinton's slate-writing performances,<sup>2</sup> this receptive attitude on the part of the spectators gives to the medium an incalculable advantage over the ordinary conjurer. To attempt an analysis of the causes of this predisposition to belief would carry us beyond the limits of the present work. It will suffice here briefly to point to the evidence for its existence, even in persons who were wholly unconscious of any such bias; and to note that in the case of Spiritualism there were many contributory causes beyond the mere love of the marvellous. The attitude of the spectators is perhaps the most striking feature in the history of Animal Magnetism and Spiritualism. We

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Mr. Massey (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. iv. p. 98): "It is antecedently probable that something more is required of the investigator than the attributes of a fair-minded judge—a co-operation, namely . . . which shall at any rate favour and not repress the development of (psychic force) in the medium."

<sup>2</sup> Above, p. 216.

find it, to go no further back than the early years of the nineteenth century, in the unquestioning acceptance by Kerner and other German observers of the dubious feats performed by Madame Hauffe and kindred somnambules; in the eagerness shown by the French magnetisers, from Tardy du Montravel, Billot, and Deleuze, down to Luys, Gibier, Baraduc, and de Rochas, to accept apports, radiant fluids, magnetic transfer, exteriorisation of sensation, and any other marvels which their subjects might present to their notice.

So, in the beginning of the Spiritualist Movement in America, Rogers, J. Bovee Dods, Richmond, and others, who believed in psychic force only, were hardly more exacting of evidence for the monstrous legends to which they gave credence than the more numerous sect who saved themselves much mental labour by referring all the alleged marvels to spirits. The like, as we have shown, may be said of Bray, Atkinson, and Serjeant Cox in our own country, and of contemporary observers on the Continent. We find evidence of the same predisposition in the constant attribution by Spiritualists of mediumistic powers to professional conjurers, and in the ingenious hypotheses put forward to explain away materialisation fiascoes.

The benefit of this half-conscious expectation of the marvellous was extended, of course, to any commonplace trickster who chose to call himself a "medium," but from the published records it seems clear that the most successful performers have been those who possessed special gifts, or employed special artifices, to enhance this latent predisposition. We have already dwelt upon the personal fascination which seems to have been exercised by Home, and the blind confidence in his honesty which he seems to have been able to inspire. A prepossessing manner and an effect of frankness seem to have characterised Foster,<sup>1</sup> Slade, and his manager, Simmons,<sup>2</sup> and may be observed in Duguid and many living mediums. Again, in the case of young girls and children, personal beauty or the apparent ingenuousness of childhood no doubt played their part in disarming criticism.

More potent means to the same end were, for most minds, the various devices employed for trading on the affections or exciting the religious emotions. Of the part played by personation of the dead, and messages to the bereaved from

<sup>1</sup> See various accounts of interviews with Foster printed in the *Spiritual Magazine* for 1862.

<sup>2</sup> See *c.g.* the interview with Slade in the *World*, 30th Aug., 1876.

the spirit world, it is not necessary to speak. But the religious bait, though rarely so conspicuous, was probably not less effective. The Davenport Brothers, as we have seen, carried in their train the Rev. J. B. Ferguson, an eloquent preacher and enthusiastic convert. Many mediums, as we have seen in the case of Home, arrived at the same result by interspersing with physical phenomena religious rhapsodies and exhortations to a higher morality.

But, after all, the most valuable asset of a medium is the trust inspired by his position and reputation. Even when repeated exposures had made it difficult, for the more intelligent Spiritualist at any rate, to uphold through evil and good report the honesty of the professional psychic, their faith in the private medium remained for long unshaken. It was on the phenomena occurring in the presence of private mediums that the late Professor Sidgwick laid most stress, not merely because of the presumption against the existence in their case of that laboriously acquired skill in legerdemain to which it was reasonable to attribute the performance in the case of professionals, but also, and mainly, because of the absence of the grosser motives to fraud.<sup>1</sup>

An attitude of receptivity towards marvels occurring in the presence or through the agency of persons of presumed honesty is not merely natural, but within limits reasonable. My own experience supplies me with an apt illustration of the prepotent influence in such circumstances of a belief in the good faith of the performer. About fifteen years ago<sup>2</sup> some persons of my acquaintance described to me a curious feat performed by one of their friends. The gentleman in question, Mr. C——, possessed, they assured me, a peculiar magnetic force, which enabled him to exercise attraction on objects made of iron. I was invited to meet Mr. C—— a few days later, and after some urgency on my part he consented to give me an exhibition of his powers. Taking the poker from the hearth, he seated himself, and placed the poker upright between his outstretched knees, with its knob resting on the ground. The poker remained at first poised in a vertical position, without any apparent support, and then gently inclined to one side or the other, following the guidance of a finger held two or three inches above it. I accepted the phenomenon in all good faith, as an instance

<sup>1</sup> See his first presidential address to the S.P.R. (*Proc.*, vol. i. p. 7), also vol. i. p. 249; iv. p. 103, etc.

<sup>2</sup> I have unfortunately destroyed my notes of this incident, and relate it from memory.

of a hitherto unsuspected magnetic power latent in the human organism; and it was not until some days later that I learnt from another source the secret of the trick—a loop of human hair attached to the trousers of the operator.

In this case the attitude of unquestioning acceptance which I displayed was due mainly to the assurance previously given me by my hosts (one at least of whom, as I have since learnt, was in the secret) that the performance was not of the nature of conjuring, but a genuine display of abnormal powers. That the means taken in this instance to prepare my mind for the exhibition went beyond the bounds of permissible mystification I am not prepared to say. But in a case recorded by Professor Sidgwick, where a trick of a similar nature was performed on many occasions, in presence of different witnesses, by a gentleman of good social position and some scientific standing, there can be no question that the limits of honour and fair dealing were overstepped. The performer, not content with repeated verbal assurances to that effect, ultimately signed a formal declaration that the phenomena had “not been produced by normal means.”<sup>1</sup>

In these two cases the receptivity of the spectators was based mainly on reliance on the ordinary laws governing social intercourse. But when the personal vanity of the witness is more directly implicated, as in the case of a master who has vaunted the marvels performed by his servant; or when, as between near relatives, the affections are strongly engaged, this receptivity frequently amounts to infatuation. A striking instance of this frame of mind is given by Sir John Forbes.<sup>2</sup> One A. B., a lawyer, invited Forbes to test the clairvoyance of his office boy, George Goble. Forbes, after two or three meetings, conclusively exposed the trickery employed, and Goble, in the presence of his master and others, confessed the imposture. But, after Sir John's departure, the boy pretended that his confession had been extracted from him in mesmeric trance, that he was innocent of conscious imposture, and proceeded to demonstrate, to his master's complete satisfaction, that his clairvoyant powers were in the main genuine.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some account of this case is given in the *Journal S. P. R.*, July, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> *Illustrations of Modern Mesmerism*. London, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> See also in this connection the account given by Forbes of the exposure of the deception employed by Miss Martineau's servant Jane; and compare Miss Martineau's own comments on the subject (*Autobiography*, third edition, vol. ii., p. 198, etc.) Another striking illustration is given above, pp. 91-94.

One of my colleagues on the Council of the S.P.R. has related to me a similar case. Some years since he was asked to investigate the mediumship of two children. After a more or less prolonged inquiry he succeeded in ascertaining that systematic trickery had been practised; trickery of an unusually daring and complicated kind, involving records of a permanent nature which could not be explained away. He obtained confession from the children, and laid his proofs before the father and elder brother, the former a well-known professional man. Their confidence in the children was shaken for the time; but the effect lasted only for a day or two, and then the habit of belief, rooted as it was in the affections, resumed possession. In my own experience I have met with more than one case of the kind, (though I am unfortunately withheld from giving full details) in which, conclusive proof having been obtained of fraud on the part of a private medium, the other members of the circle have chosen to retain their belief in the medium and his phenomena, at the cost of deliberately closing eyes and ears to the incriminating evidence.

In the case which is now to be discussed the medium united all the advantages above referred to. He possessed the friendship and perfect trust of his sitters; he was aided by the religious emotions inspired by his trance utterances; he could appeal to an unstained character and the record of a life of honourable activity.

William Stainton Moses,<sup>1</sup> known for many years to

<sup>1</sup> The account of Stainton Moses' life and work given in the text is derived, apart from the author's personal knowledge of the subject of the memoir and conversation with some of his friends, from the following sources:—

(a) The medium's own publications: *Psychography*, London, 1878; *Spirit Identity*, 1879; *Higher Aspects of Spiritualism*, 1880; and the *Spirit Teachings*, which, originally published in 1883, were reprinted after his death in a *Memorial Edition* (London, 1894), with a short biographical notice by Mr. Charlton Speer, the son of the Dr. Speer mentioned in the text. This latter work will be referred to hereafter as the *Memorial Edition*.

(b) A series of articles, "Records of Private Séances," which appeared in the Spiritualist newspaper *Light* in the years 1892, 1893, the earlier portion being under Moses' own editorship and supervision. These records consisted of contemporary notes of the séances made by Mrs. Speer, and of portions of Stainton Moses' own fuller and more finished reports of the same sittings.

(c) Two articles by Mr. F. W. H. Myers, in *Proceedings S. P. R.*, vols. ix. and xi., entitled "The Experiences of W. Stainton Moses." In these articles Mr. Myers included much evidence heretofore unpublished, the chief items being extracts from Mr. Moses' MS. note-books, testimonials to character, and reports of séances from private friends.

(d) From 1874 onwards Mr. Moses was a frequent contributor to the various Spiritualist periodicals, chiefly *Human Nature*, the *Spiritualist*, and *Light*; but I have not found it practicable, from the limits of space, to refer in detail to these contributions.

Spiritualists all over the world under his pseudonym of "M.A., Oxon.," was born in November, 1839, at Donington,<sup>1</sup> in Lincolnshire, his father being head master of the Grammar School there. At Bedford Grammar School, which he entered in his sixteenth year, he carried off several prizes, and ultimately an exhibition. He matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, at Michaelmas, 1858, taking a third class in Classical Moderations at Michaelmas, 1860. Shortly before his final examination his health unfortunately broke down, and he was compelled to go abroad for a year to recruit, and content himself with a pass degree. On leaving Oxford he was ordained, and from 1863 to 1870 acted as a curate, first in the Isle of Man and later in the West of England. Towards the end of this period his health, never apparently robust, again failed, and an affection of the throat finally compelled him to give up parish work. In 1870 accordingly he came up to London, and took up his residence with some friends, Dr. and Mrs. Stanhope Speer, acting as tutor to their young son. In 1871 or 1872 he obtained the appointment of English master in University College School, which he held until 1889, when failing health compelled him to retire. He died in 1892. His constitution during the last few years of his life appears to have almost completely broken down. He suffered from extreme depression and nervous prostration, and severe neuralgic pains. The immediate cause of his death, it is understood, was Bright's disease. Alike as a parish clergyman, a schoolmaster, and a private tutor, he seems to have discharged his duties efficiently and conscientiously, and to the day of his death he retained the respect and often the warm regard of those who were brought into contact with him.

But the foregoing brief account expresses but one side of the life of Stainton Moses. In the spring of 1872, at the instance of his friend Mrs. Speer, he read R. Dale Owen's book, *The Debatable Land*. Much impressed with what he read, he visited alone or in company with the Speers various mediums, Lottie Fowler, Williams, and Home being the chief, and sat in many private circles. Soon he developed mediumistic powers of his own, which manifested themselves first in physical phenomena, later in automatic writing. He rapidly came to the front of the spiritualistic movement, took a large part in founding the British National Associa-

<sup>1</sup> So Mr. Myers (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 248). In the *Dictionary of National Biography* the name is spelt "Dorrington." There are places of either name in Lincolnshire.

tion of Spiritualists, served on the Council of the Psychological Society, and until 1886, when he resigned because of the Society's attitude towards Eglinton and other public mediums, on that of the Society for Psychical Research, and was president, from 1884 until his death, of the London Spiritual Alliance. He also acted for many years as the editor of *Light*. It may be claimed for him, indeed, that he was at once the most prominent figure in the domestic activities of the Spiritualist movement; the ablest and most respected champion of the Spiritualist position; and in his own person an exponent of the various phases of mediumistic power second only to Home himself.

Of the chief events of Moses' mediumship we have fortunately very full records. From June, 1872, he sat regularly for some years, sometimes as frequently as four or five times a week, with his two old friends, Dr. and Mrs. Speer; Mr. F. W. Percival and a few other specially favoured persons being from time to time admitted to the circle. Of the happenings at these circles we have in the first place an account by the medium himself, compiled, since during many of the manifestations he was entranced and oblivious of what was taking place, largely from information supplied to him by the other witnesses; we have also an account by Mrs. Speer, somewhat briefer as regards the physical phenomena, but adequate; and a still briefer and more fragmentary record, covering a portion only of the period, from Dr. Speer. There are also a few independent accounts by Mr. Percival, Mr. Charlton T. Speer, and others, not regular members of the circle. These documents are fairly concordant; the most noticeable difference being that the medium himself records many details, which do not appear in the other accounts, of tests and corroborative circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

From Mrs. Speer's account it would appear that up to the middle of August, 1872, the phenomena observed consisted exclusively of raps and movements of the table with contact.<sup>2</sup> On the 30th July the raps showed intelligence for the first time, and answered the questions of the sitters. On the 17th of August of the same year, after an intermission of about two weeks, Moses joined the Speers at Douglas,

<sup>1</sup> Two or three instances of this kind are quoted in the footnotes on this and subsequent pages.

<sup>2</sup> Moses (*Light*, 23rd Jan. 1892) records, however, that on the 12th June, 1872, at a séance at which Mrs. Speer and her two cousins were present with him, well-marked movements of the table were observed *without contact of any kind*.

Isle of Man. That evening there were loud and frequent raps at the séance, and forty-nine spirits announced their presence. On the following morning, Sunday, "a butter-knife was lifted out of a deep glass butter-dish and thrown down upon the table, no visible hand near it."<sup>1</sup> Later in the day a memorable manifestation took place, which is thus recorded by Dr. Speer:—

"On Sunday morning, August 18th, 1872, my wife and family, and the Rev. W. Moses, who had only arrived on Friday night, went to St. George's Church, Douglas, Isle of Man. On returning the latter went into his bedroom, and immediately came out and called me to witness the manner in which, during his absence, certain articles of toilet, etc., to wit, a writing-case, a fly-book, and a pocket note-book, had been symmetrically placed on the centre of the bed. We at once noticed the crucial appearance exhibited and hazarded a guess as to the intention thereof. We left the room and shortly after returned, when we found that a skull-cap lying on the chest of drawers had been placed on the bed-post, while the clerical white collar, which Mr. M. had removed not many minutes before, had been placed like a halo around the upper portion of the developing cross. (It should here be noticed that our express surmises as to the design apparently in progress were confirmed by various loud, distinct raps on the foot-board.) We again left the room for a time, and found that now the lower limb of the cross had been lengthened by the addition of two ivory-backed clothes-brushes. We descended to dinner, having locked the door and taken the key with us.<sup>2</sup> After dinner, and while sitting round the table at dessert, the conversation naturally (on the children leaving) reverted to these extraordinary proceedings, when immediately manifestations commenced all around Mr. Moses—raps on the table, thuds on the floor, raps, loud and repeated, on the back of his chair. A tune played on the table with my fingers was accurately imitated; the table with all on it was moved out of its place and everything shaken. This was put a stop to by request, but the milder phenomena persisted, and, it may be said once for all, continued till nine p.m. Mr. M. suggested that I should go up to his room again. I did so, and found, on *unlocking* the door, that two paper-knives had been placed like rays to the right and left of the cross-bar of the cross. I again locked the door, put the key in my pocket, and came downstairs. In about half an hour we returned and found that two additional articles had been appended. We again left and locked the door, and on return after another half-hour the cross had been fully developed into halo and rays, while the skull-cap had been placed above all as in a crown."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Speer, in *Light*, Feb. 13th, 1892. Moses (*ibid.*) says the butter-knife was "thrown on the table *under the eyes of us all.*"

<sup>2</sup> Moses says (*Light*, 13th Feb., 1892) that Dr. Speer locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 265.

Finally a piece of paper and pencil were left in the room, and a monogram containing the initials of two friends of the medium's was subsequently found written thereon.

In Mrs. Speer's records of the following day we find the first account of two manifestations which were specially characteristic of Moses' mediumship:—

"August 19th.—Mr. S. M. and Dr. S. sat alone, and had letters and pamphlets brought to them, *taken from the room in which I was then sitting in the light*. Papers and gloves were thrown upon the table, also a quantity of scent."

At later séances "apports" of this kind were of frequent occurrence; amongst the objects so introduced, sometimes by request of the sitters, sometimes spontaneously, were books, opera-glasses, gloves, pincushions, shells, large stones, snuff-boxes, candlesticks, a chamois horn, and Parian statuettes. Seed pearls, cameos, jewels, and other precious objects were also occasionally brought and given to the sitters. The introduction of liquid scent—sometimes of familiar perfume, heliotrope, jasmine, verbena, sandalwood, sometimes unrecognised—was again a frequent feature in the séances from this time onwards. Sometimes it would be sprayed through the air, sometimes poured as from a vessel into the upturned hands of the sitters; frequently it would be found oozing from the medium's head and running down, like the precious ointment of Aaron, to his beard.

Under the 30th August Mrs. Speer's diary contains the bald record: "Many things were brought from different parts of the house through the locked doors this evening. Mr. S. M. was levitated, and when I felt for his feet they were hanging in mid-air, while his head must have almost touched the ceiling."<sup>1</sup> Dr. Speer, recording a "levitation" at a later date (Dec. 3rd, 1872), contents himself with remarking: "Mr. M. was floated about, and a large dining-room chair was placed on the table." Mrs. Speer in her independent account says, "The physical manifestations were very strong. Mr. S. M. was levitated." She adds that they sat in firelight, the séances as a rule being held in darkness more or less complete.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Moses' own account of this incident (*Human Nature*, 1874, pp. 172, 173; *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 261) is much fuller. He records that he was fully conscious of floating about the room, and that he placed a pencil firmly against his chest and marked the spot opposite to him on the wall paper. This mark was afterwards ascertained to be more than six feet from the floor.

<sup>2</sup> *Light*, March 5th, 1892.

On the 22nd August Moses' hand wrote automatically, for the first time in séance. On the 19th of the following month "direct" writing was obtained. A piece of paper was placed under the table in the dark, and when the gas was lighted a message was found signed "Imperator."<sup>1</sup> Direct writing was afterwards obtained on several occasions, amongst the spirits who thus communicated being Charles Louis Napoleon Buonaparte.

On the 19th December, 1872, the controlling spirit, "Imperator," spoke (in the darkness) in the direct voice. Thereafter this manifestation also was of frequent occurrence.

On December 31st yet another new manifestation was vouchsafed. Hitherto the medium alone had been privileged to see spirit lights and phantom forms at the circle. On this occasion both Dr. and Mrs. Speer saw a large cross of light behind the medium's head, and later "a line of light of great brilliancy, reaching several feet high and moving from side to side."<sup>2</sup> This column of light was seen again on May 11th, 1873. But on May 25th Mrs. Speer records that globe-shaped lights floated about the room; and from this date onwards the spirit lights seen, as described by both Dr. and Mrs. Speer, were mostly globular, about the size of an orange, or rather larger. Mrs. Speer first describes these lights in detail in notes of a sitting held on 23rd June, 1873:—

"This evening we were told to sit for spirit lights. We sat in a large upstairs room communicating with a smaller one; the door between the rooms was left open, a curtain drawn across, and a large square opening made in it at the top part of the curtain. Mr. S. M. sat in the small room, Dr. S. and Mrs. S. in the larger one, at a small table just outside the curtain. Mr. S. M. was quickly entranced, and remained so for an hour. During that time many beautiful spirit lights appeared through the aperture of the curtain; some were very large, and shaped like the egg of an ostrich and quite as large. The colour varied; some resembled pure moonlight, others had a blue tinge, while others were dazzlingly bright. They suddenly appeared at the opening, moved around, and then vanished, when another kind would come, to disappear in the same mysterious manner. Musical sounds then came around us. Both rooms were often quite illuminated through the brightness of the lights."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Light*, 13th Feb., 1892. Moses adds (*Light*, 27th Feb.) that before placing the paper under the table he tore off a corner and handed it to Dr. Speer, in order to identify the paper subsequently. On the manner in which this "test" can be evaded see the account of a similar test with Duguid (above, pp. 86-7).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12th March, 1892. Dr. Speer adds, "This column of light I placed my hand upon, as seen upon the wall" (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 297).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30th July, 1892.

The only other physical phenomena calling for special notice are the musical sounds. At first the only sounds were raps and blows. But in the early months of 1873 "electrical" sounds were heard. On March 24th Mrs. Speer records the occurrence of a sound which Dr. Speer likened to the notes of a stringed instrument sounding in the air.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter musical sounds developed rapidly in frequency and variety. In September, 1874, Mrs. Speer gives a detailed catalogue of them, enumerating ten or more varieties, including the harp, tambourine, fairy-bells, and various stringed instruments, and ascribing their production to eight different spirits. Amongst these disembodied musicians, it is interesting to note, was that versatile spirit Benjamin Franklin.<sup>2</sup>

From this brief sketch of the physical manifestations it will be clear that the mediumship of Stainton Moses, in this aspect at all events, added nothing to the evidence for Spiritualism. If we leave out of the account for the moment the difficulties involved in the supposition that a man of his character and antecedents should lend himself to trickery, there is nothing in the manifestations produced in his presence to suggest any other explanation. All that was done has been done again and again by fraudulent mediums and naughty children, and done under conditions much less favourable. Stainton Moses had the advantage of darkness more complete than that afforded to most mediums. For the greater part of the long period under review his only sitters were two old friends, to whom the bare suspicion of dishonesty on the part of their tried and trusted fellow-worker, the man whom they had selected to be the tutor of their son, would have seemed a monstrous thing. No tests of any kind were imposed, and the controlling spirit, speaking through the mouth of the medium, sternly repressed any attempt in that direction.<sup>3</sup> The introduction of strangers was also discouraged;<sup>4</sup> and though a few

<sup>1</sup> *Light*, 11th June, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 28th Jan., 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Here is one instance. On Sunday, 1st December, 1872, Dr. Speer had suggested, whilst a spirit message was being rapped out, that all hands should be removed from the table. The manifestations at once ceased, and were not resumed that evening. "Imperator" failed to attend at the next two sittings; and being questioned on his reappearance, on Sunday the 8th, as to the reason for his silence, "he alluded"—to quote Mrs. Speer's notes—"to the time when Dr. S. wished for a test in the middle of a sentence. The medium and myself thought it unwise and unnecessary, hence the inharmony. We then asked, 'Were you offended with Dr. S.?' 'Yes' (was rapped out very decidedly)" (*Light*, 5th March, 1892).

<sup>4</sup> See Mrs. Speer's record of 15th December, 1872: "'Imperator' was most indignant that we had allowed a stranger into our séance-room."

favoured persons were admitted later, their presence seemed to exercise an injurious influence over the physical manifestations, so that the phenomena were often limited to elevating discourse from "Imperator."<sup>1</sup>

It was hardly to be expected that in a circle constituted as described actual proofs of fraud should come to light. But it is noteworthy that even in the records written by the Speer family, under the influence of a strong prepossession in favour of the medium, there are many suspicious circumstances. Thus Dr. Speer records that on one occasion, stretching out his hand in the dark, he encountered another hand in the middle of the table, where no hand should have been: the medium ostensibly sitting at some distance from the table.<sup>2</sup> The spirit lights are described as hard, round, and cold to the touch, a description consistent with the supposition that they consisted of round bottles of phosphorised oil. At some of the early sances Dr. and Mrs. Speer were requested to rub their hands together quickly when the lights appeared, in order to generate power—a device which might naturally suggest itself to a trickster as a convenient means of checking the impulses of unseasonable curiosity.<sup>3</sup> It is to be noted further that hands, and occasionally a forearm, were seen holding the lights.<sup>4</sup> Again, in a passage to which my attention was directed by Dr. Hodgson, we have the record—by the medium himself—of what appears to have been a miscarriage to the bottle of phosphorised oil. After describing the appearance of several large lights, Mr. Moses writes:—

"Suddenly there arose from below me, apparently under the table, or near the floor, right under my nose, a cloud of luminous smoke, just like phosphorus. It fumed up in great clouds, until I seemed to be on fire, and rushed from the room in a panic. I was fairly frightened, and could not tell what was happening. I rushed to the door and opened it, and so to the front door. My hands seemed to be ablaze, and left their impress on the door and handles. It blazed for a while after I had touched it, but soon went out, and no smell or trace remained. . . . There seemed to be no end of smoke. It smelt distinctly phosphoric, but the smell evaporated as soon as I got out of the room into the air."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See especially Mrs. Speer's records of the sances to which Mr. Percival was admitted in the summer of 1873.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 314.

<sup>3</sup> *Light*, 13th Aug., 1892; *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 323, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 13th Aug., 1892; *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 317, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. xi. p. 45.

Again, note this significant episode, recorded by Mr. Charlton Speer as one of the two most satisfactory "test" incidents in his experience :—

"We were sitting one night as usual, and I had in front of me, with my hand resting upon it, a piece of notepaper with a pencil close by. Suddenly Stainton Moses, who was sitting exactly opposite to me, exclaimed, 'There is a very bright column of light behind you.' Soon afterwards he said that the column of light had developed into a spirit form. I asked him if the face was familiar to him, and he replied in the negative, at the same time describing the head and features. When the séance was concluded I examined my sheet of paper, which my hand had never left, and found written on it a message and the signature."<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps fair to assume that when Mr. Speer's attention was thus directed to what was going on behind his back, he momentarily at least diverted his attention from the paper on which his hand rested.

Mr. Moses himself, in his published writings,<sup>2</sup> was wont to attach considerable importance to the evidence for the doctrines of Spiritualism afforded by the communications, ostensibly from the spirits of deceased persons, received through his mediumship. Of communicators who thus claimed to furnish definite proof of their identity, Mr. Myers, who has collected the evidence under this head in a convenient form, reckons thirty-eight in all.<sup>3</sup> Of these thirty-eight persons some had been known in life to Moses himself or to other members of the circle; some, such as Bishop Wilberforce, Swedenborg, or President Garfield, were historical personages; yet others were individuals of no special eminence, and without any apparent point of contact with Mr. Moses or his circle.

In one important particular the evidence of identity in these cases is superior to that generally furnished through so-called clairvoyant mediums. In marked contrast to the vague generalities which commonly pass for tests, Mr. Moses' spirits were prodigal of names, dates, and other concrete facts which lend themselves to ready verification. Here is an example: "On February 28th, 1874, a spirit came by raps and gave the name 'Rosamira.' She said that she died at Torquay on January 10th, 1874, and that she had lived at Kilburn.<sup>4</sup> She stated that her husband's name was 'Lan-

<sup>1</sup> *Memorial Edition*, Introduction, p. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Especially in his *Spirit Identity*.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xi. pp. 64, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Moses lived for some years at Birchington Road, Kilburn.

caster''; and added later that his christian name was "Ben." As a matter of fact the whole of these particulars, given at the séance at the end of February, are to be found in the notice of the death in the *Daily Telegraph* of January 15th preceding.<sup>1</sup>

The case is typical. Mr. Moses' spirits habitually furnished accurate obituaries, or gave such other particulars of their lives as could be gathered from the daily papers, from published biographies, or from the *Annual Register* and other works of reference. All the spirits, indeed, gave their names, with one exception—an exception so significant that the case is worth recording. The *Pall Mall Gazette* for February 21st, 1874, contains the following item of intelligence: "A cabdriver out of employment this morning threw himself under a steam-roller which was being used in repairing the road in York Place, Marylebone, and was killed immediately." Mr. Moses was present at a séance that evening, and his hand was controlled, ostensibly by the spirit of the unhappy suicide, to write an account of the incident, and to draw a rough picture of a horse attached to a vehicle. The name of the dead man, it will be seen, does not appear in the newspaper account, and out of the thirty-eight spirits who gave proofs of their identity through the mediumship of Mr. Moses this particular spirit alone chose to remain anonymous.<sup>2</sup>

No account of the life of Stainton Moses could be complete without some notice of his *Spirit Teachings*, a series of automatic writings which began in March, 1872, and continued uninterruptedly for ten years from that date, and with lessened frequency down to the time of his death. At first cramped and hesitating, the writing soon came to flow readily, and, according to his own statement, without any conscious intervention on the part of the mortal penman. Indeed, Moses tells us that he was able to read a book or otherwise occupy his mind during their production. The communications were in different handwritings and purported to proceed from different spirits, of whom "Imperator," the guiding spirit at the physical séances, was the chief. The original writings, which fill twenty-four note-books, were left to Moses' literary executors at his death, and are still,

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xi. pp. 75 and 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. xi. p. 77. In a former work, *Studies in Psychical Research*, pp. 125-33, I have given a detailed analysis of these alleged spirit messages received by Mr. Stainton Moses. To that account I would refer the reader who desires further information on the subject.

I believe, preserved for inspection. But the *Spirit Teachings* published in his lifetime contained copious selections, especially from the earlier writings, chiefly those given in the year 1873. At the time when the automatic writings began Stainton Moses, it will be remembered, had but recently left behind him seven or eight years of active work as a parish clergyman. He still professed Christianity, and though he soon ceased to wear the distinguishing dress of an Anglican priest, the title "Rev." continued, at any rate for many years, to be prefixed to his name in the prospectus of University College School and other documents.<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, therefore, these earlier communications purporting to proceed from disembodied spirits were occupied almost exclusively with the problems of theology and eschatology. "Imperator," or some other spirit, writing through the medium's hand, would expound the Spiritualist creed, gently leading away from the orthodox Christian doctrine, and Mr. Moses in his own proper person would question, hesitate, and hint doubts as to the lawfulness and the authority of the new teaching. Throughout the years 1872 and 1873 we can trace in the automatic writing the gradual widening of the writer's theological views, under a guidance which, whether proceeding, as the communications asserted, from the ministrations of an angelic fellowship, or merely the reflection in his own inner spirit of the new beliefs and modes of thought at work in the environment, did, in fact, represent influences foreign to those which had hitherto shaped his conscious thought. Here is an extract from a discourse written by "Imperator" in June, 1873, setting forth the reign of law in the world to come:—

"Immutable laws govern the results of deeds. Deeds of good advance the spirit, whilst deeds of evil degrade and retard it. Happiness is found in progress, and in gradual assimilation to the godlike and the perfect. The spirit of divine love animates the acts, and in mutual blessing the spirits find their happiness. For them there is no craving for sluggish idleness, no cessation of desire for progressive advancement in knowledge. Human passions and human needs and wishes are gone with the body, and the spirit lives a spirit life of purity, progress, and love. Such is its heaven.

"We know of no hell save that within the soul, a hell which is fed by the flame of unpurified and untamed lust and passion, which is kept alive by remorse of agony and sorrow, which is fraught with the pangs that spring unbidden from the results of past

<sup>1</sup> His name appears as Rev. W. Stainton Moses in the list of members of the S. P. R. for 1885, the last year of his membership.

misdeeds, and from which the only escape lies in retracing the steps and in cultivating the qualities which shall bear fruit in love and knowledge of God.

"Of punishment we know indeed, but it is not the vindictive lash of an angry God, but the natural outcome of conscious sin, remediable by repentance and atonement and reparation personally wrought out in pain and shame, not by coward cries for mercy and by feigned assent to statements which ought to create a shudder."<sup>1</sup>

The matter is, no doubt, well expressed, and, as the medium himself said of the discourse from which the extract is taken, it seems rational, if not in accordance with popular conceptions of Christian doctrine. But it needed not that a spirit should descend from the seventh sphere—such in effect was "Imperator's" position—to preach views which could be heard from any Unitarian pulpit.

Here is another extract, undated, but written apparently a little later in the same year, descriptive of the triumph of Spiritualism. The style shows "Imperator" at his best:—

"We tell you, friend, that the end draws nigh. It shall not be always so. As it was in the days which preceded the coming of the Son of Man, as it has been in the midnight hours which precede every daydawn from on high, so it is now. The night of ignorance is fast passing away. The shackles which priestcraft has hung around struggling souls shall be knocked off; and in place of fanatical folly and ignorant Pharisaism and misty speculation you shall have a reasonable religion and a divine faith. You shall have richer views of God, truer notions of your duty and destiny; you shall know that they whom you call dead are alive amongst you; living, as they lived on earth, only more really; ministering to you with undiminished love; animated in their unwearying intercourse with the same affection which they bore to you whilst they were yet incarned.

"It was said of the Christ that He brought life and immortality to light. It is true in a wider sense than the writer meant. The outcome of the revelation of Christ, which is only now beginning to be seen amongst men, is, in its truest sense, the abolition of death, the demonstration of immortality. In the great truth—man never dies, cannot die, *however he may wish it*—in that great truth rests the key to the future. The immortality of man, held not as an article of faith, a clause in a creed, but as a piece of personal knowledge and individual experience, this is the keynote of the religion of the future. In its trail come all the grand truths we teach, all the noblest conceptions of duty, the grandest views of destiny, the truest realisations of life.

<sup>1</sup> *Memorial Edition*, pp. 77, 78.

"You cannot grasp them now. They daze and bewilder your spirit, unaccustomed to such a glare. But mark well, friend, brief space shall pass before you recognise in our words the lineaments of truth, the aspect of the divine. + IMPERATOR."<sup>1</sup>

The doctrines taught were, of course, not novel, nor such as need lay claim to celestial inspiration. They were the common property of a considerable group of thinkers at that time who, whilst retaining a belief in a future life, found themselves unable to accept the popular interpretation of the Christian tradition; they are to be found in particular in all the Spiritualist writings, from the *Great Harmonia* of Andrew Jackson Davis to the *Debatable Land* of Robert Dale Owen, which had formed the medium's propædeutic in mediumistic lore. With Moses, indeed, as a man of good education, the ideas are clothed in more becoming form, the whole teaching is more consistent and reasonable than with most of his predecessors. The style rarely effervesces, on the one hand, with sounding rhetoric and sparkling incoherence, nor degenerates, on the other, into bald commonplace. The writings are surprisingly uniform in their sober rationalism, are characterised by the loftiest ethical pretensions and by something like genuine religious fervour. But, after all, as with most automatic utterances, the thought is lacking in definiteness, as the language in which it is embodied is lacking in distinction. We meet with the continual repetition of similar sentiments, clothed in almost identical words. After a few pages of the kind of stuff above quoted we find we are no forwarder with the argument, and we see no particular reason why "Imperator" should not go on for ever, like a recurring decimal. Of mundane literature the *Spirit Teachings* most resemble sermons, but they are not amongst the best of their class.

Such, in brief, were the works of the Reverend William Stainton Moses. It remains to construct, if we can, an intelligible conception of the man. It seems to me clear, as I have tried to show, that there is nothing in the nature of either the physical or the mental phenomena described to require the operation of any supernatural agency. And in default of any sufficient evidence from other sources that physical manifestations of this kind are ever due to such hypothetical agencies, it seems reasonable to conclude that all the marvels reported at the séances were, in fact, produced by the medium's own hands: that it was he who tilted the table and produced the raps; that the scents, the seed pearls,

<sup>1</sup> *Memorial Edition*, p. 133.

and the Parian statuettes were brought into the room in his pockets; and that the spirit lights were, in fact, nothing more than bottles of phosphorised oil. Nor would the feats described have required any special skill on the medium's part. With the exception of the spirit lights—the preparation of which in the circle as constituted probably involved little risk—the things done are all such as tricky children and novices generally have practised for generations past on their credulous friends. I doubt if this Moses could have competed with Jannes and Jambres.

But here the real difficulties of the case begin. That Stainton Moses, being apparently of sane mind, should deliberately have entered upon a course of systematic and cunningly concerted trickery, for the mere pleasure of mystifying a small circle of friends, or in the hope of any petty personal advantage, such, for instance, as might be found in the enhanced social importance attaching to a position midway between prestidigitator and prophet—this is scarcely credible. The whole course of his previous life as a hard-working parish priest, his contemporary career in the world outside as a successful and respected schoolmaster, the apparently sincere religious feeling shown in the *Spirit Teachings*, all combine to contradict such a supposition. Nor is it readily conceivable that such a petty swindler would have carried on the dull details of his chicanery to the end, and have even left behind him, amongst his profitless records, fresh mystifications whose consummation he could not hope to see.<sup>1</sup>

The annals of apocryphal literature no doubt furnish some kind of parallel. The author of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* kept his secret to the end; John Payne Collier died protesting the genuineness of his second folio; Poggio Bracciolini and his contemporaries never revealed the mystery of those "brown Greek manuscripts" which it was their good fortune to discover in such suspicious abundance. All these no doubt found a sufficient reward in the mystification of their public, or the mortification of their rivals. But such an explanation hardly seems to fit Stainton Moses.

It is scarcely less difficult to conceive of any impersonal motive for such prolonged and squalid deception which could seem adequate to a sane mind. The writers of apocryphal gospels and the fabricators of monkish charters and title-

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Myers' account generally of the communications in Mr. Moses' note-books, and especially some messages purporting to have come from a recently deceased lady, which were never apparently made public in any form in the lifetime of the medium (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xi. p. 96).

deeds sought to benefit their order or to enforce their peculiar interpretations of the truth; the author of *Icon Basilike* found his earthly reward in a bishopric. If we may trust the evidence of the *Spirit Teachings*, Moses' mind was passing, in the early days of his mediumship, through an intellectual crisis of a not uncommon kind. Could he have hoped, in those days of failing ideals, to buttress up for others by fraud a faith which to his eyes now rested on too precarious a foundation? Or, conversely, was his mediumship a subtle device to bring discredit upon the search after evidence of a future life? Neither conjecture is of a kind to carry conviction.

To me it seems frankly impossible to construct a working hypothesis on the premiss that Stainton Moses was of normal mind, and actuated by motives which appeal to normal men. There appears, indeed, to have been little trace in his outward life, at any rate during his years of active work, of nervous instability or obvious abnormality of any kind. As a schoolboy he is known to have been a somnambulist, and it is on record that on one occasion he was seen by his brother to write in his sleep an excellent essay on a subject which had been set to him for the morrow's task. Again, at the end of his life, during a period of extreme nervous prostration, he became a victim, like many other mediums, to the drink habit. But to those who as mere acquaintances met him in the committee-room, on the lecture platform, or in ordinary social intercourse, he was just an educated English gentleman, of an irritable egotism, a somewhat ponderous conversation, and perhaps deficient humour, but in no way transgressing the bounds even of convention.<sup>1</sup> And yet there can be little doubt that the clue to the enigma of his life must be sought in the annals of morbid psychology. The question will be further considered in the next two chapters, in connection with the history of other notable mediums.

<sup>1</sup> My own personal acquaintance with Stainton Moses was but slight. I had for some years, from 1880 to 1886, been in the habit of meeting him on committees of which we were both members, and had spent a few evenings in his company. At one of these—a tête-à-tête at his own house—I had spent two or three hours in discussing the phenomena exhibited through his mediumship, chiefly the automatic writings; and in examining some of the note-books in which "Imperator's" utterances were recorded. Mr. Myers, in the article already referred to (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. ix. p. 245, etc.), quotes testimonials from Dr. Eve, late Head Master of University College School, and others who were brought into close contact with Mr. Moses, showing that he was held in esteem and regard by those with whom he worked. I have received like testimony from several of his more intimate associates.

## CHAPTER VI

### AUTOMATISM

AFTER this brief survey of the strongest evidence so far adduced for the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, the reader will no doubt be prepared to accept the conclusion provisionally formulated in the first chapter of the present book, that, with certain doubtful exceptions not sufficiently numerous or important to weigh heavily in the balance, they may be explained by trickery or muscular automatism on the one hand, and illusion or unconscious misrepresentation on the other. It would betray, however, a very inadequate conception of the nature of the movement to dismiss it as merely one more instance of the exploitation of fools by knaves. That many so-called mediums have been knaves of a commonplace type there can of course be little question; in particular, many of the American professionals who have fattened on the credulity of their victims appear to have taken to spirit-rapping as in other circumstances they would have taken to card-sharping or the confidence trick. But the typical mediums, the men or women who have risen to eminence in their profession, would not come under any such familiar formula. If knaves, they seem at any rate to have shared in the folly of their dupes. It is, no doubt, in this fact that the secret of their power lay. The medium succeeded in deceiving others because, wholly or partially, he at the same time deceived himself; and he deceived himself because, as a rule, he was not fully aware of what he was doing. The exact degree and nature of the medium's moral responsibility for any particular action it is, of course, impossible to define. As Huxley said of the crayfish, to know how a medium feels and thinks one must become a medium. With mediums who exhibit exclusively in the trance, if the trance is not merely assumed as a blind—and as already said, it is rarely possible to prove the

genuineness of a trance state—the thaumaturgic performance may be wholly divorced from the waking consciousness. On the other hand, men like Slade and Foster were possibly as responsible for their actions—no more and no less—as any other charlatan who preys upon society. Again, it is not easy to define how far, and in what directions, mediumship involves deviation from the normal. Some mediums, no doubt, exhibit various symptoms of degeneracy; but to no greater extent than could probably be found amongst criminals or vagabonds. Others, such as some of the clairvoyants whose claims have lately been investigated by the Society for Psychical Research, and many private persons, show on a superficial acquaintance no other external sign of deviation from perfect sanity than is implied in the liability to fall into spontaneous trances. Yet some of these trance mediums, persons of good education, with no pecuniary motive, and indeed no very obvious motive of any kind, for fraud, have habitually exhibited physical manifestations of the ordinary kind. To suppose that they cheat for the mere fun of the thing might be a satisfactory solution if the performance took place only now and again. But when the cheating is repeated day after day and year after year, the fun must surely have evaporated.

If we revert to the history of the movement, we shall find that the predecessors of the latter-day mediums were distinctly of a pathologic type. There can be no question that the children who acted as witch-detectors were the victims of their own diseased imaginings, and would in these days have been treated for hysteria. The naughty little girls and boys who played, and still play, the Poltergeist in quiet households exhibit in many instances similar morbid tendencies;<sup>1</sup> and the "magnetic" somnambules, who in the early years of the last century served as the first intermediaries between a supposed spiritual world and our own, suffered from many ailments real and imaginary. The spirit mediums of the latter half of the nineteenth century were no doubt less obviously neurotic; and as the movement progressed there was a larger admixture of deliberate and apparently healthy knavery.<sup>2</sup> But the history of Spiritualism

<sup>1</sup> See my *Studies in Psychical Research*, pp. 159-60, and *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xii. p. 113, for some account of the signs of disease and abnormality observed in these children.

<sup>2</sup> Indications are not wanting, however, that even the most apparently healthy mediums belong to a degenerate type. Reference has already been made to the charges of criminality brought against Foster (above, p. 52). Similar charges have been brought against Slade (*Truesdell, Bottom Facts*,

in this country, as given in the earlier chapters of the last book, shows that here at any rate the professional trickster was an exotic. The movement began with table-turning, and was reinforced and kept alive by various private persons, many of them at any rate of unquestioned good faith, whose mediumship took the form of automatic writing, drawing, and speaking, and the seeing of visions. If private mediumship had ended at this point and the physical phenomena had been confined exclusively to persons notoriously practising for money, the problem would present less difficulty. But, as shown, physical mediumship in private circles soon went beyond mere table-turning and spirit-rapping, movements which were no doubt in many cases spontaneous and even unconscious.

Probably throughout the history of the movement, as at the present day, private mediums who exhibit physical phenomena of a kind which call for premeditation or deliberate effort have been a small minority as compared with the number of presumably innocent persons whose activities stop short at table-turning or trance-speaking. But actually the case is too frequent to be lightly dismissed as accidental or unimportant. Again and again we find persons, removed by education and social position from the ordinary temptations to fraud, who are engaged in the production of physical manifestations involving elaborate and systematic deception. In default of any adequate motive for their conduct, the explanation inevitably suggests itself that automatic movements of the simpler kind, unquestionably involuntary with many persons in their earlier stages, may tend to pass over into actions of a more complicated nature, and may at the same time lose something of their subconscious character.

Unfortunately the investigation of the problems of private mediumship is hampered by two considerations. In the first place many of the mediums concerned are still living, and a certain reserve is necessarily imposed upon one who, like the present writer, has been largely dependent for his knowledge of the subject upon the goodwill of the persons investigated. In proof of the statement that there have been actual exposures of systematic and apparently disinterested

pp. 299-301) and against one or two mediums in this country. Gibier (*Psychism*, pp. 164, 188. New York, 1900) cites several instances of physical abnormality and sexual aberration amongst mediums. Eusapia Paladino is said to be liable to attacks of hystero-epilepsy, etc. (Jules Bois, in *Le Matin*, 5th Jan., 1902); and the notorious prevalence of the drink habit amongst mediums points in the same direction.

deception by private persons, the details of which it is not considered advisable to publish, I am permitted to cite in support of my own personal experience the testimony of my colleagues, Professor Barrett, Dr. R. Hodgson, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, and Miss Alice Johnson. Reference should also be made to an account, by the late Professor Sidgwick, of a case of "Disinterested Deception."<sup>1</sup>

The case of Mr. Stainton Moses was selected, therefore, as typical of private mediumship in general, not merely because the material was more abundant and the variety of the phenomena greater, but because his doings were open to discussion as being already matter of history. But the selection thus enforced had one obvious disadvantage which will serve to illustrate the other main obstacle to investigations of this kind. Mr. Stainton Moses had never been detected in trickery. Exposure, indeed, of the methods employed by private mediums is, for reasons which need not be repeated, difficult to ensure and seldom complete.<sup>2</sup>

Probably the stage performances of accomplished tricksters like the Davenport Brothers, Slade, and Foster have diverted attention from the real nature of the problem. Even such representatives of the modern psychology as Münsterberg<sup>3</sup> and Jastrow<sup>4</sup> treat of the subject as if the main things to be explained were how and why the witnesses were deceived. But Janet,<sup>5</sup> Richet, and other French writers have recognised that the prior question is, How came the medium to deceive? No doubt the essentially pathological nature of the problem was sooner recognised in France because of the obvious affinity of certain stages of mediumship with the more startling deviations from the normal to be found in such institutions as the Salpêtrière. Amongst English writers Maudsley has seen clearly that in Spiritualism there are impostors who deceive themselves, finding in that self-deception their most potent defence; and that in this kind of imposture there are manifold gradations, from trickery which is almost wholly innocent and unconscious

<sup>1</sup> *Journal S. P. R.*, July, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> In most "private" circles, whilst thorough investigation is precluded, the precautions adopted against possible trickery are ludicrously insufficient, and sometimes of set purpose altogether omitted: The belief in the genuineness of the resulting phenomena in such cases depends upon the confidence felt by the circle in the good faith of the medium—a consideration which is clearly irrelevant if it can be shown that the medium is not wholly responsible for his actions.

<sup>3</sup> *Psychology and Life*, chapter on "Psychology and Mysticism." New York, 1899.

<sup>4</sup> *Fact and Fable in Psychology*. Macmillan, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> *L'Automatisme Psychologique*, 2nd edition, 1894, pp. 376-419.

to premeditated chicanery hardly to be distinguished from any other form of vulgar fraud.<sup>1</sup>

Modern physiology has taught us to look upon the cerebro-spinal nervous system as an aggregation of nerve centres, each tending to react in its own way in response to an appropriate stimulus from without. The organism is perpetually being assailed by stimuli, incentives to action, of one kind or another, and a chaos of unrelated and automatic movements would ensue, but for one circumstance. The aggregation of nerve centres is not simply an aggregate, but a hierarchy, in which the activities of the lowest centres, the centres in which the response to external stimuli is the most immediate, are continually checked and controlled by the higher, the whole being in the normal man under the supreme direction of those highest centres which correspond to the consciousness and volition of waking life. In the amœba the sensation leads to an immediate motor reaction. In man the immediate reflex action of a sensory stimulus is commonly checked, and the nerve current, instead of discharging itself in a movement, is diverted to higher nerve centres. Thus its energy may be expended in irradiating by various channels through the network of nerve cells, a process which results, on the psychic side, in calling up images associated with the original sensation. Hence it comes about that the psychic life of civilised man stands out against a dim background of suppressed actions and inchoate ideas. Few of us in waking life are aware of the innumerable faint images which accompany the main stream of thought, still fewer probably of the remote origin of the process of thought itself in suppressed speech, or of the motor activities which still tend to accompany that process. For the normal man those twilight regions, where hover the ghosts of actions and ideas strangled at their birth, lie so far beyond the light of knowledge that hardly even in deliberate introspection can he catch faint glimpses of them. In dreams or delirium the riotous stream of mechanically associated images shows us what our thinking would be if there were no reflective faculties to select the serviceable and suppress the irrelevant elements; whilst the man who in deep reverie "thinks aloud," or follows the beat of music with swaying head and body, or, like Sam Weller,

<sup>1</sup> *The Pathology of Mind*, 3rd edition, pp. 64, 65, 78, etc. Again, the American writer Hammond divides mediums, somewhat too sharply perhaps, into two classes—the dishonest and the neurotic (*Spiritualism and Nervous Derangement*. London, 1876).

painfully indites his correspondence with tongue as well as hand, reminds us of the transmuted muscular activities out of which some factors of our thinking are, in the last analysis, fashioned.

Now sleep and reverie are the most familiar examples of certain states, as yet very imperfectly understood, in which the equilibrium of the psychic life is upset. Allied states are intoxications of various kinds, the delirium of fever, hypnosis, somnambulism, and other spontaneous trances, double consciousness, hysteria, epilepsy, and all those strange forms of neurotic affections—hysterical anæsthesia, hysterical paralysis, amnesia, aboulia, and the rest—which have been investigated during the last two or three decades by various groups of French and American observers. Whether, with Professor Pierre Janet, we regard each of these states, beginning with ordinary sleep, as constituting in itself a falling off from perfect health and sanity,<sup>1</sup> or whether, with many English and Continental medical men, we argue that even hypnosis is compatible with the fullest mental vigour, is not, for our present purpose, of material importance. The common characteristic of all these states with which we are here concerned is a division or “dissociation” of consciousness. For whereas in the ordinary waking life all the activities of the organism are consciously and deliberately subordinated to a common end, in these conditions of psychic disequilibrium a part, or it may be the whole, of our activities proceed without the control, and sometimes without the knowledge, of the central personality.

The main procession of ideas, then, is accompanied by innumerable fainter images, which flit momentarily through the penumbra of consciousness. In other words, out of the innumerable train of images started by automatic association the attention selects a few only on which to focus the consciousness, and lets the rest pass away to be, as a rule, forgotten. In dreams, however, where the ruling faculties are asleep, rejected material of this kind comes to the front. There for the ordinary man the matter ends. But with some persons a state of ecstasy or reverie occurs spontaneously or can be induced by appropriate means, in which dream images of this kind appear. Probably crystal-gazing or “scrying” is the most effective, as it is one of the oldest methods for inducing this state. By gazing into a crystal

<sup>1</sup> See *L'Automatisme Psychologique*, p. 137. “Un individu parfaitement sain . . . mais aucun homme n'est aussi parfait: mille circonstances, l'état de passion, l'état de sommeil, l'ivresse ou la maladie diminuent ou détruisent,” etc.

some persons can become, as it were, spectators of their own dreams.<sup>1</sup> Of recent years, under the auspices of the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers in this country, a number of persons have made trial of their power of crystal-gazing and have recorded the results. Mr. Andrew Lang, Professor Pierre Janet, Dr. Morton Prince, Professor Hyslop, and others have also contributed observations made by themselves on other persons. In many cases there can be little doubt that the faculty of seeing pictures in a crystal implies no greater, or hardly greater, deviation from normality than the faculty of seeing similar pictures in dreams. The following is an abridged account, written in 1892, of her own experiences by a competent observer, Mrs. A. W. Verrall, a lecturer at Newnham College.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Verrall states that she is a good visualiser, and embodies most of her ideas in pictorial form. The mention of a name instantly calls up a mental picture. She sees faces in the fire and shapes in the clouds, and has had several spontaneous visual impressions (quasi-hallucinations). Cut crystal, polished glass, or a glass of water are equally efficacious in inducing pictures, but a dim light is found to be preferable. Mrs. Verrall believes that the crystal picture is built up from the bright points of light reflected in the crystal; but the picture once formed has a reality and a spontaneity quite unlike an imaginary scene called up voluntarily with closed eyes. The pictures are mostly coloured, but occasionally resemble black and white sketches. They represent animals, human beings, common objects (clock, ring, melon), or landscapes, and other scenes real and imaginary. In but a small proportion of cases has Mrs. Verrall been able to trace the origin of the pictures in any recent memories. But it is clear, from one or two incidents in her

<sup>1</sup> In some persons the structure of thought is apparently not primarily compounded of visual images, but of images derived from other sensations, usually auditory or motor. And experience shows that there are very wide differences between individuals in the power of forming visual images. The classic illustration is Mr. Galton's account of the result of his statistical inquiry on mental imagery (*Inquiries into Human Faculty*, 1883, p. 83 *et seq.*). Mr. Myers (*Sensory Automatism, Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 436-535) gives accounts, collected from various sources, of the systematised visual imagery which accompanies thought in certain persons. But in crystal vision, as in dreams and hallucinations generally, it seems to be the floating, half-developed, unsystematised images which make their presence felt. The fullest and most recent account of this unsystematised mental imagery underlying our psychical life which I have seen is contained in a monograph supplement to the *Psychological Review* (New York, May, 1898), "On Mental Imagery," by Wilfrid Lay. Mr. Lay begins by distinguishing this half-conscious mental imagery from (1) what is commonly known as "imagination"; (2) sensation; (3) visual after-images; (4) mere memory images. Visual images appear greatly to preponderate as a rule. In his own case they form about 57 per cent. of the total, auditory images numbering about 29 and olfactory about 6 per cent.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 473-8.

experience, that the pictures in the crystal may represent things seen some time since and forgotten. Thus, on August 25th, 1890, Mrs. Verrall saw in the crystal an 'ugly clock in white alabaster, round face on hideous stand, dial black, letters gold.' She made a rough sketch of the clock, but could not identify it. A fortnight later, going to the house occupied by a sister of one of her servants (in which she had been on one occasion about a year before), she saw on the mantelpiece an alabaster clock very closely resembling the clock of her vision. That the real had served as the prototype of the visionary clock is rendered more probable from the fact that Mrs. Verrall had special reason at the time for thinking of the house in connection with her former servant.

Mrs. Verrall's crystal visions are mostly quite trivial and purposeless; but she records that she often receives from the crystal intimations, not, however, pictorial, reminding her of things which she had forgotten.

Mrs. Verrall's experience appears to be fairly typical. The special points to be noticed are that the visions are quite unmistakably real at the time of their appearance; so real and persistent, indeed, that some seers find it possible to employ a magnifying glass to bring out the details; that they are spontaneous, and often can neither be summoned nor dismissed at will; and that they are mostly as trivial and purposeless as dreams. No doubt, as a rule, the crystal pictures are simply reproductions or reconstructions of recent experiences; but with most seers it is only a small proportion that can be directly traced to their source. There are a good many instances on record, however, in which the picture, as in the case of Mrs. Verrall's alabaster clock, has been proved to be a more or less imaginatively altered reproduction of a scene long passed from the conscious memory; or of an object or mental image, perhaps of recent occurrence, which never reached the focus of consciousness at all. An experimental parallel to these cases can be observed in hypnotic subjects. The subject when awakened can often be made to see in the crystal some scene suggested to him, without retaining any recollection of whence the suggestion comes;<sup>1</sup> or will even, as in some of Professor

<sup>1</sup> Thus in a recent experiment I had repeated to a hypnotised subject, for the purpose of testing his memory, a Latin version of a bit of English doggerel:—

"Sanguinolentus erat, si vera est fabula, passer  
Cui fuit in plumbo sanguinolenta domus," etc., etc.

It then occurred to me to bid him see in a looking-glass, on waking, the scene described by the lines. On waking, after writing some of the lines in *spiegel-schrift* (i.e. writing reversed so as to be read in a mirror), he took up the glass which had been used by me for interpreting the *spiegel-schrift*, and said that he

Janet's amnesic patients, furnish by this means to his physician useful information on the events, long since wiped out from the waking consciousness, which caused the malady.<sup>1</sup> As in the present chapter it is proposed to deal solely with the psychological mechanism of crystal-seeing, I omit for the present all reference to the alleged telepathic or clairvoyant significance of many of these visions.

In one respect Mrs. Verrall's experiences are exceptional, or her observation more critical than that of her fellow-seers. She believes, it will be seen, that the bright points of light seen in the crystal probably act as *points de repère* for her visions. Most crystal-seers do not recognise such an origin. But that the bright polished surface of the glass or crystal does act in some way as a stimulus to the retina, and thus infuses a sensory quality into the vague images flitting through the twilight of consciousness, there can be little question. The fact that the substances commonly used for scrying—crystal, glass, water, dark polished wood, oiled fingernails, etc.—have common physical characteristics is sufficient to indicate some physical effect.<sup>2</sup> In a case recorded by Professor Hyslop the seeress, before a crystal was put into her hands, had been in the habit of seeing visions on the surface of sunlit water.<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Verrall, it will be seen, is not apparently aware of any alteration in her state of consciousness during her crystal visions. And, indeed, in the normal person it would appear that the disturbance in such cases is extremely slight. But some seers of visions recognise a subtle change in consciousness during the vision. Thus

saw in it a small bird of some kind—a sparrow—and some straw in its mouth ; it was building its nest in a gutter or spout. The vision soon faded ; and he seemed to have no idea that it had been suggested to him by the lines quoted.

<sup>1</sup> See *Neuroses et Idées fixes* ; also M. Janet's remarks at the London International Congress of Experimental Psychology, quoted by Mr. Myers, *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 482, 483. Miss Goodrich-Freer (*Essays in Psychical Research*. London, 1899) gives some interesting illustrations of forgotten incidents brought to light by the crystal.

<sup>2</sup> A shining surface is not absolutely essential, however ; blank sheets of paper and other similar objects have served the purpose.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xii. p. 259. W. R. Newbold (*Psychological Review*, July, 1895), from the observation of various cases of crystal-seeing, draws the conclusion that the visionary scene represents the reflex response of the retina and lower optical centres to the prolonged, vague, indeterminate stimulus afforded by the lustrous surface of the glass. The smoky or milky clouds seen by most crystal-gazers represent, according to him, the first (mainly retinal) reflex ; and this first amorphous sensation gradually becomes modified by the ideational centres. He quotes the case of a crystal-seer, a young girl, who describes in the first instance a grey spot, and proceeds : " Then the grey spot seems to sink to the bottom of the glass, and turns and whirls about slowly ; then, of course, it has to become something."

Mr. Keulemans, a well-known scientific draughtsman, records that:—

“The eye of a bird, during the slow process of drawing it, forms a capital point of concentration for the mind and consequent distraction from ordinary flows of thought. I noticed that whenever strong impressions had got hold of my mind they had a tendency to develop themselves into a vivid mind-picture as soon as my eye and attention were concentrated upon the eye in the drawing; and that whenever I began darkening the iris, leaving the light speck the most prominent part, I would slowly pass off into a kind of dream-state.”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Miss Goodrich-Freer (“Miss X.”) believes that her crystal visions occur without diminution of her conscious activity. But in the case of her spontaneous visions, at any rate, there would seem to be some disturbance of the psychic equilibrium. Here is an account by a friend who was present during one of Miss Freer’s visions:—

“‘X.’ [Miss Freer’s pseudonym] and I were dressing to go [out] when I suddenly noticed that her eyes were *fixed on the window in a manner I knew well, and have long learnt to associate with something ‘uncanny.’* I waited until her face regained its normal expression, and then asked what she had seen or what she felt. She turned to the clock and said in a *dreamy, far-away tone*, ‘A quarter-past eleven—I think Mr. C. is dead, or very ill.’”<sup>2</sup>

In this case, however, the vision occurred spontaneously; and in Mr. Keulemans’ case the reverie was apparently hastened by a previously existing idea struggling for expression. It is likely that under such circumstances the disturbance of consciousness would be more profound than in the deliberately induced crystal vision, where the attention is directed beforehand to observing and recording the results of the experiment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. p. 517.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xi. p. 132; see also Parish (to whom I owe this reference), *Hallucinations and Illusions*, p. 297 and elsewhere, on the indications of dissociation of consciousness accompanying similar visions. Another crystal-seer, “Miss A.,” writes that if she looks long in the crystal her eyes water, and she has “a feeling as if a band were tied round my head” (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. p. 500).

<sup>3</sup> For other accounts of crystal vision see the records by various persons quoted in Mr. Myers’ article on “Sensory Automatism and Induced Hallucination” already referred to (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 436–535); Miss Freer’s own account of her experience, in *Essays in Psychological Research* (Redway, 1899); an article by Professor Hyslop, *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xii. p. 259, etc.; “The Experimental Study of Visions,” by Dr. Morton Prince, *Brain*, 1898, p. 529; *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xiv. p. 366; *The Making of Religion*, by Andrew Lang, Longmans and Co., 1898, chap. v., on “Crystal Vision, Savage and Civilised”;

Of other conditions, apart from disease, which favour the production of sensory hallucination, probably the most efficacious are those incidental to a Spiritualist séance. The prolonged darkness in itself appears to act as a stimulus to the retina; entoptic phenomena which escape notice in broad daylight become conspicuous in the almost complete absence of external stimuli, just as organic sensations from the viscera come to the surface in dreams; or, again, streaks of light through crevices, or faint reflections from polished surfaces become the starting-point for elaborate sensory figments. That the emotional conditions are peculiarly favourable for sense-deception has been already pointed out. It is well known that vague cloudy lights are often seen at dark séances, and that, as in the crystal similar photisms generally usher in definite pictures, so at the dark séance these cloudy lights may precede or develop into the appearance of definite human forms. Recently various critical observers have recorded results of this kind either in their own experience or from observations of others.<sup>1</sup>

By whatever means induced, this power of seeing visions seems to develop rapidly with exercise, to such an extent that the subject is liable to be constantly hallucinated. I have known several Spiritualists of unquestioned integrity, who would frequently see visions and phantasmal figures, often in broad daylight. Most successful crystal-seers have experiences of such spontaneous visions.

In dealing with clairaudience, the hearing of voices, music, and the like, we do not find any such wealth of material to assist our analysis; nor, indeed, does the subject lend itself so readily to systematic investigation. But there is no reason to doubt that the phenomena have, physiologically, the same origin as the visions which we have just been considering; that the voices heard are, in fact, simply the result of the exaggerated activity of lower cerebral strata, released for the time from the repressive control habitually exercised by the higher centres.<sup>2</sup>

*Psychological Review*, New York, July, 1895, "The Experimental Induction of Automatic Processes," by W. Romaine Newbold; the writings of Pierre Janet; an article on "Magic Mirrors," etc., by Andrew Lang, in the *Monthly Magazine* for December, 1901, etc.

<sup>1</sup> See especially "A Study in Spiritistic Hallucinations," by Professor Harlow Gale, *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xv. pp. 65-90; "Some Psychological Phenomena bearing upon the Question of Spirit Control," by Principal C. H. Tout, *ibid.*, vol. xi. p. 309; "A Case of Psychic Automatism," communicated by Professor W. James, *ibid.*, vol. xii. p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Myers (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. p. 492) quotes an account by "Miss X." (Miss Freer) of auditory hallucinations (human voices and musical sounds) induced by

If we turn to the manifestations of motor automatism—inspirational writing, drawing, speaking, movements of tables, rapping, etc.—we shall find a like explanation indicated. That our ordinary visible and conscious activities are habitually attended by innumerable suppressed motor reflexes is less easy to demonstrate than in the parallel case of faint sensory images. Not only is the unconsciousness more profound in the one case than in the other, but, for obvious reasons, no organism could long survive in which a riot of unrestrained motor activities at all comparable to the lawless crowd of dream images was liable to occur, even occasionally. To find a parallel, on the motor side, to the phenomena furnished by dreaming on the sensory side, we have to look to our hospitals and asylums. Sudden outbreaks of mania, and especially the mania which follows a violent epileptic attack, are plausibly explained as due to the healthy functioning of the still unimpaired intermediate regions of the cerebro-spinal system suddenly released from the inhibitory influence of the cortical centres, which are completely exhausted by the prior paroxysms.<sup>1</sup>

But even in normal life we can discover traces of these imperfectly strangled activities. All thinking in the civilised man is "more or less successfully suppressed action, and, as a well-known muscle-reader expresses it, all willing is either pushing or pulling."<sup>2</sup> "Thinking aloud" may be regarded as merely an atavistic reversion to the primitive form of thought; and the effort to concentrate thought, to think strongly on a concrete matter, *e.g.* a name or an object, tends constantly to produce some form of muscular activity, either subconscious whispering of the name thought of, or subconscious movement in the direction of the object. It is on this tendency that the marvellous success of professional

holding a shell to the ear. W. R. Newbold (*Psychological Review*, New York, July, 1895) mentions a young woman in whom auditory hallucinations would be excited on hearing the sound of water running from a spigot; also a paranoiac, who complained of hearing a continuous hissing, which sometimes developed into abusive language; the cause was ultimately traced to a chronic inflammation of the inner ear (see also Parish, *Hallucinations and Illusions*, pp. 70, 71). Auditory hallucinations are, it is well known, comparatively rare amongst sane persons. The hearing of voices—*i.e.* clearly externalised voices, as distinguished from the "inner voice"—is not, therefore, so common a form of mediumship as the seeing of visions or phantasmal figures. But I have come across several instances amongst Spiritualists.

<sup>1</sup> See *Croonian Lectures on the Evolution and Dissolution of the Nervous System*, by Dr. Hughlings-Jackson, 1884. In the same way the rats seen in delirium may be regarded as the outcome of the still healthy intermediate sensory centres which have not been affected by the disease.

<sup>2</sup> Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, p. 336.

"thought-reading," more aptly called "muscle-reading," depends.

Of late years some critical study has been given to these involuntary movements. Professor Jastrow has devised an instrument, a modification of that employed in the case of table-turning by Faraday, for recording movements of the hand and body when the mind is under the influence of various preoccupations. He has set his subject to name a list of colours, think of a given locality, or count the oscillations of a pendulum; and he has found that the record of the slight automatic movements of head and hand tends to show some rough correspondence with the subject's mental occupation; there is movement in the direction of the place thought of, or back and forward movements in sympathy with those of the pendulum.<sup>1</sup>

Again Professor W. R. Newbold<sup>2</sup> and Mr. Solomons and Miss Stein<sup>3</sup> have made experiments in eliciting automatic writing and speaking from normal subjects. The results obtained were not perhaps very striking; the specimens of automatic writing furnished by the latter observers, in particular, are very far inferior, in fluency and in intellectual content, to some of the "inspirational" writings which we have considered in previous chapters. But the experiments, nevertheless, go to show that, even in perfectly normal individuals, there is a general tendency to movement without conscious motor impulse, for sensory ideas to pass on subconsciously into motor reactions, and for the organism to react automatically to stimuli such as that afforded by a pencil placed in the hand; that such normal persons may train themselves to write or read aloud, whilst the main current of their attention is otherwise occupied, in such wise that they may be, for some moments at a time, ignorant of the things written or spoken; and that, in particular, they may be entirely unconscious of any volition of their own in connection with the movements of the hand in writing. The movement in such cases seems to the owner of the hand

<sup>1</sup> *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, by Joseph Jastrow (Boston, U.S.A., 1900). A record of these experiments first appeared in the *American Journal of Psychology*, vol. iv. (1892) p. 398, under the title of "A Study of Involuntary Movements." A record of further and more elaborate experiments on similar lines, and tending to similar conclusions, will be found in an article by Milo A. Tucker, in vol. viii. p. 394 of the same review.

<sup>2</sup> *Psychological Review*, New York, July, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept., 1896. An article by Miss Stein (*ibid.*, May, 1898), on "Cultivated Motor Automatism," contains an account of some later experiments. But none of her subjects seem to have shown spontaneity in the automatic writing.

extra-personal; and he finds himself in some instances unable to distinguish between its spontaneous motions and those mechanically imposed upon it by the person conducting the experiment. On the whole these results go to prove that though the various motor automatisms which we have to consider in the case of spirit mediums may be regarded as merely exaggerated illustrations of phenomena constantly attendant on our waking life, they are exaggerations which will rarely be found under ordinary circumstances in perfectly normal individuals.<sup>1</sup>

It is only in persons predisposed by constitution and temperament to such exercises, or in whom the psychic equilibrium is temporarily upset through fatigue, illness, or some strong emotional stress, such as grief, anxiety, or the excitement produced by witnessing similar manifestations in others, that the automatic movements attain any noticeable development. At the ordinary spirit séance, as already shown, some or all of these causes are in operation. The assistants at such séances constantly feel a sensation of coolness on their hands, see vague lights in the surrounding darkness, and experience spasmodic twitchings of their hands and arms. The latter soon evolve, under favourable conditions, into automatic drawing and writing: or the nascent medium may exhibit involuntary speech with or without temporary loss of consciousness. Abundant illustrations of all these developments, and of the contagious effect of example, have been given in preceding chapters. Of recent years there have been several critical studies of the phenomena. M. Flournoy, to whose work further reference will be made later, has published accounts of several cases of automatic writing observed by him.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Charles Hill Tout, principal of Buckland College, Vancouver, has furnished a valuable record of some mediumistic experiences of his own.

<sup>1</sup> As Mr. Solomons and Miss Stein found, in healthy persons automatic action cannot develop beyond a certain point, because it is continually inhibited by the action of higher centres. "Our trouble," they write, "never came from a *failure* of reaction, but from a *functioning* of attention. It was our inability to take our minds off the experiment which interfered." In the hysteric, as they point out, this difficulty does not exist, because he finds himself unable to attend to the sensation, his arm becomes anæsthetic, etc. The superior efficacy of planchette as a writing instrument when the hands of more than one person are placed upon it may be due, as Mrs. Sidgwick has suggested to me, to the opportunity thus afforded for each person to divert his attention from the movement of his own hands, and to attribute the resulting messages to the hands of his colleague.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue Philosophique*, Feb., 1899, "Genèse de quelques prétendus messages spirites," and *Des Inules à la planète Mars*. Geneva, 1900.

About 1892 Mr. Tout took part with some neighbours in a series of spiritualistic séances. Subjective lights were occasionally seen by himself and one other member of the circle. The ladies present were affected with spasmodic twitchings and other movements, sometimes of a violent character, chiefly in the fingers and arms. Mr. Tout felt a strong impulse to imitate these motions, and occasionally gave way to the impulse, though never to such an extent as to lose complete control of his limbs. At later séances he on several occasions yielded to similar impulses to assume a foreign personality. In this way he acted the part of a deceased woman, the mother of a friend then present. He put his arm round his friend and caressed him, as his mother might have done, and the personation was recognised by the spectators as a genuine case of "spirit control." On another occasion Mr. Tout, having under the influence of music given various impersonations, was finally oppressed by a feeling of coldness and loneliness, as of a recently disembodied spirit. His wretchedness and misery were terrible, and he was only kept from falling to the floor by some of the other sitters. At this point one of the sitters "made the remark, which I remember to have overheard, 'It is father controlling him,' and I then seemed to realise who I was and whom I was seeking. I began to be distressed in my lungs, and should have fallen if they had not held me by the hands and let me back gently upon the floor. As my head sank back upon the carpet I experienced dreadful distress in my lungs and could not breathe. I made signs to them to put something under my head. They immediately put the sofa cushions under me, but this was not sufficient—I was not raised high enough yet to breathe easily—and they then added a pillow. I have the most distinct recollection of a sigh of relief I now gave as I sank back like a sick, weak person upon the cool pillow. I was in a measure still conscious of my actions, though not of my surroundings, and I have a clear memory of seeing myself in the character of my dying father lying in the bed and in the room in which he died. It was a most curious sensation. I saw his shrunken hands and face, and lived again through his dying moments; only now I was both myself—in some indistinct sort of way—and my father, with his feelings and appearance."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his impersonation Mr. Tout never seems to have completely lost consciousness of his doings; and though his words and actions appeared to him at the time outside his own initiative, he is satisfied that they are really to be explained merely as the dramatic working-out, by some half-conscious stratum of his own personality, of suggestions made at the time by other members of the circle,

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S.P.R.*, vol. xi. pp. 309-16.

or received in prior experiences of the kind. He describes himself as peculiarly susceptible to suggestion, and as having been much addicted, in his earlier years, to day-dreams and the weaving of romances.

In another autobiographical record of mediumship, communicated to the *Proceedings of the S. P. R.* by Professor William James,<sup>1</sup> who is personally acquainted with the author, the automatism takes a more extreme development:—

Mr. Le Baron (pseudonym) is a journalist, and has published some work on metaphysics. In 1894 he stayed for some time at an American Spiritualist camp-meeting, and joined a circle which held séances at midnight in the pine woods for converse with the invisible brethren. At one of these meetings Mr. Le Baron became conscious of new and strange sensations. He felt his head drawn back until he was forced flat on the ground. Then "the force produced a motor disturbance of my head and jaws. My mouth made automatic movements, till in a few seconds I was distinctly conscious of *another's voice*—unearthly, awful, loud, weird—bursting through the woodland from my own lips, with the despairing words, 'Oh, my people!'" Mutterings of semi-purposive prophecy followed.

A few days later he spoke again in the same involuntary manner to the friend with whom he was staying, in the character of her recently deceased mother. Again, after sleeping in the bed for some years occupied by his friend's father, who had been lame, he awoke lame, and limped painfully for some hours. He soon began both to write and to speak sentences of semi-prophetic and mystical character, such as "He shall be a leader of the host of the Lord"; "I shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt answer to My voice." He learnt to converse by means of a pencil and paper with this invisible monitor, which, or whom, he not very happily christens "the psychophysical spontaneity." Various journeys were enjoined upon him—to Stowe, in Vermont, to St. Louis, to Seville, to the Emperor of China; the first two journeys were actually undertaken. Later he learnt that he was the reincarnation of Rameses, and received many messages concerning his high mission. Finally, it was given to him to speak in an unknown tongue, and to furnish to himself translations of the same. Some of these fragments were written down at the time by himself; others were spoken into a phonograph in the presence of Professor James and Dr. Hodgson. Here is a specimen, together with its translation:—

"*The Unknown Tongue.*—Te rumete tau. Ilee lete leele luto scele. Impe re scele lee luto. Onko keere scete tere lute. Ombo te scele to bere te kure. Sinte lute sinte Kuru. Orumo imbo impe rute scelete. Singe, singe, singe, eru. Imba, Imba, Imba.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. xii., pp. 277-98.

"*Translation.*—The old word! I love the old word of the heavens! The love of the heavens is emperor! The love of the darkness is slavery! The heavens are wise, the heavens are true, the heavens are sure. The love of the earth is past! The King now rules in the heavens!"

That these utterances were involuntary, and that their content was not consciously suggested by anything in Mr. Le Baron's experience or aspirations, is proved not only by his own reiterated statement to that effect, but by the fact that he was persistent for some time in the hope that the unknown tongue would prove to be a real language, with analogies to some form of primitive human speech; and that he spent much time and labour in endeavouring to find its origin in Coptic or Romany or some Dravidian tongue. It is obvious, however, from a very superficial examination that the "unknown tongue" is not a language at all, and that its elements are fragments of English speech. As a work of art, indeed, it is far inferior to the "Martian language" employed by M. Flournoy's medium, Héléne. Again, the "deific verbiage" and psycho-automatic rhetoric which form the bulk of Mr. Le Baron's involuntary utterances are scarcely more involved and pretentious, and distinctly more melodious, than his own normal style as exhibited in the record before us.

The two cases last quoted aptly illustrate two stages of automatic action. Mr. Tout yields himself to the impulse to personation, and is yet half conscious that he is acting a part. He is apparently in the same psychological condition as subjects in a light stage of hypnosis, who will faithfully fulfil the hallucination imposed upon them by the hypnotist, but will be partly aware all the time that they are making themselves ridiculous, and that the comedy or tragedy which they are set to enact is but an affair of pasteboard and tinsel after all. There seems to be here a real division of consciousness, the one part acting as spectator and critic of the performance directed by the other.<sup>1</sup> Traces of the same conflict of separate systems of ideas occur in dreams, and it is said to form a marked feature in the delirium caused by haschisch.<sup>2</sup>

In Mr. Le Baron's case we reach a further stage. Not only are the movements more completely beyond the subject's control, but he is no longer conscious that they originate

<sup>1</sup> See Professor James' remarks upon this point (*Principles of Psychology*, vol. ii. pp. 605, 606).

<sup>2</sup> See Parish, *Hallucinations and Illusions*, p. 45, and the references there cited.

within his own organism. He can, indeed, with difficulty be convinced by subsequent analysis and reflection that the automatic utterance, and the intelligence displayed by it, are alike derived from himself.

In both these cases, it is to be noted, the disturbances were of a temporary character, and we are perhaps entitled to infer that they had their origin rather in the special circumstances in which the subject of the experience found himself placed than in any strong predisposition on his part to such psychic disaggregation. The cases furnish good examples of the type intermediate between that of the normal man and that of the medium born. Most mediums—at least most private mediums—probably belong to this transition type. There is perhaps a slight instability of the nervous system to begin with, but it is only the accident of some severe personal loss, or the companionship of Spiritualist friends, which furnishes the occasion for an outburst of visions or automatic writing ; and when the occasion has passed, the automatism lapses with it.

## CHAPTER VII

### DREAM-CONSCIOUSNESS

IT may be inferred, then, that in normal persons automatism will not easily or permanently develop outside certain narrow limits. When these limits are rapidly overstepped; when, as in numerous cases cited in preceding chapters, the automatic writer begins with little practice to write sermons and poems, or draw pictures whose prototypes are found neither in heaven above nor in the earth beneath; when the visions in the crystal grow into substantial spectres, obtruding themselves in the daylight—we are entitled to assume some psychic instability, some tendency of the central nervous system to split up, or become “dissociated” temporarily or permanently. The Continental writers, on whom we are mainly dependent for reports of first-hand systematic observations, have drawn their conclusions almost exclusively from the study of cases obviously pathologic. In these the psychical symptoms, the division of memory and of consciousness, the mutually independent and even antagonistic centres of volition in the same organism, are accompanied by physical symptoms of a pronounced character. The right arm, which controls the convulsions of delirium and prevents the left hand from inflicting bodily injury on the patient, is itself insensible to pricking, pinching, or thumping; the hystero-paralytic, whose memory is split up into six differing and mutually exclusive fragments, displays six corresponding states of partial paralysis and anæsthesia. When Leonie the Second, or Miss Beauchamp the Third, befools one of her co-partners, we find that the physical organism, which is the common property of the partnership, is feeble and neurasthenic, if not actually defective in some sensory equipment or muscular activity. But in less extreme cases it is more difficult to detect any physical symptoms corresponding with the psychical dissociation. Janet, however, and other observers agree in

attributing the ignorance which the apparently normal automatist commonly shows of the movements made by his hand to partial anæsthesia.<sup>1</sup> Binet has shown that this partial anæsthesia of the moving member can actually be detected by mechanical means; the skin of the writing hand can less readily distinguish than in the normal state the two points of a pair of compasses.<sup>2</sup> And W. James has found that the writing hand is sometimes quite insensible to pain.<sup>3</sup>

Again, in many automatists who betray no more marked sign of abnormality than the liability to fall into spontaneous trances, there may be found also local anæsthetic patches on the skin, sometimes temporary and shifting, sometimes apparently lasting unchanged for considerable periods. In the trance and occasionally at other times there will be convulsive movements, contractions, and other disturbances of the muscular system.<sup>4</sup>

On the psychical side the indications of disunion in the cerebral hierarchy are easier to detect. Binet, indeed, sees in the simplest case of automatic movement—as when the hand keeps on repeating pothooks and circles—the rudiments of a secondary personality.<sup>5</sup> But if we accept the view of the American observers cited in the last chapter, that these simpler movements are to be explained rather as instances of normal reflex action than as indicating the existence of any separate system of ideas, or parasitic consciousness, it is difficult to deny the participation of the higher ideational centres in the movement when, for instance, the writing shows intelligence not apparently inferior to that of the subject in his ordinary state. The real difficulty is to explain how this intelligence, this orderly sequence of ideas,

<sup>1</sup> *L'Automatisme Psychologique*, pp. 372, 373. Solomons and Stein (*Psychological Review*, Sept., 1896) claim to distinguish three sensory elements in our knowledge of the act of writing a word: (1) the sense of effort; (2) the feeling of the motor impulse; (3) the knowledge of the completed act gained either by "return" sensations, mostly tactile and muscular, from the arm, or by the sight of the written record. It is with the disappearance of the first two, according to them, that the feeling of personal responsibility for the act ceases. When the subject is no longer conscious of having willed or put forth effort, he does not recognise the act as his own. But other writers have not confirmed this analysis.

<sup>2</sup> *Alterations of Personality* (American translation), p. 242. London, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. American S. P. R.*, p. 549. I have recently repeated this experiment with complete success on an English subject—a well-educated man of about thirty. In the case of my subject, however, both hands were almost completely numb and insensible to the pain of pricks and pinches, but not to the touch, and they continued so not only during the (post hypnotic) act of writing, but for some minutes afterwards.

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion below, on the case of M. Flournoy's medium, Hélène Smith.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 220, etc.

springs up ready-made, without any conscious preparation on the part of the subject. It is this difficulty which has led so many persons to find the explanation of their own "automatic" rhetoric in celestial inspiration.

The explanation, no doubt, is that in such cases there has been subconscious preparation—the beginnings of a secondary consciousness. We find in a remark of Mr. Hill Tout's a clue to the mystery:—

"Building and peopling *chateaux en Espagne* was a favourite occupation of mine in my earlier days, and this long-practised faculty is doubtless a potent factor in all my characterisations, and probably also in those of many another full-fledged medium."<sup>1</sup>

It is probable that an over-indulgence in day-dreams forms the first indication of the tendency to isolated and unregulated psychic activity, which in its more extreme form may develop into a fixed idea or an obsession. The nature of the supposed process will be more clearly understood if we consider its workings in the first instance under circumstances specially favourable for its development, that is, in subjects of markedly neurotic temperament; and then return to the consideration of the effect of similar subconscious reveries in persons of more stable mental constitution. M. Janet has traced in several cases this gradual development of a subterranean day-dream until it invades and obscures the whole waking life. One of the most instructive of these histories is that entitled "A Case of Possession":—<sup>2</sup>

Achille is a French peasant of bad family history, his mother, in particular, and her family having been given to drunkenness. Achille himself in his youth was feeble, delicate, and timid, but not markedly abnormal. He married at twenty-two, and all went well until one day in his thirty-third year, after returning home from a short absence, he became afflicted with extreme taciturnity, and in the end completely dumb. He was examined by various physicians, who successively diagnosed his ailment, one as diabetes, another as angina pectoris. Achille's voice now returned, he manifested symptoms appropriate in turn to either malady, and incessantly bewailed his sufferings. In the final stage, he fell into a complete lethargy, and remained motionless for two days. At the end of that period he awoke and burst into a fit of Satanic laughter, which presently changed into frightful shrieks and complaints that he was tortured by demons. This state lasted for many

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xi, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> *Neuroses et Idées fixes*, vol. i, p. 377 *et seq.*

weeks. He would pour forth blasphemies and obscenities; and immediately afterwards lament and shudder at the terrible words which the demon had uttered through his mouth. He drank laudanum and other poisons, but did not die; he even tied his feet together, and threw himself into the water, ultimately coming safe to land. In each case he ascribed his deliverance to the fact that his body was doomed to be for ever the abode of the damned. He would describe the evil spirits which tormented him, their diabolic grimaces and the horns which adorned their heads.

Ultimately he came under Professor Janet's charge, and the latter satisfied himself that the unhappy man had all the signs of genuine possession as described by mediæval chroniclers; that his blasphemies were involuntary, and many of his actions unconsciously performed. Janet even made the devil write at his bidding—in French not too correctly spelt—poor Achille the while knowing nothing of the matter; and further established the fact that during the convulsive movements of the upper part of his body Achille's arms were insensible to pricking and pinching—an old-time proof of demoniacal possession. In the end this most guileful of modern exorcists persuaded the devil, as a proof of his power over the unhappy man, to send poor Achille to sleep; and in that suggested sleep M. Janet interrogated the demoniac, and learnt the secret of his malady. He had been acting out for all these months the course of a most unhappy dream. During the short absence which preceded his attack he had been unfaithful to his wife. Possessed with a morbid terror of betraying his fault, he had become dumb. The physicians who had been called in had unwittingly suggested, by their questions, the symptoms of one or two fatal maladies, and his morbid dream-self had promptly seized upon the hints, and realised them with surprising fidelity. In the slow development of his uneasy dream the time came for the man to die; and after death there remained for such a sinner as he nothing but damnation. The lesser devils stuck nails into the flesh, and Satan himself, squeezing through the holes so made, entered on an ambiguous co-tenancy of the tortured body.

It is pleasant to record that the skilful exorcist was able to dispel the evil dream, and restore the sufferer to his right mind.

It will be seen that here we have a veritable schism of consciousness; the dream state intervening in the ordinary life produces the illusion of a double personality, which is interpreted, according to the tradition once prevalent throughout Europe, but now lingering only in a few remote districts and in a few enfeebled intellects, as possession by the devil. It is only in markedly pathological cases that the division of the personality is so complete, and the consequence of a disordered dream so grave. But even in

very simple cases of automatism we may trace the beginnings of the cleavage; and the illusion of an alien personality, as we have seen in innumerable instances, is of very rapid growth.

Another case of M. Janet's shows us, in an educated subject, a similar example of double personality of much slower growth, but of hardly less extreme type. In this case the automatism, beginning with manifestations of the ordinary mediumistic kind, developed, owing no doubt to some native nervous instability, into a complete obsession, under which the unhappy victim, much against his conscious will, committed all kinds of absurd and injurious actions.

M. Ler at the time of the observations was a man of forty, of good intelligence and education, actively engaged in teaching, and with no definite ailment in the past beyond a tendency to neurasthenia. When about thirty years old he became interested in Spiritualism, and soon developed as a writing and drawing medium. Later he took to 'inspirational' speaking. At a still later stage the automatic manifestations, which had at the outset been confined to the séance-room, or, at least, had been summoned and repressed at will, now passed beyond the control of the unhappy 'medium,' and took to appearing at all times and seasons. Finally, the controlling 'spirit' imposed ridiculous and even hurtful commands upon him. When the victim ventured to disobey these commands, a curious penalty was exacted by the offended spirit. The man's own hand, against his will, tore his clothes, broke his furniture, and threw his papers into disorder. At the stage when Professor Janet's assistance was invoked the patient had begun to tear up bank-notes, and had on one occasion thrown himself into the Seine. In the victim's own words, '*Il m'empêche de manger. Il m'empêche de boire . . . Il est toujours pres de moi, et Il chuchote des menaces. Il ne faut pas en rire, car Il les execute trop souvent. Il m'a déjà jeté à le Seine, et Il finira par me tuer.*'<sup>1</sup>

M. Janet, taking such cases as these for a text, interprets all systematised automatism, and especially all mediumship, as examples of abnormally developed day-dreams.<sup>2</sup> It is

<sup>1</sup> *Neuroses et Idées fixes*, vol. ii. pp. 172-9.

<sup>2</sup> Janet's words are: "Je crois que nous sommes tous plus ou moins semblables à ces tout petits [children telling each other stories] et que nous aimons à nous raconter sans cesse de belles histoires qui nous font oublier la plate réalité et nous donnent le courage de travailler à la transformer. Mais cette belle histoire . . . nous nous la racontons bien souvent dans la journée même en marchant, en mangeant, en accomplissant un travail mécanique qui ne demande pas trop d'attention, des écritures, des dessins, de la couture surtout, nous nous parlons sans cesse et nous continuons ce récit interminable.

"Souvent même nous sommes ennuyés, quand les nécessités de la vie nous

probable that he somewhat exaggerates the prevalence, amongst ordinary adults, of indulgence in day-dreams of the kind supposed. Amongst adult Englishmen the practice can hardly be supposed a common one; and some statistics recently published in the *American Journal of Psychology* indicate that whilst most children and a large proportion of women are given to the practice, it is comparatively rare amongst men.<sup>1</sup>

But probably with persons of strong imagination, and especially with those of feeble health or character, or who retain many childish characteristics, the habit may persist into adult life, and form, as George Eliot puts it, a convenient mental opiate.

Nor, again, would it be reasonable to infer that because M. Ler began by practising mediumship, and ended by becoming a victim to a self-imposed obsession, that all who yield themselves to similar practices incur an appreciable risk of a like fate. It would be more in accordance with what we have learnt of mental pathology to surmise that catastrophe must in any event have overtaken M. Ler, and that Spiritualism in his case, as demoniac possession in that of Achilles, merely furnished a suitable embodiment for his delirium. In any case the persons on whom Janet's observations were made appear to have been neurotics of much more advanced types than are commonly met with in this country. In the following case, one of the most instructive which I have come across in my own experience, the idea of spiritual intercourse and its incidental practices, so far from accelerating, appears actually to have averted a serious crisis by providing a harmless outlet for pent-up nervous energies.<sup>2</sup>

Miss A. B., a young woman of about thirty, experienced a sudden and demonstrative attachment for a man, C. D., living in the same neighbourhood. The affair attracted some unpleasant notoriety, and the young man, who had apparently acted a rather

forcent à faire attention à quelque chose de réel, et nous nous hâtons de revenir à cette histoire qui se déroule en nous sans effort, d'une manière si facile et si agréable."—*Neuroses et Idées fixes*, vol. i. p. 393.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. vii. (1895), p. 86, "The Continued Story," by Mabel W. Learoyd, The exact figures are:—

	WOMEN.			MEN.	
	Yes.	No.		Yes.	No.
Adults . . . .	100	114		20	128
Children . . . .	41	21		29	23

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Garth Wilkinson, as already stated (above, p. 36), advocated the practice of automatic writing as actually beneficial in certain cases of insanity (*The Homeopathic Principle applied to Insanity*, London, 1857).

passive part throughout, abruptly discontinued the acquaintance. Miss A. B. continued, however, to cherish the belief that the man had been influenced by the malice of her enemies, and that he was still profoundly attached to her. A few weeks after the breach she felt one evening a curious feeling in the throat, as of choking—the prelude probably, under ordinary circumstances, to an attack of hysteria. This feeling was succeeded by involuntary movements of the hands and a fit of long-continued and apparently causeless sobbing. Then, in presence of a member of her family, she became, in her own belief, possessed by the spirit of C. D., personating his words and gestures and speaking in his character. After this date she continually held conversation, as she believes, with C. D.'s spirit; "he" sometimes speaking aloud through her mouth, sometimes conversing with her in the inner voice. Occasionally "he" wrote messages through her hand, and I have the testimony of a member of her family that the writing so produced resembled that of C. D. Occasionally also A. B. had visions, in which she claimed to see C. D. and what he was doing at the moment. At other times she professed to hear him speaking or to understand by some inner sympathy his feelings and thoughts.

It seems clear that in this case we have to do simply with the dream of an hysterical girl—a device by which the wounded pride is salved and possibly a serious nervous crisis averted. But this dream, unlike other dreams, is not confined to the hours when the higher centres are off duty, nor manifested only in sensory images; it pervades the waking hours, and as in Achille's case, but with happier results, is acted out in detail. A curious feature of the case is that A. B.'s dream has imposed not merely on herself, but also apparently on at least two members of her family.<sup>1</sup>

M. Flournoy, Professor of Psychology in the University of Geneva, has done more than any other recent writer to elucidate the genesis of mediumship. His methods and results are similar to those of Janet and the French School, but he has had the advantage of studying at close quarters subjects of a less abnormal type than the patients at the Salpêtrière. One of his most instructive observations is on a case of mediumship belonging to the transitional type referred to at the end of the next chapter, which germinated in a few days, and flowered apparently only for some forty-eight hours:—

<sup>1</sup> I should perhaps state that I received the account of the episode from A. B. herself and from one other member of the family. I could discover no grounds for their belief that A. B.'s sensations were in any way connected with C. D.; for it is impossible to attach any weight to the imitation of a handwriting with which A. B. was perfectly familiar.

M. Michel Til was a man of forty-eight, well educated and in good health. One Friday he was persuaded by some Spiritualist friends to try his hand at automatic writing. He succeeded at his first attempt in obtaining some flourishes, and a few phrases written in a hand very different from his own. He continued the practice for the next two days; and on the Sunday, after an evening spent with the "spirits," he passed a very troubled night. An inner voice insisted on speaking to him, promising friendship and health, and prophesying a magnificent future for him: "*Tes destinées sont bénies, je serai ton guide et ton soutien.*" His finger took to tracing similar phrases on the wall in the darkness.

The following day M. Til was much disturbed. The automatic movements continued incessantly throughout the morning, and finally the writing conveyed the terrible news that his son had been detected helping himself from his employer's cigarette-box; that he had met reproof with insolence, and had been given notice of dismissal. The distracted parent went at once to the office where his son was employed. The head of the firm was out, but the chief clerk assured M. Til that his son's character was excellent, and that they had no fault to find with him. Whilst the conversation was proceeding, M. Til's finger traced on the table a phrase which proved to be: "*Je suis navré de la duplicité de cet homme.*"

The unhappy parent could not be satisfied until the assurance of his son's good conduct had been repeated by the head of the firm on his return; and the guilty hand then wrote: "*Je t'ai trompé, Michel; pardonne-moi.*"

M. Flournoy puts forward the following explanation of the episode. M. Til had some three weeks before remarked that his son smoked a good many cigarettes. The young man had explained that everybody at his office did so, and that the chief left his cigarettes about everywhere, so that any of the clerks could have helped themselves if they wanted to. The latent and unacknowledged uneasiness which was apparently originated by this remark was stimulated to renewed activity by a chance conversation, just before the lying message was received, with an old acquaintance, who asked, "Is your son leaving his place? I hear Z. [the employer] has a vacancy for a clerk." M. Til's psychic equilibrium had been already upset by the previous automatic messages, and the disturbed night which supervened completed the mischief; in the soil thus prepared the germ of the subconscious drama sprouted and grew like Jonah's gourd, happily to wither as quickly.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Revue Philosophique*, Feb. 1899, "Genèse de quelques prétendus messages spirites."

Those who are familiar with the manifestations of modern Spiritualism will have known many cases of similar sporadic outbursts of automatism, in which the subject for a time appeared to lose control of his personality, and was only recalled by some such sudden shock as in M. Til's case. The planchette took to writing obscenities and blasphemies, the crystal revealed only purposeless horrors, or the inner voice sent the too trustful disciple on a fool's errand.

In his latest volume<sup>1</sup> M. Flournoy has given the results of five years' observation on a case of automatism which has been, according to his explanation of the matter, incubated for the greater part of a lifetime:—

Miss Hélène Smith—the name is fictitious—was born about 1863. Her parents are well educated and healthy, by no means of the neurotic or psychopathic type, though Mrs. Smith has had in the course of her life two or three hallucinatory visions. Hélène herself as a child was quiet and dreamy, and had occasional visions, but was, on the whole, not specially remarkable. She is, to all outward appearances at the present time, healthy, even to robustness. From the age of fifteen she has been employed in a large commercial establishment in Geneva, and holds a position of some responsibility. But it is in 1892 that her real history begins. In that year she was persuaded by some friends to join a Spiritualist circle. It soon appeared that she was herself a powerful medium. At first her mediumship consisted in seeing visions, hearing voices, and assisting in tilting the table, whilst still retaining more or less consciousness and subsequent memory of her experiences. Shortly after M. Flournoy's admission to the circle, in the winter of 1894-5, Miss Smith's mediumship advanced a stage, and she habitually passed at the séance into a trance state, retaining subsequently no memory of her visions and doings in that state. Her development followed at first the normal course. She delivered messages of a personal character to her sitters, purporting to emanate from deceased friends and the like. She offered numerous proofs of clairvoyance. She was from time to time controlled by spirits of the famous dead. Some of her earliest trances were under the guidance and inspiration of Victor Hugo. Within a few months, however, the spirit of the poet—too late, indeed, for his own post-mortem reputation, for he had already perpetrated some verses—was expelled with ignominy by a more masterful demon who called himself Leopold. The new-comer was at first somewhat reticent on his own past, and when urgently questioned was apt to take refuge in moral platitudes. Later, however, he revealed himself as Giuseppe Balsamo, Count Cagliostro. It then appeared that in Hélène herself was reincarnated the hapless Queen Marie Antoinette, and that others of the mortals

<sup>1</sup> *Des Indes à la planète Mars*, 1900.

represented Mirabeau, Philip of Orleans, and the Princess de Lamballe. Cagliostro, "ce cher sorcier," attended only in his discarnate state. Of all the courtly functions then held in nineteenth-century Geneva, with all their ghostly memories of past splendours and tragedies, there is no space to speak. But from M. Flournoy's spirited description it is clear that the reincarnated queen was lacking neither in wit, grace, nor dignity.

At times Héléne's memory in the trance went back to a still remoter past. As Simandini, daughter of an Arab sheikh in the fifteenth century, she had been courted by the princely Sivrouka, lord of the fortress of Tchandranguiri, in the province of Kanara, Hindustan. She had enjoyed as his wife many years of married happiness, relieved by the chaste but passionate devotion of the Fakir Kanga, and had finally proved her fidelity by expiring, in wifely fashion, amid the flames of her lord's funeral pyre. All the scenes of this forgotten history were enacted in lifelike tableaux before M. Flournoy and his friends, and duly interpreted for their benefit by the serviceable Leopold-Cagliostro. It should be added that the entranced medium, in her rôle of a princess of the Orient, wrote a sentence or two in passable Arabic and spoke a few words of Hindustani.

It is Héléne's extra-planetary experiences, however, which have excited most attention, and which furnished to the attendants at her circle the most convincing proofs of her dealings with the spiritual world. In November, 1894, the spirit of the entranced medium was wafted—not without threatenings of sea-sickness—through the cosmic void, to arrive eventually on the planet Mars. Thereafter night after night she described to the listening circle the people of our neighbour planet, their food, dress, and ways of life. At times she drew pictures of the inhabitants—human and animal—of their houses, bridges, and other edifices, and of the surrounding landscape. Later she both spoke and wrote freely in the Martian language. From the writings reproduced in M. Flournoy's book it is clear that the characters of the Martian script are unlike any in use on earth, and that the words (of which a translation is furnished) bear no resemblance, superficially at least, to any known tongue. The spirits—for several dwellers upon Mars used Héléne's organism to speak and write through—delivered themselves with freedom and fluency, and were consistent in their usage both of the spoken and the written words. In fact, Martian, as used by the entranced Héléne, has many of the characteristics of a genuine language; and it is not surprising that some of the onlookers, who may have hesitated over the authenticity of the other revelations, were apparently convinced that these Martian utterances were beyond the common order of nature.

Such in brief outline are the mediumistic revelations of Héléne Smith. Under M. Flournoy's deft analysis all

pretensions to a supramundane origin disappear. The Martian cycle is, in his view, a romance pure and simple, the first germs of which are to be found in the speculations of Flammarion and others as to the possible inhabitants of that planet. The descriptions of the social life, the dress, the habits of the Martians are, as he shows, infantile in their simplicity; the landscapes are too obviously suggested by Japanese lacquer and Nankin dishes. And the language—marvellous work of art—is still a work of art, the creation of a mind whose mother-tongue was French. The vowel and consonant sounds are the same as in French; the inflections, the grammar, the construction are all obviously modelled on French; Martian even uses a double word for the negative (*ke ani = ne pas*), employs the same word, *zi*, to express "the" (*la*) and "there" (*là*); and so on in innumerable other cases. In fact, the so-called Martian language is such a language as a young child might construct by substituting for each word in the French dictionary an arbitrary collocation of letters, and for each letter a new and arbitrary symbol. As a work of art it is infantile; as a feat of memory it is prodigious. In the same way M. Flournoy shows that the Arabic, the Hindoo, and the historical elements generally of the other cycles can be traced to sources possibly, in some cases patently, open to the medium.

Again, M. Flournoy finds that Héléne's clairvoyant messages to himself dealt almost exclusively with periods and incidents with which Mrs. Smith was familiar, and of which Héléne might well have heard her mother speak. Nor in any other of Héléne's trance revelations, some of which are curiously like those of Madame Hauffe and other noted seeresses in the past, can M. Flournoy, predisposed though he is to believe in the possibility at least of telepathy, find any positive proof of the acquisition of knowledge through supernormal channels.

Thus, to take one of the most remarkable cases. At a séance held in 1899 Héléne has a vision of a village and a landscape which she cannot recognise, and an old man who possesses himself of her hand, and writes "Chaumontet Syndic." Later, the information was given that the old man was Syndic of Chessenaz in 1839. At another séance Héléne wrote a message of three lines and signed it "Burnier, Curé de Chessenaz."

M. Flournoy made inquiries, and found that there is a small village named Chessenaz in Haute Savoie, about sixteen miles from Geneva, and learnt by correspondence

with the mayor that in 1839 the syndic of the village was one Jean Chaumontet, and the curé was named Burnier. Moreover, the names written through Héléne's hand presented some resemblance to the authentic signatures of these two worthies preserved on a document forwarded by the mayor for M. Flournoy's inspection. Héléne stated that she had never been in Chessenaz; but she had relations in a neighbouring village and had been to visit them. The case cannot, I think, be regarded as affording strong evidence of supernormal faculty.<sup>1</sup>

A case of this kind inevitably suggests that the facts given at the séance were got up beforehand for the purpose of imposing upon the sitters. The same explanation is *primâ facie* indicated in some others of Héléne's clairvoyant manifestations, such as some of the personal messages given to M. Flournoy and others, the reproduction—obviously by a person who was ignorant of either language—of fragments of Hindoo and Arabic, and so on. But M. Flournoy is absolutely satisfied of the good faith of his medium; and his five years' acquaintance with her clearly entitles his opinion on the matter to some weight. His own explanation of these incidents, that they represent probably the revival of latent memories, is consistent with his view of the whole case.

Héléne's mediumship is, in fact, according to her sympathetic chronicler, simply a reversion to the dreams of her childhood. As a little girl she was quiet, dreamy, fond of solitude, and very timid. Her tendency to automatism showed itself in various ways; she would draw with a pencil, or compose, with bits of cloth, fantastic designs in an oriental style; she would sit in her chair on Sunday afternoons and see vision after vision arise before her eyes—golden landscapes, ruins standing in the midst of a desert, chimæras on pedestals—foreshadowing, no doubt, the Hindoo and Martian scenery of her later trances. The child saw also several apparitions; one, in particular, representing a monk in a brown robe, with a white cross on his breast, who appeared to her in moments of terror and danger—when attacked by a dog, or addressed with undue freedom by a stranger. In her later years Leopold-Balsamo-Cagliostro claimed that this shadowy protector of her girlhood was none other than himself.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 406-10. M. Flournoy expresses no decided opinion about this particular case, but he is disposed, without dogmatizing on the subject, to take the view that Héléne possesses real telepathic and clairvoyant powers.

Moreover, it appeared that H el ene as a child was somewhat at odds with her surroundings. Her mother thought her unhappy, her father and brothers that she was proud and despised their humble circumstances. There seems to have been some truth in this latter accusation; at any rate, it is recorded that on one occasion she asked her parents whether she was really their own child, and not a changeling. Discontented thus with the limited horizon offered to her, she appears to have turned her thoughts inward, and indulged, as children will, in day-dreams. The growth of the dream was favoured by the child's love of solitude, disinclination to active exertion and artistic temperament. In her inner life she became a queen, and escaped at will into other centuries and other worlds. The habit of dreaming was thus formed, and much of the material which appeared later in her trances was no doubt accumulated in the critical period between her tenth and her twentieth years, when her reveries and hallucinations appear to have been most marked. After the latter date these automatic phenomena, under the pressure of external circumstances, and her absorption in her daily occupations, appear to have been in abeyance, until the Spiritualist s ances which began in 1892 gave them a new impetus. From that point they developed rapidly; and the store of dream imagery inherited from her earlier years was enlarged and embellished under the influence, now of Allan Kardec, or Flammarion, or Dumas, now by suggestions of the admiring circle who attended on her trances. In M. Flournoy's view, then, we have in H el ene's trances a reversion to earlier stages of consciousness. The Martian cycle is marked out as the earliest of these childhood reveries, by the naive and infantile character of its leading conceptions, and by the fact that the Martian "language" shows no trace of any influence but French, whereas H el ene in later childhood had learnt some German.<sup>1</sup> The two other main cycles afford indications not only of a later stage of mental development, but of historical knowledge acquired probably in more recent years. H el ene in the trance is just a child of larger growth, weaving her gorgeous reveries in happy oblivion of the commonplace and sordid restrictions of her waking life. Just as in pathological states of the physical organism

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 242. M. Flournoy points out that the linguistic faculty shown in the construction of the Martian language, of which faculty little trace appears in the waking H el ene, is probably derived from her father, who had a great facility for the acquisition of languages, and could speak five or six European tongues fluently (p. 15).

certain groups of primitive cells may multiply and produce various morbid growths, "de même, en psychologie, il semble aussi que certains éléments reculés et primitifs de l'individu, des couches infantiles encore douées de plasticité et de mobilité, sont particulièrement aptes à engendrer ces étranges végétations subconscientes, sortes de tumeurs ou d'excroissances psychiques, que nous appelons des personnalités secondes."<sup>1</sup>

But though M. Flournoy finds the tumour in this instance benign, the phenomenon is none the less, as he points out, pathological. Physical proof of Héléne's pathological condition during her trance is to be found in various disturbances of the muscular system (contractions, convulsions, and involuntary movements of various kinds), partial paralysis, and local anæsthetic patches. One significant symptom is the frequent occurrence of complete "allochiry"—a confusion between her right and left sides of such a nature that she will persistently look for her pocket on the left side, instead of on the right; and that if one of her fingers is pricked or pinched behind a screen, so that she cannot *see* the injured member, it is the corresponding finger of the other hand which is agitated.<sup>2</sup> This curious inability to distinguish between the right hand and the left is one of the stigmata of hysteria.<sup>3</sup>

Again, though Héléne in her adult life appears to be, as a rule, quite normal and healthy outside the séance-room, and manages the duties of her post to the satisfaction of her employers, yet fragments of the subliminal romances occasionally intrude themselves into hours of business—an irruption of subterranean lava into the peaceful upper strata of her being. Thus some of her letters contain sporadic Martian characters, and when consulted on the colour of a ribbon, she has been known to drop into poetry.<sup>4</sup> More-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Janet, *Neuroses et Idées fixes*, vol. i. p. 234, etc.; *Etat mental des Hystériques* (1892), p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Here is the quatrain in question—

"Les nuances de ces rubans  
Me rappellent mes jeunes ans  
Ce bleu *verdi* je m'en souviens  
Dans mes cheveux *alloit* si bien."

The case is further complicated by the fact that, in writing an account of the incident to M. Lemaître, a colleague of M. Flournoy's in the investigation, Héléne wrote the italicised words and parts of words in the script appropriated by the séance-consciousness for Marie Antoinette, and that the mental vision which accompanied the verses belonged obviously to the "Royal Cycle" (pp. 53, 54).

over, for a period of six months, when she was suffering from general debility and menorrhagia, and unable to attend to her business, the automatic manifestations invaded her waking life almost to the point of actual inconvenience.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Smith's mediumship included manifestations of all kinds. The physical phenomena were, indeed, few, and ceased at an early period. But they were of an unequivocal character; they resembled closely the early manifestations of Mrs. Guppy and other noted mediums, and it is conceivable that under favourable circumstances Héléne's mediumship might have developed on similar lines. The earlier circle at which these phenomena appeared was, however, composed of inharmonious elements, and soon broke up. After the commencement of M. Flournoy's acquaintance with Héléne the physical phenomena appear to have been confined to occasional levitation of tables and transportation of flowers, etc., at Héléne's own home, with her father or mother as witnesses. The only case which M. Flournoy cites in detail occurred during the six months' illness above referred to.

At the earlier séances, however, which were held in the dark, besides movements of the table, etc., there were occasional playing on a piano and other instruments at a distance, and "apports." The "apports" included at first flowers of various kinds, branches of trees, a leaf of ivy bearing in legible characters the name of one of the chief "communicators" at the time. Later, when Héléne's exotic and oriental visions began, the "apports" changed their character correspondingly. The circle now received shells filled with sand and still wet from the sea, a china vase full of water containing a rose, Chinese money, etc., etc.<sup>2</sup>

Here, then, we have the problem of physical mediumship expressed in its simplest terms. Miss Smith is a young woman of good character: she has none of the ordinary motives for deception: an acute observer, with prolonged

<sup>1</sup> Pages 38, 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 354-62. As regards the "apports," M. Flournoy contents himself with pointing out the difficulties in the way of the hypothesis of a fourth dimension, or the passage of matter through matter, and prefers to express no opinion as to how the things came into the circle, which sat, naturally, with closed doors. On general grounds, however, partly because of the experiments of Thury, Richet, and Crookes, and partly no doubt because of his conviction of the honesty of the medium, he is inclined to believe in the possible genuineness of the simpler movements—levitation of furniture, transportation of flowers and oranges, etc.—which involve, as he justly remarks, no more cumbersome hypothesis than that of a force radiating from the medium which should be capable of attracting or repelling objects in the neighbourhood.

and exceptionally favourable opportunities for observation, is convinced of her complete honesty. Yet she rolls oranges about the floor when her father is not looking, and smuggles white lilac and sea-shells into the room at a dark séance. Miss Smith is unquestionably an unconscious and involuntary agent in the prolonged drama of the Martian cycle. She is an involuntary, if not wholly an unconscious, agent when she spouts verses from behind the counter in answer to a customer.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to suppose that these other actions were altogether knowingly and wilfully undertaken. But the "apports" imply a prolonged process of preparation; the objects had to be selected and procured beforehand, introduced surreptitiously into the séance-room, and presented at the appropriate moment to the expectant circle. If the whole process is performed automatically—or, let us say, without the full concurrence of will and consciousness—we have to assume, first, that the programme of each séance is prepared beforehand in some subliminal manufactory. The elaborate structure of Miss Smith's romances would by itself indicate some previous preparation, and we have in certain cases evidence that various scenes of the drama had been rehearsed before their presentation to the circle.<sup>2</sup> We have further to suppose that this process of subliminal preparation may include the performance, during waking life, of acts more or less completely ignored by the ordinary consciousness. We have seen that Miss Smith unwittingly intercalates fragments of Martian or royal writing into her private correspondence. Could she, with equal innocence, put a bunch of white lilac or a china vase into her pocket before the séance?

Many analogous cases can, of course, be quoted of acts performed in obedience to an impulse, the secret springs of which are hidden from the knowledge of the agent. Even dreams occasionally exercise a more or less unconscious influence on the waking life. Tissié narrates a case in which a man repeatedly committed thefts in the daytime in reluctant fulfilment of the dream of the night before. More worthy of credence perhaps is an instance which he relates in his own experience: Walking in the boulevard one day, he found himself executing an involuntary *coup de*

<sup>1</sup> It is probable that these waking automatisms would in many cases almost instantly fade from the memory if there were no external cause—as, in this case, the injunction to note down at once an account of such incidents—to fix their trace in consciousness.

<sup>2</sup> See M. Flournoy's remarks on this point, pp. 70-4.

*jarret*, and traced the movement to the vague reminiscence of a recent dream, in which he had been pushing a heavy handcart.<sup>1</sup> Moll gives other instances of dreams inducing subsequent action.<sup>2</sup>

Again, when the nervous system is enfeebled by disease, exhaustion, or old age, the patient may commit acts now merely trivial and purposeless, now actually repugnant to his conscious will, as in coprolalia and kleptomania. In certain states, such as masked epilepsy, the patient may continue to act, to all outward seeming, in an intelligent manner, though he himself retains no subsequent recollection of what he has done or said. He may even commit crimes or other actions foreign to his ordinary character. Those rare and striking cases of double consciousness and multiplex personality which have been so much studied of late years in France and America furnish additional illustrations. But these catastrophic disturbances of consciousness are perhaps too remote from ordinary experience to throw much light upon the problem. It is in more commonplace, though hardly more familiar regions, in the facts of hysteria on the one hand, and of post-hypnotic suggestion on the other, that we find the strongest support for the interpretation of physical mediumship above indicated.

In the hysterical patient we see the same exaggerated self-consciousness which characterises the magnetic somnambule and her successor, the spirit medium. In both the master-impulse is the desire to attract attention, sympathy, and admiration. The young woman who in one generation and in one set of social conditions seeks to make herself the centre of her little world by an imaginary spinal complaint, or a prolonged exhibition of saintly dying, at other times and in other circumstances will achieve the same end by surreptitiously ringing the household bells, or by rapping on the legs of her chair. The acts of the hysteric, again, are like those of the medium and the Poltergeist child in their apparent purposelessness. The servant girl who sets fire to the house, or the baby, with no other aim than to get herself talked about, exhibits hardly greater disproportion of means to end than the private medium who keeps up the dull farce of spirit raps and spirit voices for nearly half a century. The study of hysteria paints for us in rather coarser colours just such a weakening of the moral sense, such an inextricable mingling of imposture and reality,

<sup>1</sup> Tissié, *Les Rêves*, pp. 154, 170, etc. Paris, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> *Hypnotism* (English trans.), p. 202. London, 1890.

and such examples of unnatural cunning posing under the mask of innocence, as we find in mediumship. It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that the historical cases which are claimed by Spiritualists as instances of possession are classed in modern text-books as exhibitions of hysterio-epilepsy.

The view of hysteria commonly accepted in this country regards it as mainly a disease of the will, a perversion of the moral sense, and conceives that the patient knows what he is doing, and can be taught, by moral admonition or judicious neglect, to do better. But the records of the Salpêtrière and similar institutions furnish grounds for believing that, in some cases at any rate, the eclipse alike of wit and will may be more complete than is allowed for in the common view. Janet has recently described a case from his own *clinique*, which admirably illustrates the present discussion:—

Some two years back a young woman of twenty-six, Meb, was brought to Janet who was suffering from hallucinations of a distressing nature. On making inquiry into the previous history of the patient, he found, as is not unusually the case, that the hallucinations, which had persisted for many years, had been originally of a devotional character. Amongst these earlier visions the most conspicuous figure was Saint Philomela, whose reality was held, not only by the patient herself, but by her mother and aunt, as incontestably proved by certain substantial tokens—pebbles, feathers, flowers, and small pieces of cheap jewellery—which the saint had brought with her. These “apports” were sometimes found lying about on the stairs or in other unlikely spots, as if fallen there by chance; sometimes they would be discovered by the patient in her bedroom on waking in the morning. On one occasion she thus found several small objects arranged so as to form a cross; at another time a pair of wings was stretched out on the eider-down quilt. Occasionally, again, these “apports” made their appearance mysteriously in the daytime in other parts of the house; notably on one occasion feathers floated down from the ceiling upon the family assembled at their evening meal.

Janet threw Meb into the hypnotic sleep, and she then revealed the secret of these manifestations: it was she herself, in a state of natural somnambulism, who had arranged little pieces of glass in the form of a cross; she who had placed pebbles and silver brooches on the stairway; she who had put a stool on the table and, mounted thereon, had lightly fastened small feathers from her quilt with paste to the ceiling of the *salle à manger*, so that the heat of the lamp might bring them fluttering down. In her waking state she had professed to share the surprise which these portents excited

in her relations, and Janet, after careful study of the case, is inclined to think that the profession was genuine, and that when awake Meb retained no recollection of her skilful preparations for these thaumaturgic exhibitions.<sup>1</sup>

The analogy of post-hypnotic suggestion lends support to Janet's view of the innocence of the waking Meb. The hypnotised subject, at the request of his operator, will commonly undertake in the trance to perform actions, even of a complicated and arduous nature, and will faithfully perform his promise after being aroused from the trance. The interval between promise and fulfilment may vary from minutes to months; the enjoined act may be the blowing out of a candle, the mispronunciation of a household word, a mimic murder, the working out of an elaborate arithmetical calculation, or the vision and salutation of a phantasmal figure. The state of the subject during the performance of the enjoined action varies very widely. In some cases he relapses into a state indistinguishable from that of the original trance, and immediately after the performance will be found to have forgotten the whole incident. In other cases, though the action is carried out with full consciousness, and the agent is not even at a loss for a plausible motive for his conduct, the real source of the impulse is entirely hidden from him. In yet other instances it would seem that there is a faint recollection of the original undertaking; just as in the earlier trances, as already pointed out, the hypnotised subject is often half aware, whilst realising some suggested illusion, that he is acting a part. So Miss Smith, as we have seen, was vaguely aware of the absurdity of her occasional lapses into poetry during business hours. In the early stages of automatism there is often a conflict between the idea automatically suggested and the normal consciousness. The subject is partly conscious of what he is doing, but, not knowing why he does it, feels as if he was not personally responsible for the thing done. Eventually, if the automatism is indulged, it is conceivable that it may become systematised, and the unconsciousness thus become complete, as we have reason to believe it frequently is in the case of post-hypnotic performance of suggestion.

Whilst, however, cases such as that described by Janet have a direct bearing upon our present problem, we should not be justified in pressing the analogy too closely. Meb, as Janet's account of her condition shows, was an hysteric of

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin de l'Institut Psychologique International*, Dec., 1901.

a comparatively advanced type, much farther removed from sanity than was the case, apparently, with the English and American mediums whose "physical phenomena" we have been considering. There were no such patent indications of abnormality in Home or Stainton Moses, or even in Hélène Smith, as would permit us lightly to assume that "apports" and other phenomena involving prolonged preparation and considerable forethought could have been produced wholly without the participation of the agent's normal consciousness. It is more in accordance with known analogies to suppose that the medium in such cases yields, perhaps, innocently at first to the promptings of an impulse which may come to him as from a higher power, or that he is moved by an instinctive compulsion to aid in the development of his automatic romance; that, like a child of larger growth, he plays his part in a self-suggested drama with something of the freedom from moral and rational limitations which characterises our nightly dreams, but with something also of that double consciousness which warns us, even in dreams, that we are playing a part. In any case, if he continues to abet and encourage this automatic prompting, it is not likely that he can long retain both honesty and sanity unimpaired. The man who looks on at his hand doing a thing, but acquits himself of responsibility for the thing done, can hardly claim to be considered as a moral agent; and the step is short to instigating and repeating a like action in the future, without the excuse of an overmastering impulse.

This, or something like it, is probably the history of the development of most cases of private "physical mediumship." How far, in each particular case, the "medium" may be unconscious of the action at the moment, or free from responsibility for the whole process of deception, it is, of course, impossible for any external observation to determine. But that, after all, is a question of ethics rather than of psychology.

In Miss Smith's case, whether because her good sense warned her of the danger, or possibly because her feeling of personal dignity (which M. Flournoy assures us is a very prominent feature in her character) was outraged by accidentally becoming aware of the suspicions of her good faith entertained by some members of the circle, or from some other cause, the physical phenomena soon ceased at her séances, and her automatism developed on less equivocal lines.

These considerations raise an issue of great practical

importance, how far, to wit, the cultivation of what may conveniently be called mediumistic powers involves the risk of injury to the medium. Probably the data are not yet sufficient to admit of the question being fully answered. But even now we can see that there is a wide distinction in this respect between the psychological and the physical manifestations. Crystal-gazing and trance-speaking, even when practised for many years, appear to have no ill effect. One of the best crystal-seers of my acquaintance is a lady in robust health, mentally and physically. Mr. Lang has given similar testimony as regards the crystal-seers whose visions he has described.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Piper's health would not appear to have suffered by her prolonged course of trances. Hélène Smith could carry on nightly conversations with the inhabitants of other worlds, and retain her waking faculties unimpaired. At a large meeting of Spiritualists and their friends I have picked out two well-known "clairvoyant" mediums, one of them a lady who has kindly given much of her time for purposes of investigation by some of my colleagues, as being, of all the company, conspicuously on the best terms with their physical organisms. The mediumistic seems closely akin to the hypnotic trance, and the automatic phenomena incident to the two states are almost precisely parallel. There are cases in which men and women have been for prolonged periods the subjects of hypnotic experiment without apparent injury to health, intellect, or character.

On the whole, then, the experience so far gained furnishes little ground for apprehension that the investigation of psychological phenomena of this kind in adults, if conducted with reasonable prudence, is likely to have injurious effects on the subject. But the case is different when we turn to physical mediumship. It is obvious, on any view of the case, that the departure from the normal involved in the production of physical phenomena is much greater. And if we accept the view here presented, that such phenomena are invariably fraudulent, the responsibility which rests on those who invite their production is necessarily grave. That in the interests of knowledge even this form of moral vivisection cannot be defended, I, for one, should hesitate to affirm. But no one who realises the true significance of the facts would lightly embark upon an enterprise which involves the risk of such serious moral dangers. To attend the séances of a professional medium is perhaps at

<sup>1</sup> In *The Making of Religion* (1898), chapter on Crystal Visions.

worst to countenance a swindle; to watch the gradual development of innocent automatism into physical mediumship may be to assist at a process of moral degeneration.

For the beginnings of such automatism are like the beginnings of disaffection in the State. Alike in the corporeal and in the political hierarchy certain anarchic elements may free themselves from constitutional control, and work out their own ends, within limits, with impunity. In a fairly stable constitution those limits are soon reached, and the rebellious elements are suppressed, or learn to acquiesce in their limitations. When, however, from stress of external circumstances or inherent defect, the forces of control are enfeebled, the contagion of disorder may spread further, and a permanent centre of rebellion thus be formed—*imperium in imperio*—which may grow strong enough to rival and ultimately even to overthrow the central Government. So, in persons of unstable nervous system it would seem that these automatic manifestations tend to develop until a point is reached at which they pass beyond the control, and, it may be, even beyond the consciousness of the work-a-day self. And unless we are prepared to admit that these dubious phenomena do indeed testify to the working of physical energies unknown to Science, we are forced to recognise that, however trivial and innocent may seem the first steps in "physical mediumship," where the good sense of the medium or his friends does not intervene to stop the further development of the manifestations, they must end either in a dishonesty which carries less disgrace than the dishonesty of the market-place only because the victim may be supposed not wholly responsible, or in a permanent defect of rational control, less dangerous no doubt than recognised forms of mental infirmity, as being partly feigned.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TRANCE UTTERANCES OF MRS. PIPER

BY the admission that, while the so-called physical phenomena of Spiritualism afford no evidence of the action of any physical force beyond that exerted by the human muscles, the medium himself in performing the feats may be a not wholly conscious or voluntary agent, the ground is cleared for the real problem of Spiritualism. Inadequate, as we have endeavoured to show, as an explanation even of the physical phenomena, deliberate fraud is seen to be preposterous as a final solution of what are conveniently called the mental manifestations. Automatic oratory and crystal vision may no doubt be feigned, and probably are constantly feigned for trade purposes. But no one who has seriously studied the evidence at first hand can doubt that the entranced subject, at any rate, has in many cases powers of perception and apprehension which are beyond those exercised by normal persons, and which cannot be deliberately acquired by the most prolonged practice. Even the professional "thought-reader" who exhibits his powers on a public platform, or the equally professional "sensitive" who performs at the *clinique* of some Paris physicians, probably owes his success not more to training than to natural endowment. And where trickery is precluded by the very conditions of the experiment we often find indubitable indications of some preternormal receptivity to impressions. The manifestations which have been supposed to afford evidence of such preternormal receptivity in mediumistic or sensitive subjects may conveniently be classed into two main groups. In the first group are included those cases in which the influence, whether of the living operator or of inanimate objects, on the sensitive subject is apparently exercised at close quarters. Such are the alleged instances of community of sensation

described by the earlier Magnetists in this country and on the Continent; the supposed action of metals, gems, drugs, and magnets; the apparent ability of the sensitive to detect mesmerised water and mesmerised coins. With these may also be grouped, perhaps, the exhibitions of Phreno-Mesmerism, where the subject was demonstrably ignorant of the location of the phrenological organs, and most instances of clairvoyance at close quarters, or seeing objects with closed eyes, as described in the reports of the second French Commission, and by Townshend and other English Mesmerists. In some instances, as in the case of Major Buckley's clairvoyants, who professed to be able to read mottoes in sealed nuts, commonplace trickery is probably a sufficient explanation. In other cases, the nature and extent of the success achieved, and the ease with which expert observers, including conjurers, were baffled, force us to look for some agency more equal to the marvels recorded. No doubt in such instances the results may generally be attributed, on the one hand, to hyperæsthesia of the senses of touch, hearing, or sight, conditioned by the somnambulant state; on the other hand, to the indications furnished by the voice, look, gestures, or breathing of the innocent experimenter. Most of the results recorded by the earlier French Magnetists, by Reichenbach, by Elliotson and his contemporaries, may, so far as the records enable us to judge, be safely attributed to the effect of such unconscious suggestion acting on specially receptive, that is, generally, hyperæsthetic, subjects. Nor, until similar results are obtained under conditions which preclude the operation of suggestion by normal channels—and I have failed so far to find any record of such experiments—need we look for any other explanation of the alleged action at a distance of metals, drugs, and magnets, the transference of sensibility, and similar marvels vouched for by modern French observers.

In a few rare instances in the past, however, as I have endeavoured to show in discussing the records of early Mesmerism, especially in this country,<sup>1</sup> the results would seem to go beyond anything which, in the stated conditions, the acumen of the most hyperæsthetic sensitive could gather from the most apocalyptic of experimenters. It is not easy thus to explain all manifestations noted by Pététin, Bertrand, and Elliotson; it is still more difficult to suppose that Braid, who was, at any rate, fully alive to the risks of unconscious suggestion, should in his experiments in Phreno-Mesmerism

<sup>1</sup> See above, Book I. chaps. viii. and ix.

have so flagrantly neglected the precautions which he was constantly enforcing on others.

In the second group are placed the alleged instances of the perception of distant scenes and persons. Clairvoyance of this kind bulks, as we have seen, very largely in the early history of Spiritualism. As a matter of fact, however, from 1848 onwards until a quite recent date, whether because the observers were generally lacking in scientific training and habits of accurate observation, or because the spurious physical phenomena diverted an undue share of interest to themselves, we find amongst the numerous references to clairvoyance hardly any records sufficiently detailed to be worth consideration. Prior to 1848 the trance utterances of Cahagnet's somnambules,<sup>1</sup> and some of the clairvoyant descriptions recorded by Gregory, Haddock, and other English Mesmerists merit most attention.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking generally, however, the instances alike of community of sensation and of clairvoyance at a distance recorded by the older observers are scarcely sufficient in themselves to afford a case for investigation. The observers were, if not always untrained, in almost every case ignorant of the special dangers to be guarded against and the special precautions necessary; moreover, the conditions and surroundings are, for the most part, very imperfectly described, and the results are generally vitiated by the amiable confidence professed by the observer in the good faith of his sensitive—a confidence which, being founded on experience of the sensitive in his normal state, was, as we now know, in the actual circumstances irrelevant. Again, in most cases of "travelling" clairvoyance, we are told too little of the antecedents and general circumstances of the case, or of the precautions, if any, which were taken to ensure that the information uttered in the trance could not have reached the clairvoyant by normal means. And, finally, except in the case of Cahagnet's somnambule, Adèle, the records are sporadic, and the accounts given, which have obviously been selected and preserved because of their special excellence, may merely represent the few lucky hits out of a very large number of barren experiments. I have already pointed out that the records of the clairvoyance shown by Alexis Didier are vitiated by considerations of an analogous kind, Alexis being able to choose the one or two persons to whom he furnished successful tests out of the large number present at his séance.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Book I. chap. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Book I. chap. x.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I. pp. 147-8.

But since the foundation, in 1882, of the Society for Psychical Research, and the more rigorous methods of experiment inaugurated by Professor W. F. Barrett and his colleagues, the problem has assumed a new aspect. Within the last twenty years a large mass of evidence has been accumulated for the operation of some faculty which can take cognisance of things outside the scope of any possible extension of the known senses. This hypothetical faculty, which is assumed to represent the action, unmediated by the external sense-organs, of one mind or brain upon another mind or brain, has been provisionally named *thought-transference* or *telepathy*. Space will not permit here of any but the briefest reference to the bulk of this evidence. It may be conveniently grouped under three main heads.

(1) *Experimental*. The one party to the experiment, who may be close at hand, in an adjoining room, or at a distance of some miles, endeavours to impress upon the other party some idea with which his own mind is occupied at the moment—an object in the room, a number, a mental picture, and so on. In a few rare instances the agent has succeeded in evoking experimentally an apparition of himself before the distant percipient.

(2) *Spontaneous*. A large number of instances of apparitions coinciding with death, intimations of illness and accident, have been critically examined and, as far as the circumstances would permit, verified by careful inquiries, inspection of letters and diaries, and collation of other corroborative testimony.

(3) *Trance observations*. Within the last ten years a third source of information—the trance utterances of certain clairvoyants—has assumed considerable, and may ultimately assume preponderant importance. Under the conditions observed by Dr. Hodgson in the case of Mrs. Piper, the best-known of these clairvoyants, this form of inquiry more nearly resembles in rigidity and precision an experimental investigation in the laboratory than a mere record of spontaneous mediumistic outpourings.

Mrs. Piper is a typical medium. By a fortunate combination of circumstances she has been saved from the temptation, to which nearly every other clairvoyant medium of note has at one time or another succumbed, to advertise her gifts by resorting to physical phenomena.<sup>1</sup> For many years past her

<sup>1</sup> So far as I am aware, no other clairvoyant medium of note since 1848 has failed at one time or another to exhibit physical phenomena, if only to the extent of table-tapping, as part of her mediumistic gifts. Even with the earlier French

trance manifestations have been the subject of accurate and continuous observation and record, and have no doubt in the process been modified by the constant suggestions received from her environment. But at the outset she appears to have represented the ordinary phases of trance mediumship as exhibited in America fifteen or twenty years ago. In 1885 she came under the observation of Professor William James, of Harvard, and two years later of Dr. Hodgson and other members of the American Society for Psychical Research. From Dr. Hodgson's subsequent inquiries it would appear that Mrs. Piper in 1884 had visited, for medical advice, a professional clairvoyant, whose leading control purported to be a French physician named Finné, or Finnett. At her second visit Mrs. Piper herself became entranced, and was controlled by an Indian girl named (*mirabile dictu*) Chlorine. Thereafter other controls appeared—Mrs. Siddons, Bach, Longfellow, Commodore Vanderbilt, Loretta Ponchini. A year or two later, when she was first seen by W. James and others, a French doctor had succeeded in obtaining almost exclusive control. The name of this French doctor was reported to be Phinuit. For the last fifteen years Mrs. Piper in her trances has been under the almost continuous observation and supervision of members of the S.P.R., chiefly Dr. Hodgson, and nearly all her utterances—especially during the latter part of this period—have been exactly recorded. For some years past, moreover, the task of preserving a complete record has been simplified, as the revelations through the trance have for the most part been given through her hand in writing, instead of orally, as at the outset.

Here is a typical illustration of one of her trance conversations. The case is chosen partly as being, by exception, a condensed description only, and, therefore, short enough to quote, partly because the narrator, Professor Shaler, of Harvard, is a well-known man of science, and by no means

and German somnambules, as shown in Book I., stone-throwing and other movements of objects occasionally appeared. And since that date the collocation is so general as to be extremely significant. I have already dwelt at length on the cases of Home and Stainton Moses. It is enough to say here that Stainton Moses appears in this respect to be typical of private mediums generally. The chief private clairvoyants, whose experiences have been recorded by the S.P.R., have also been on occasion mediums for physical phenomena. Sometimes the phenomena have been recorded elsewhere, under an assumed name; sometimes they have taken place only in the family circle or amongst intimate friends, and have not been made public at all. But the fact of their occurrence in such circumstances, where the operator could have had no adequate or readily intelligible motive for fraud, affords strong confirmation of the view taken in the text that mediumship is a pathologic state.

prepossessed in favour of Mrs. Piper or the hypothesis of telepathy. The sitting was held on May 25th, 1894, at the house of Professor James, in Cambridge, Boston; Professor Shaler, with his wife and Professor James, who was taking notes, being present. Professor Shaler writes to Professor James on June 6th :—<sup>1</sup>

"MY DEAR JAMES,—At the sitting with Mrs. Piper on May 25th I made the following notes :—

"As you remember, I came to the meeting with my wife; when Mrs. Piper entered the trance state Mrs. Shaler took her hand. After a few irrelevant words, my wife handed Mrs. Piper an engraved seal, which she knew, though I did not, had belonged to her brother, a gentleman from Richmond, Virginia, who died about a year ago. At once Mrs. Piper began to make statements clearly relating to the deceased, and in the course of the following hour she showed a somewhat intimate acquaintance with his affairs, those of his immediate family, and those of the family in Hartford, Conn., with which the Richmond family had had close social relations. The statements made by Mrs. Piper, in my opinion, entirely exclude the hypothesis that they were the results of conjectures, directed by the answers made by my wife. I took no part in the questioning, but observed very closely all that was done.

"On the supposition that the medium had made very careful preparation for her sittings in Cambridge, it would have been possible for her to have gathered all the information which she rendered by means of agents in the two cities, though I must confess that it would have been rather difficult to have done the work.

"The only distinctly suspicious features were that certain familiar baptismal names were properly given, while those of an unusual sort could not be extracted, and also that one or two names were given correctly as regards the ceremony of baptism or the directory, but utterly wrong from the point of view of family usage. Thus the name of a sister-in-law of mine, a sister of my wife's, was given as Jane, which is true by the record, but in forty years' experience of an intimate sort I never knew her to be called Jane—in fact, I did not at first recognise who was meant.

"While I am disposed to hold to the hypothesis that the performance is one that is founded on some kind of deceit, I must confess that close observation of the medium made on me the impression that she is honest. Seeing her under any other conditions, I should not hesitate to trust my instinctive sense as to the truthfulness of the woman.

"I venture also to note, though with some hesitancy, the fact that the ghost of the ancient Frenchman who never existed, but who purports to control Mrs. Piper, though he speaks with a first-

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xiii. pp. 524, 525.

rate stage French accent, does not, so far as I can find, make the characteristic blunders in the order of his English words which we find in actual life. Whatever the medium is, I am convinced that this 'influence' is a preposterous scoundrel.

"I think I did not put strongly enough the peculiar kind of knowledge which the medium seems to have concerning my wife's brother's affairs. Certain of the facts, as, for instance, those relating to the failure to find his will after his sudden death, were very neatly and dramatically rendered. They had the real life quality. So, too, the name of a man who was to have married my wife's brother's daughter, but who died a month before the time fixed for the wedding, was correctly given, both as regards surname and Christian name, though the Christian name was not remembered by my wife or me.

"I cannot determine how probable it is that the medium, knowing she was to have a sitting with you in Cambridge, or rather a number of them, took pains to prepare for the tests by carefully working up the family history of several of your friends. If she had done this for thirty or so persons, I think she could, though with some difficulty, have gained just the kind of knowledge which she rendered. She would probably have forgotten that my wife's brother's given name was Legh, and that of his mother Gabriella, while she remembered that of Mary and Charles, and also that of a son in Cambridge, who is called Waller.<sup>1</sup> So, too, the fact that all trouble on account of the missing will was within a fortnight after the death of Mr. Page cleared away by the action of the children was unknown. The deceased is represented as still troubled, though he purported to see just what was going on in his family.

"I have given you a mixture of observations and criticisms; let me say that I have no firm mind about the matter. I am curiously and yet absolutely uninterested in it for the reason that I don't see how I can exclude the hypothesis of fraud, and until that can be excluded no advance can be made.

"When I took the medium's hand, I had my usual experience with them, a few preposterous compliments concerning the clearness of my understanding, and nothing more.

"Faithfully yours,

"N. S. SHALER."

The foregoing account, though of course not so valuable as a completer record, conveys with sufficient accuracy the impression left on impartial observers by a fairly successful interview. Professor Shaler, it will be seen, is confident that

<sup>1</sup> Professor Shaler's argument is scarcely sound. On the assumption that Mrs. Piper had got up these particulars beforehand, she would probably have made a point of remembering the unusual names, though she might have forgotten, or misapplied, the common ones.

the information given about family affairs was too detailed to be due to mere guessing, and could not have been extracted by skilful "fishing" from Mrs. Shaler and himself. There remains the supposition that Mrs. Piper had got up the information beforehand, for the express purpose of bringing it out at this interview. In this particular case there is no great improbability in such a supposition. The visit to Cambridge (Boston) had, no doubt, been decided on some time beforehand. Mrs. Piper could easily guess that she would be likely to meet at Professor James' house other members of the Harvard Faculty; and even if it is assumed that the precaution generally taken at these séances—that of introducing the sitters under assumed names—was duly observed in this case,<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Piper would no doubt, on the hypothesis of fraud, have made it her business to procure beforehand photographs or personal descriptions of all the likely sitters. Again, such a source of the information given in the trance would be in accordance with precedent. Apart from the general presumption in favour of a known cause, fraud, in preference to an unknown cause—clairvoyance, telepathy, or spirits—we have evidence that fraud of the precise kind indicated by Professor Shaler has been, and probably is still employed, especially by American clairvoyants.

Now the fact that nearly all those who have had sittings with Mrs. Piper have been impressed by her transparent honesty is, in strictness, irrelevant. We have seen that many of Foster's and Home's sitters were equally confident of the medium's honesty, and that, generally, the ability to impress his clients with confidence in his integrity is an essential part of a medium's equipment. Further, it should be remembered that the conviction of the medium's honesty in this case is founded on experience of Mrs. Piper in her waking state, whereas the revelations proceed from Mrs. Piper entranced. Nor would the genuineness of Mrs. Piper's trance, if it could be substantiated, be conclusive. The reproduction in a genuine trance of knowledge fraudulently acquired is not more difficult to believe than the fraudulent performance of conjuring tricks in a state of trance. It is more to the point that all those who have made a careful study at first hand of Mrs. Piper's trance utterances, and who are therefore best qualified to speak—Professor W. James, Dr. Hodgson, Sir Oliver Lodge, the late F. W. H. Myers, Mrs. H. Sidgwick, Dr. Walter Leaf, Professor Romaine Newbold,

<sup>1</sup> Professor Shaler, it will be seen, does not refer to this point.

Professor J. H. Hyslop—have put on record their conviction that the results attained cannot be explained by fraud or misrepresentation. It is, unfortunately, impracticable within the limited space at my command, especially in view of the voluminous nature of the records, to give here a fair sample of the evidence on which this conviction is founded. Two or three more extracts from brief descriptions of séances must suffice. For fuller information the reader is referred to the *Proceedings S. P. R.*, where he will find many accounts of séances given in full, and to Mr. Myers' forthcoming book on *Human Personality*.<sup>1</sup>

Here, for instance, is an account by Professor J. Estlin Carpenter, of Oxford, of a sitting with Mrs. Piper on 13th December, 1894. The sitting again took place at the house of Professor James, who prefaces the account with the following note:—<sup>2</sup>

"Mrs. James and Mrs. Piper were in the same room when Professor J. Estlin Carpenter, of Oxford, entered. He was introduced as Mr. Smith to Mrs. Piper, and withdrew, speaking to her, to the end of the room. His wife then entered, and was greeted by Mrs. James inadvertently as 'Mrs. Carpenter,' which, of course, annuls the best test of this sitting."

The following is the statement by Professor Carpenter:—

"CAMBRIDGE, *December 14th, 1894.*

"DEAR PROFESSOR JAMES,—I had a sitting yesterday with Mrs. Piper at your house, and was greatly interested with the results obtained, as they were entirely unexpected by me. Various persons were named and described whom we could not identify (my wife was present); but the names of my father and mother were correctly given, with several details which were in no way present to my mind at the time. The illness from which my father was

<sup>1</sup> The earliest account of Mrs. Piper is to be found in the Report on Mediumistic Phenomena by Professor W. James (*Proc. Am. S. P. R.*, p. 102). The accounts of her trance utterances published in the *Proceedings* of the English Society are extremely voluminous, but the evidence cannot fairly be appraised without an attentive study of at least some of these records. See *Proceedings S. P. R.*, vol. vi. pp. 436-650, containing records edited respectively by the late F. W. H. Myers, Dr. Oliver Lodge, and Dr. Walter Leaf; vol. viii. pp. 1-167, containing a discussion and further detailed reports of sittings edited by Dr. Hodgson; vol. xiii. pp. 284-582, a further report and records by Dr. Hodgson; vol. xiv. pp. 6-49, a further record by Professor Romaine Newbold; vol. xvi. (649 pages) consists of a report and record of a series of sittings by Professor Hyslop. There are critical articles on the subject by myself, vol. xiv. pp. 50-78, by Mrs. Sidgwick and Mr. Andrew Lang, vol. xv. pp. 16-38 and 39-52 respectively. Further material is awaiting publication in the *Proceedings*.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xiii. pp. 528, 529.

suffering at the time of his death was identified, but not the accident which took him from us. A penknife which I happened to have with me was rightly referred to its place on the desk in his study, and after considerable hesitation Mrs. Piper wrote out the word *organ* when I asked concerning other objects in the room. She added spontaneously a very remarkable item about which I was in no way thinking, viz. that on Sunday afternoons or evenings (her phrase was 'twilight') we were accustomed to sing there together. She stated correctly that my mother was older than my father, but died after him; and she connected her death with my return from Switzerland in a manner that wholly surprised me, the fact being that her last illness began two or three days after my arrival at home from Lucerne. She gave the initials of my wife's name rightly, and addressed words to her from her father, whose first name, George, was correct. She also desired me in my father's name not to be anxious about some family matters (which have only recently come to my knowledge), though their nature was not specified. Finally, though I should have mentioned this first, as it was at the outset of the interview, she told me that I was about to start on a voyage, and described the vessel in general terms, though she could not give me its name, or tell me the place where it was going. I saw enough to convince me that Mrs. Piper possesses some very extraordinary powers, but I have no theory at all as to their nature or mode of exercise.

"Believe me, faithfully yours,

"J. ESTLIN CARPENTER."

Here, again, is an account given by the well-known French author, M. Paul Bourget, who paid two visits to Mrs. Piper in December, 1893. The account, which is taken from the *Figaro*, January 14th, 1895, apparently relates to the first of these visits.<sup>1</sup>

"Mrs. P.—me tenait les mains, et elle touchait en même temps une toute petite pendule de voyage ayant appartenu à quelqu'un qu'elle ne pouvait pas avoir connu,—un peintre qui s'est tué dans des circonstances particulièrement tristes de folie momentanée. Comment arriva-t-elle à me dire et cette profession de l'ancien propriétaire de la pendule et sa folie, et le genre même de son suicide? Y avait-il une communication entre mon esprit et son esprit à elle, dédoublé dans cette mystérieuse personnalité du docteur Lyonnais? Mes mains, qu'elle tenait entre les siennes, lui révélaient-elles, par des frémissements perceptibles à l'hyperacuité de ses nerfs, mes impressions sous chacun de ses mots, et avait-elle conservé, dans son sommeil, un pouvoir de se laisser guider par ces

<sup>1</sup> An account of M. Bourget's second visit will be found in *Proc. S. P. A.*, vol. xiii, pp. 495-99.

minuscules jalons? Ou bien, car il faut toujours réserver une place au scepticisme, était-elle une comédienne incomparable et qui devinait mes pensées au ton seul de mes questions et de mes réponses? . . . Mais non. Elle était sincère. Les physiologistes qui l'ont observée dans ses crises ont trop souvent reconnu le caractère magnétique de son sommeil à des indices mécaniques qui ne trompent pas. Tout ce que je peux conclure des détails réellement extraordinaires qu'elle me donna à moi, un étranger de passage, sur un disparu, et dont je n'avais parlé à personne dans son entourage, c'est que l'esprit a des procédés de connaître, non soupçonnés par notre analyse."

These three records may be taken as fairly typical. The information given, it will no doubt be admitted, is beyond the scope of chance coincidence, or of skilful conjecture based upon hints let drop by the sitter during the interview. On the supposition that Mrs. Piper worked up the *dossiers* of her sitters beforehand, she might conceivably obtain her facts in various ways—(a) by her own observations, e.g. by reading private letters; (b) by information derived from other mediums; (c) by the employment of private inquiry agents. Probably all these methods have been and are habitually employed by professional clairvoyants.<sup>1</sup> The conviction entertained by those who are best qualified to judge that Mrs. Piper's information was not obtained by such methods is based partly on the precautions employed, partly on the nature of the information itself.

<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, extremely difficult to get trustworthy evidence on a matter of this kind, mainly because the persons whose testimony would be most valuable—ex-mediums and ex-agents of mediums—are by the nature of the case hopelessly discredited as witnesses. I have met a man who professed to have worked up cases for Slade and others in this country. He would not give me details except for payment, and obviously testimony of that kind when purchased would be of even less value than when tendered gratuitously. Truesdell (*Bottom Facts of Spiritualism*, p. 308, etc.) shows how the thing could be done. The medium or his agent, in the capacity of a book-canvasser, etc., would thoroughly work a given town or district and make notes of all the information gained, and would return a few months later to reap the harvest by giving clairvoyant sittings. There is a belief, no doubt well founded, amongst the more clear-headed American Spiritualists that there is an elaborate organisation for obtaining and interchanging information thus acquired amongst all the members of the guild. It is perhaps in this way that we may explain the peculiar good fortune of well-known Spiritualists in obtaining "tests." Some of Mrs. Piper's sitters had previously visited other mediums; but if the precautions taken to prevent her knowing the names of the sitters were effectual, as they probably were in most cases, it seems hardly likely that she could have utilised any information thus gained.

Again, except in this country, where she stayed for some time in private houses of members of the Society, Mrs. Piper's opportunities of personally acquiring information by surreptitiously reading letters or questioning servants appear to have been extremely limited. But, of course, it must always be

As regards the first point, Mrs. Piper has been under close scrutiny and supervision, chiefly by Dr. Hodgson, for many years, and no suspicious circumstance of any kind has come to light. But the precaution on which we are entitled chiefly to rely is that nearly all her sittings for more than ten years past have been arranged beforehand, again mainly by Dr. Hodgson, without the names of the sitters being communicated to her. In almost every case the sitter has been unknown to her by sight, and has been introduced to her under the pseudonym of "Smith"—the incognito being strictly preserved, at any rate throughout the first sitting.

In some instances, especially in this country, the sitting was improvised for the benefit of a chance caller, of whose very existence Mrs. Piper can hardly be supposed to have been aware. In one or two cases the sitter, with praiseworthy caution, concealed his identity even from Dr. Hodgson. That occasionally during this long term of years carelessness or malign chance may have offered a loophole for fraud is, of course, not improbable. The strength of Mrs. Piper's case lies in the high proportion of successful sittings, and in the extraordinarily high proportion of correct statements at many individual sittings—proportions so high as to render the hypothesis of fraud very difficult to sustain.

An argument which carries hardly less weight will be found in the nature of the information itself. Obviously, if Mrs. Piper acquired her information from such sources as newspaper obituaries, registers, and tombstones, or as a result of reading private letters and making inquiries amongst servants and tradespeople, we should expect that the information, taken as a whole, would betray its origin. We are not left wholly to barren speculation in the matter. Amongst the records of clairvoyance in the past we do find some which more or less clearly point to such an origin, and which indicate also pretty clearly the high-water mark of effort in this direction. There are three clairvoyants known to us whose records are sufficiently full to permit of some comparison being made. These three are Adèle Maginot, Alexis Didier, and Stainton Moses.<sup>1</sup> Now the "clairvoyance"

assumed that a medium will avail himself of opportunities of this kind, or rather, will make it his business to seek for opportunities. Truesdell (*op. cit.*, p. 185, etc.) describes a slate-writing séance of his own where he was enabled, from knowledge acquired by reading a private letter in the sitter's greatcoat-pocket, to give some surprising "clairvoyant" tests.

<sup>1</sup> Home should perhaps be added, but the records of Home's clairvoyance are certainly less complete, and it is obvious that he enjoyed exceptional opportunities for acquiring information by illicit means.

of Stainton Moses consisted almost exclusively of the reproduction of names, dates, and other concrete facts in the lives of the persons represented, all of which facts could have been acquired from newspapers, books, and other public sources. In no single instance are we forced to resort to any explanation more recondite than the subconscious reproduction of latent memories. The case of Alexis Didier is typical of the clairvoyance of his time, and, indeed, of "travelling" clairvoyance generally. He does not deal much in names and dates, but he is concerned mainly with personal descriptions of living persons, of houses and parks, of dogs and other domestic animals, and more rarely of quite recent incidents. Now it is to be remarked that in the case of Alexis Didier, at any rate, fraud was not only conceivable, but highly probable; and that the descriptions of places and recent events are precisely the things which a private inquiry agent would find it most easy to supply.

There are, indeed, a few instances in which Mrs. Piper, like Stainton Moses, has given in her trance utterances names and other facts which might without difficulty have been obtained from the newspapers or similar public sources. But the information in these cases is inaccurate and confused, and the obvious comment is that the "controls" of the English medium managed this sort of thing much better.<sup>1</sup> Again, Mrs. Piper is very vague about dates; she prefers to give Christian names rather than surnames, and of Christian names the commoner rather than the more out of the way; she rarely attempts to give descriptions of houses or places, and her attempts in this direction are commonly failures. In other words, she is weakest precisely where the pseudo-medium is most successful. Her real strength lies in describing the diseases, personal idiosyncrasies, thoughts, feelings, and character of the sitter and his friends; their loves, hates, quarrels, sympathies, and mutual relationships in general; trivial but significant incidents in their past histories, and the like. Not only is information on such

<sup>1</sup> The cases referred to are those of the Rev. Robert West, where the full names of the deceased, the place of his burial, and the text on his tombstone were correctly given; the case of Porter Brewster Guernsey (given as John Gerster), of Lake City, drowned in Lake Pepin; the case of William N—; and that of Gracie X—. In all these instances many correct particulars were given, including names of persons and places, which could have been obtained from newspapers, but the information was curiously confused and inaccurate, suggesting rather imperfect reminiscence of information casually acquired than the deliberate "getting up" of the case for fraudulent purposes (see *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 35-43). In any case, these four cases stand apart from the general bulk of Mrs. Piper's utterances.

points as these more difficult to acquire by normal means, but it is obviously much more difficult to retain in the memory.

But if in their general character Mrs. Piper's trance utterances differ widely from those of Stainton Moses and Alexis Didier, both of whom, as we have already seen, are open, on quite other grounds, to strong suspicion of fraudulent practices, they bear, on the other hand, a strong resemblance to those of an earlier medium against whose good faith no suspicious circumstance has been alleged—Adèle Maginot, the somnambule employed by Alphonse Cahagnet. Like Mrs. Piper, Adèle Maginot appears to have been vague about names and dates, and sparing in her descriptions of scenery and the furniture of rooms. But in all that pertained to the emotional side of her interlocutors' reminiscences her information was frequently as copious as it was apparently accurate. She would describe in unmistakable terms the dress, personal appearance, physical and moral characteristics of persons whom in life she had certainly never seen, of whose existence she can hardly have been aware. The points of agreement between Adèle's revelations and Mrs. Piper's, and their marked differences from the outpourings of the common run of professional clairvoyants, seem too marked to be purely accidental.

Partly, then, from the stringent nature of the precautions taken and the high measure of success nevertheless achieved, partly from the nature of the revelations themselves, we are led to the conclusion that Mrs. Piper's trance utterances indicate the possession of some supernormal power of apprehension—at lowest the capacity to read the unspoken, and even unconscious, thoughts and emotions of other minds. To many of those who have investigated her trances, including Dr. Hodgson himself, the evidence appears to go beyond this, and to point to communication with spirits of the dead. Certainly here, if in any case in the whole history of Spiritualism, is such evidence to be found. Many of the personalities, or pseudo-personalities, who speak, write, and act through the organism of the entranced Mrs. Piper present so faithful a mimicry of the persons whose names they assume as to have prevailed in some cases over the natural reluctance of sceptical outsiders. The most effective of these impersonations is that of the so-called G. P. G. P. was a young journalist and author of some repute, an acquaintance of Dr. Hodgson, who died suddenly from the effects of an accident in February, 1892. A few weeks after

his death he purported to possess Mrs. Piper's organism, and from that time onwards for some years has assumed the chief control, has carried on many and prolonged conversations with Dr. Hodgson and others, and furnished numerous proofs of his knowledge of the doings and affairs of the person whom he represents. He has made reference to G. P.'s manuscripts and personal effects, to private conversations which took place before his death, and to many other matters betraying an intimate acquaintance with G. P.'s own concerns and those of his friends. One of the most striking proofs of identity furnished is his constant recognition, amongst the numerous persons who have since his death consulted Mrs. Piper, of those known personally to G. P. when alive. Not only so, but the supposed G. P. has accorded to each his due measure of welcome, whether as near relation, friend, or mere acquaintance. Nor is Dr. Hodgson able to find any instance where such recognition has been incorrectly accorded. There have been many other trance personations speaking through Mrs. Piper's organism which have been accepted by sitters as genuine representations of deceased friends.

To other students of the records, including the present writer, the evidence nevertheless appears at present insufficient to justify the Spiritualist view, even as a working hypothesis. It would be impossible, within the limits of our remaining space, to set forth fully the reasons for regarding these trance personalities as illustrations of the plastic powers of the medium's own spirit, rather than as representing alien intelligences. But the case is open, of course, though to a less extent perhaps than in any instance previously recorded, to the objection that the emotional state of the sitters inevitably tends to bias their judgment; and that evidence of identity derived from gesture, manner, or even idiosyncrasy of speech, is peculiarly difficult to appraise dispassionately. Again, the ordinary characteristics of the secondary personality, as observed in cases where the agency of the dead cannot reasonably be invoked, can be traced, though no doubt more skilfully disguised than in any of her predecessors, through most of Mrs. Piper's impersonations. We find the same tedious and childish repetition; the same lack of any sense of proportion; the tendency to dwell on the concrete and trivial; the tentative and piecemeal exhibition of information, as if angling for signs of assent or dissent from the sitter; extreme suggestibility; and, above all, disingenuousness and reluctance to admit ignorance or mistakes. No doubt, as Dr. Hodgson argues with good show of reason,

none of these suspicious circumstances are inconsistent with the supposition that the spirit who is endeavouring to communicate through Mrs. Piper's organism is hampered by an imperfect acquaintance with the mechanism to be operated, is distracted by various interruptions from both the earthly and the spiritual side, and is possibly further hindered by the very fact of partially resuming the vesture of mortality. It must be conceded to Dr. Hodgson's ingenious argument that we have no right to reject these utterances as unauthentic because they do not conform to our preconceived idea of what communications from the dead should be. It is impossible, however, to disregard their general resemblance to other manifestations of secondary personality; a resemblance which is still further emphasised by the fact that Mrs. Piper's spirits, like those of her predecessors, indulge in a good deal of vague talk about the conditions of planetary life, astral bodies, and other matters which have formed the commonplace of mediumistic revelations for two or three generations past.

But, after all, the criterion by which the hypothesis of spirit intercourse must ultimately be tested consists in the nature of the information furnished. It is contended that in many cases the information given through the hand of Mrs. Piper, even when the hypothesis of thought-transference from distant friends is exploited to the full, is of such a character that it cannot plausibly be ascribed to any intelligence but that of the spirit from whom indeed it purports to proceed. My own view is, briefly, that the instances which seem to point to some external source of inspiration are neither sufficiently numerous nor sufficiently free from ambiguity to warrant any such inference. The accurate appreciation of evidence of this kind is an almost impossible task. As already indicated, Mrs. Piper's trance utterances, though less cumbered with incoherence, circumlocution, and ambiguity, designed or fortuitous, than those of her predecessors, yet contain sufficient alloy to make the extrication of the pure metal a delicate matter. Her trance personality does not commonly deal in precise and categorical statements of fact: names are frequently uttered or written piecemeal and in tentative form: diseases are diagnosed by symptoms often by no means distinctive: persons are indicated by descriptions of a dubious kind: incidents and relationships are shadowed forth by obscure and inadequate hints. In a word, the information given is very generally incomplete or of uncertain meaning, and needs expert

interpretation. I have already said that, taken as a whole, the evidence produces on my own mind the almost complete conviction that Mrs. Piper in trance is possessed of some faculty beyond the normal—a faculty at the lowest of tapping the thoughts of her interviewers. But beyond that it does not seem to me safe to go. Some of the most successful shots may be ascribed to chance-coincidence, which must operate to some extent in so wide a field: many more may be due to cunning conjecture and inference on the part of the entranced medium, whose training and experience for some years past have afforded unprecedented opportunities for developing any native gift in that direction. But the most serious objection is that the difficulty and uncertainty of interpretation give wide scope to the unconscious bias of the interpreter. How much room is as a matter of fact left for difference of interpretation may be illustrated by a single example. Dr. J. H. Hyslop, Professor of Logic and Ethics in Columbia University, New York, has lately published<sup>1</sup> a record of a series of sittings held with Mrs. Piper in 1898 and 1899. No pains have been spared to make the record complete. His report, which is considerably longer than the present volumes, contains the verbatim record of seventeen sittings, with exhaustive commentaries on the evidential aspect of the utterances, and accounts of experiments designed to elucidate the supposed difficulties of trance communication. The conclusion at which Professor Hyslop arrives, after an investigation in which no item of the evidence has failed to be weighed and analysed, and no possible source of error would seem to have escaped consideration, is, briefly, that the explanation which best fits the facts, and the only explanation so far adduced which fits them all, is that of spirit communication. My own view, after an examination less exhaustive, no doubt, but by no means superficial, is that these last recorded trance utterances of Mrs. Piper do not obviously call for any supernatural explanation. I cannot point to a single instance in which a precise and unambiguous piece of information has been furnished of a kind which could not have proceeded from the medium's own mind, working upon the materials provided and the hints let drop by the sitter. I agree with Professor Hyslop in rejecting telepathy as the explanation of these latest revelations, not, however, as being inadequate, but as

<sup>1</sup> As vol. xvi. of the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, London.

being superfluous. I do not ask the reader to accept my judgment on the case. The point of the illustration is that a subject in which it is possible for two honest and fairly competent investigators from the same set of facts to deduce such divergent conclusions is clearly not yet sufficiently advanced to serve as a basis for any but the most modest generalisations.

Once more, a weighty objection to accepting Mrs. Piper's trance personalities at their own valuation is that they have again and again failed to answer the test questions put to them, and that the manner of their failure has often proved more fatal to their claim than the failure itself. Thus, the *soi-disant* Hannah Wild on several occasions dictated what professed to be a copy of the contents of a sealed letter written by the real Hannah Wild before her death, for the express purpose of the test; and all these versions were entirely wide of the mark.<sup>1</sup> The spirit of Stainton Moses, asked to furnish the real names of his earthly guides,<sup>2</sup> which were unknown to his questioner, professed on several occasions to give the names, and on each occasion gave them incorrectly.<sup>3</sup> G. P. himself, when pressed to mention the names of two persons associated with him in a certain undertaking, excused himself in the first instance on the ground that the test would be unsatisfactory, as the names were known to one of those present. Later he gave two names which were not correct.<sup>4</sup>

In short, these trance personalities, though more lifelike and better informed than most, appear to have the common failings of their class. It is impossible to believe that in these trance utterances we are listening to authentic and unembarrassed messages from the dead. Nor, notwithstanding the subtle and convincing character of some of the impersonations, and the fact that in many cases the information furnished has been known to no one present, possibly even to no one living, is it easy to accept the hypothesis of communion with the dead even in the modified form suggested by Mrs. Sidgwick.<sup>5</sup> What evidence could be regarded as sufficient to prove such agency it is difficult

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. pp. 10-15.

<sup>2</sup> Rector, Doctor, Imperator, Mentor, etc., the "guides" of Stainton Moses, were supposed to represent historical personages, whose names had been revealed by Moses in his lifetime to two or three intimate friends only.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. xv. pp. 23-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. xiii. p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. xv. p. 37.

to say; on the facts so far adduced we can but say, "Not proven."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Critical examinations of the evidence afforded by Mrs. Piper's trance utterances for communication with spirits of the dead will be found in articles by Dr. Leaf (*Proc.*, vol. vi. p. 558), Mrs. H. Sidgwick and Mr. Andrew Lang (*Proc.*, vol. xv. pp. 16 and 39), Marcel Mangin (*Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, July-Oct., 1898). All these writers, it should be pointed out, though indisposed to accept the spirit hypothesis, are of opinion that Mrs. Piper's trance utterances cannot be explained by fraud. Dr. Hodgson's own account of the genesis of the Phinuit control should also be referred to (*Proc.*, vol. viii. p. 46).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

THE time has come when we must attempt to formulate an answer to the questions which we set before us at the outset of our inquiry. In the course of our survey we have seen that Modern Spiritualism in its present form is the outcome of various pre-existent beliefs. On the one hand, it stands in direct historical succession to that cult of Animal Magnetism which prevailed more or less in every civilised country from the days of Mesmer, and which attained an exceptional development in America in the period immediately preceding the outbreak of the Rochester rappings. The doctrine of Animal Magnetism itself, with its hypothesis of radiant effluences, its fantastic analogies between the corporeal and mineral magnet, and its vague hints of kinship with the stars, we traced back through the sympathetic system to the long tradition of the Alchemists. The various psychological manifestations, however, of the induced trance, which these cosmic forces were by the genius of Mesmer invoked to explain, find their nearest parallel, not in the practice of the Alchemists, but in scattered spontaneous outbreaks of clairvoyance, possession and speaking with tongues; in the crystal visions of Dr. Dee; in the healing powers of Valentine Greatrakes. On the other hand, the true ancestry of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, which are but scantily represented in the annals of magnetism and religious fanaticism, is to be sought in a system of belief which in its later years, at any rate, formed the characteristic superstition of the vulgar—in witchcraft and its associated phenomena.

We have seen that the hysterical children, who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played a leading part in the discovery and conviction of witches, habitually reinforced the sinister indications afforded by their self-suggested fits and convulsions by the employment of various mechanical devices—the vomiting of pins and other small objects, throwing of stones, movements of furniture,

and occasional surreptitious levitations of themselves. With the passing of the generations these mischievous outbreaks, which to this day still make their appearance from time to time not only amongst the uneducated, gradually changed their external form, as the belief of the spectators ebbed from witchcraft to possession, and from possession to occult forces. Mistress Faith Corbet, the two little modest girls of John Mompesson, Hettie Wesley, Mary Jobson, Angelique Cottin, are all links in the one chain of evolution. The motive in all cases appears to have been the morbid craving for notoriety and excitement on the part of a sickly child; the means employed vary from age to age only with the opportunities offered for deception; the explanations adopted by the sympathetic spectators repeat accurately their individual beliefs and temperament, or the current traditions of the country and the time. In the case of Faith Corbet and the Drummer of Tedworth the effects were ascribed to the malignancy of witchcraft; in the Wesley household, as in most modern outbreaks, the disturbances were supposed to indicate a spirit of doubtful character. Mary Jobson, in the eyes of Dr. Clanny, was the recipient of angelic inspiration; whilst the performances of Angelique Cottin were ascribed in scientific Paris to the operation of electricity.

For generations the two streams of superstition had pursued a parallel course without meeting. The learned had believed in their fluids, the vulgar in their Poltergeists; but whilst the magnetic somnambule had for the most part eschewed physical phenomena, the naughty children had found the seeing of visions and trance-speaking too tame to satisfy their ambitions. With the introduction of Angelique Cottin to the scientific world of Paris the two streams had seemed about to unite; but it was not actually until two or three years later, and in America, that their fusion became an accomplished fact.

In France, the land of its birth, Animal Magnetism had been from the first predominantly naturalistic, though even in France there had been a few men who, following the example of the great Swedish seer, had seen in the trance an open gate to the spiritual world. In 1847 this interpretation received strong support from the trance utterances of Cahagnet's somnambules. In Germany the Spiritualist interpretation had found many and enthusiastic adherents, and a special cult had been founded on the revelations of the so-called Seeress of Prevorst. In England, mainly owing no doubt to the predominant influence of Elliotson and to the

association of the new science with a materialistic phrenology, the naturalist view had, as in France, with a few unimportant exceptions prevailed.

It was in America, however, where, as in England, the cult of Animal Magnetism had won but tardy recognition, that the Spiritualist interpretation found its most congenial soil, and attained ultimately its fullest development. At first, indeed, the chief crop consisted of pseudo-scientific theories of fluids and emanations, framed perhaps on more vigorous lines and with a more conspicuous freedom from the trammels of fact than in the older civilisations. But the times were peculiarly favourable to growth in another direction. Apart from the conditions inseparable from a new and rapidly expanding society, with a people of quick intelligence, but lacking as yet in fixed and recognised standards of belief and culture, the temperament of the American people appears to have been, at this time at any rate, especially open to the appeal of religious or humanitarian enthusiasm. In the decade 1840-50 two such enthusiasms had caught and still held the popular imagination. The doctrine of the Second Advent and the imminent millennium had been preached for some years by William Miller in New York and neighbouring States, and in 1843—the date fixed for the Second Coming—his followers were reckoned to number about fifty thousand. Many of these lived in the daily and almost hourly expectation of a new heaven upon earth. In superficial contrast with this promise of the kingdom of heaven, the scheme of Fourier for the reconstruction of human societies on Socialist lines found at the same time a ready hearing. The Second Adventist, no doubt, found his adherents chiefly amongst the more ignorant members of the community, whilst Brisbane and other opponents of Fourierism made their appeal, as we have seen, to the educated classes. But in whichever guise the appeal came, it found its response in the same deep-seated human instincts, the dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of the present social state, the perennial expectation of a Golden Age to come.

The "magnetic clairvoyants" who sprang up in a society thus constituted and thus prepared inevitably shared the contagion of the time. They soon forsook neuropathy, etherology, and pathetism, to discourse at large of spiritual influx and social justice, of a new heaven and a new earth. We have seen how in Andrew Jackson Davis these influences made themselves felt; the Poughkeepsie Seer was essentially

a child of his time. Other temporary circumstances combined to swell the ranks of his disciples and to make his appeal more effective and far-reaching. The Churches whose sympathies were widest and their doctrinal bonds the most lax naturally contributed most to the new movement. In particular the Universalist Church, which had been preoccupied for a generation with questions concerning the nature of the future life and its relations with the present, and was daily losing, through the divisions of opinion on these questions, many of its most earnest members, furnished many recruits to the nascent Spiritualism of Poughkeepsie.

But the movement even so seemed at one time about to suffer euthanasia, as so many kindred movements have done. The concrete promises of an imminent social reconstruction seemed about to prevail over the vaguer and more remote ideals of the clairvoyant and those about him. By the middle of 1849 the control of the *Univercælum* had already passed from their hands, and that organ was thenceforth devoted to the spreading of the new hope of salvation on mundane lines, by means of co-operation and trades-unions. But, as we have seen in the case of Edward Irving's congregation, expectations of spiritual signs and wonders, if sufficiently definite, are apt to breed their own fulfilment; and the hopes of Davis, Fernald, Harris, and their followers were not destined to remain fruitless. The outbreak, in the spring of 1848, of Poltergeist manifestations of a familiar type in a rural township in New York State, their rapid spread in neighbouring towns, and their reinforcement two years later by similar performances of a more elaborate kind in the house of a Presbyterian minister, gave the necessary impulse. All the vague mystic aspirations and hopes of a coming revelation crystallised round these concrete messages from the Unknown, and by the middle of 1850 we find Modern Spiritualism fairly started on its career, with some half-dozen organs of its own, edited for the most part by those who had gathered round the Seer of Poughkeepsie.

The new gospel appealed to the sympathies of men in diverse ways. To the idly curious, the mere brute appetite for the marvellous, it offered signs and wonders; to those whose curiosity was of a more instructed kind it held out hopes of new developments of science, a science which, starting from the physical, should mount up towards the spiritual; those who looked only for an earthly Utopia were dazzled with the promise of the speedy fulfilment of their dream;

it offered consolation to the mourner; and to all some hope of light on the mystery of the universe. The movement was thus inspired, in its beginnings, with a genuine enthusiasm which may not unfitly, perhaps, be called religious. With all their imperfections, the early apostles of Spiritualism in America seem to have been for the most part disinterested. Sometimes, as with Spear, Ferguson, Warren Chase, Edmonds, and, a little later, Robert Owen in this country, the enthusiasm was of a high type. There was egotism, no doubt, but the objects of ambition were not of a personal kind. The new cult, as represented by its leading spokesmen, was rarely sordid. Even the repulsive extravagances of Thomas Lake Harris had, at the worst, something of idealism. But the limitations of the new gospel betrayed its origin. The epithet "religious," indeed, seems to require some justification. If the prostration of the heart before the vision of Ideal Righteousness, of the intellect before Supreme Intelligence, is essential to religion, the movement was so far not religious. Its prophets held their offices as self-constituted seers, by no ordinance of higher powers. The universe for them contained no mystery; their vision was limited by the monstrous shadow cast in their own likeness on the void. Their appeal, in fact, including as it did the proffered solace to bereaved affection, was of an almost exclusively mundane character. They held out the promise, not of new knowledge of spiritual things, as "spiritual" has been interpreted in other religious movements, but of a practicable and imminent millennium, freed from the fear of death, and continuing, on the grey level, through indefinite generations. Their gospel aimed not at raising earth to heaven, but at bringing down heaven to minister to the needs of earth. The grace and beauty of mediæval belief had, of course, long since vanished. Spiritualists no more than their contemporaries could hope to realise the poet's vision:—

"With white feet of angels seven  
Her white feet go glimmering,  
And above the deep of heaven,  
Flame on flame and wing on wing."

Probably no body of earnest men and women ever presented a more unlovely picture of the hereafter. Yet in spite, or perhaps because of the concreteness of its ideals, and the parochial limitations of its chief prophets, the new ideas had sufficient motive power to overrun the American continent.

It has not been thought necessary to dwell at length upon the more repellent side of the movement in America, the intrusion, in response to the popular demand for marvels, of the professional charlatan, and the rapid concurrent degradation of the cult. It is more profitable, from the present point of view, to study the growth of the movement in this country. Prior to 1852 the Spiritualist interpretation of the utterances of magnetic somnambules had found here but few and half-hearted supporters. The irruption in the autumn of that year of one or two professional rappers from America, and the concurrent development of table-turning, seem to have acted mainly by stimulating the students of the trance to fresh investigations, and by making known the phenomena of automatism to a wider circle. It was on the manifestations of trance-speaking, automatic writing, and similar manifestations in private households, not on the fraudulent phenomena of the professional medium, that the new faith for some years almost wholly depended in this country. With the return of Home from the Continent in 1859, and the invasion of other American mediums during the next few years, English Spiritualism entered on a process of popularisation and debasement similar to that which it had undergone in the land of its birth. In this country, however, the process was of much more gradual development. Professional mediumship itself was of slow growth here; it was not until towards the end of the decade 1860-70 that English men or women, with one or two exceptions, were found to rival the feats of Home, Foster, and the Davenport. And it is noticeable that some of those who were first in the field were young girls, in whose case it is easier to take the charitable view that the deception had its origin in abnormal conditions of physique and temperament.

Private mediumship—the production of spurious marvels for other motives than those of direct pecuniary gain—formed for some years the distinguishing characteristic of English Spiritualism. Again, the genuinely religious interest of Howitt, Shorter, Mrs. de Morgan, and the Wilkinsons, on the one hand, the scientific attainments, on the other, of men like Varley, Crookes, and Wallace, who thought the matter worthy their serious study, tended to keep things at a comparatively high level of thought and feeling. The cult, indeed, in this country has never attained to such dimensions as a popular movement, nor sunk to quite so low a level of fatuity and imposture as the latter-day American Spiritualism. This result is no doubt partly due

to the legal restrictions which have operated here to hinder the exploitation of the credulous, partly, no doubt, to the influence of the Press, and generally to the difference in social conditions, and to the fact that there have always been found in this country persons of credit and seriousness to take an interest in the subject.

But from 1870 onwards various causes have tended to lower the general character of the movement. First amongst these, no doubt, is to be reckoned the growth of professionalism, and concurrently the increasing frequency of public exposures. But the death or retirement of its earlier champions had much to do with this result. The little band of men and women who assisted at the incubation of Spiritualism from 1855 onwards gradually died or lost their active interest in the matter, and in its later aspects Spiritualism had for some years ceased to attract men of like mind to replace them.

If we turn now to the evidence, we find that it is not primarily on the discredited physical phenomena, of which enough has been already said in previous chapters, that the belief in spirit influence or occult force is founded, but on manifestations of another order, of which these feats of legerdemain form an incidental and dubious accompaniment. Ecstasy, possession, somnambulism, the magnetic, mediumistic, or hypnotic trance are conditions exhibiting certain common characteristics, the most marked being that the subject loses, more or less completely, control over his actions and consciousness of his identity. When the hand acts without the knowledge of the owner, when the mouth speaks words foreign to the thoughts and character of the speaker, the inference, in an age of faith, is inevitable that the utterance and the action are to be attributed to alien spiritual powers. The nature of the influence, whether diabolic or divine, thus supposed to act through the intermediary of the ecstatic, reflects accurately current traditions and beliefs. Neurotic children and hysterical nuns have been possessed, alike in their own belief and in that of the spectators, by the devil and his angels; the proscribed peasants of the Cevennes and the members of Irving's congregation were sustained in times of tribulation by the fancied visitation of a divine afflatus. With the philosophic Dr. Dee the spirits, themselves of ambiguous habitation, held discourse neither of heaven nor hell, but of the primæval language, of magic, and the mystic relations of numbers. In eighteenth-century Paris, when spirits were no longer fashionable, the somnambule's

visions were all of fluidic emanations, and her revelations were concerned with the subtle interaction of animate and inanimate bodies.

Modern psychology has learnt something of the nature of these departures from normal consciousness, and has found their analogues, on the one hand, in reverie, sleep, and automatism; on the other, in delirium, hysteria, and other morbid conditions. Further, it has explained and justified the belief in an alien influence held by the patient himself and those around him. For together with the division or restriction of consciousness, which is the common characteristic of these states, there is, as we have already seen, a concomitant alteration of the physical basis of consciousness. Even in automatic writing the automatist is frequently unconscious of the movement of his hand, and, learning what has been written in the same manner and at the same time as the other spectators, by the eye alone, he tends to regard the movements of his hand as extra-personal. In cases of trance and other states where the division of consciousness is more complete, the corresponding physiological changes are unquestionably more far-reaching. Probably, as Ribot has suggested, there is some alteration in that complex of organic sensibilities, on which the feeling of personal identity may be presumed largely to depend. The subject is conscious that he is no longer the same man. A good illustration of the manner in which a change in these obscure sensations may suggest a change of personality is afforded by Mr. Hill Tout's experience, quoted above.<sup>1</sup> His assumption of the rôle of his dying father appears to have been primarily inspired by his own feelings of physical weakness and depression. Again, in spontaneous trance or in deep hypnosis we constantly find that the subject refers to his waking self in the third person. He feels himself another man, and naturally assumes another name.

In these obscure physiological changes, then, aided by suggestion, which is rarely lacking, from the spectators,<sup>2</sup> is to be found a sufficient explanation of the constant assumption by the entranced subject of alien personalities, and of the claim put forward on his behalf for external inspiration. The mere fact of the claim being made, and made obviously in good faith, is no evidence for its authenticity.

<sup>1</sup> Page 303.

<sup>2</sup> The question "Who are you?" commonly addressed to the performing table or planchette is obviously well calculated to call spirits from the vasty deep. See Professor Patrick's remarks upon this point in his article on "Peculiarities of the Secondary Personality" (*Psychological Review*, New York, Nov., 1898).

Nor, again, does the realistic character of the impersonation and its fidelity to the facts in itself furnish any better guarantee of the claim. The hypnotised subject will in like manner, at a hint from the operator, assume any required rôle and carry it out with dramatic power and consistency. The impersonation by Mademoiselle Hélène Smith of Marie Antoinette and Simandini, or by Mrs. Piper of the French physician Phinuit, are instances of the extraordinary coherence and lifelike quality which these trance creations may assume in capable hands.<sup>1</sup>

The proof that the intelligence which speaks to us through the mouth of the apparently unconscious medium is, indeed, the particular spirit which he professes to be is more and more clearly seen to depend less on the evidence afforded by dramatic personation or imitations of gesture, intonations, and other external characteristics, than on similarity of mental content. Nor is even here a superficial resemblance sufficient to justify the presumption of identity. If the entranced medium speaks to me with the voice of my dead friend, uses his characteristic gestures and phrases, or reproduces his handwriting, we may be dealing merely with a pseudo-personality created by the subliminal fantasy of the medium. If the "control" converses with me on subjects known only to myself and my friend, there is still the possibility that the knowledge displayed may have been derived, by whatever process of transmission, from my own mind. It is only if information should be furnished on matters familiar to the dead but unknown to the medium, her interlocutor, or any living mind, that we are entitled to look for the explanation elsewhere.

Whether any tests of the kind could suffice to prove the existence of discarnate spirits; and, again, whether in face of the unknown and unimaginable possibilities of deception in that presumed other world, any conceivable proof of personal identity should suffice, has been questioned by competent authorities.<sup>2</sup> But scepticism on the first head

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Hodgson's account (*Proc. S. P. R.*, vol. viii. p. 50) of the genesis of "Phinuit" and his own abortive researches into that eminent physician's earthly career. Dr. Hodgson has, I understand, of late years modified his view as to the exact nature of the Phinuit personality; but it seems hardly open to doubt that it is a creation and not a reincarnation.

<sup>2</sup> As regards the first contention, take, for instance, the following passage from Münsterberg: "The question is . . . whether departed spirits enter into communication with living men by mediums and by incarnation. The scientist does not admit a compromise; with regard to this he flatly denies the possibility; . . . the facts as they are claimed do not exist, and never will exist" (*Psychology*

exhibits, perhaps, some confusion of thought, on the second something of pedantry. Proof of the existence of other minds outside our own, even in this world, is hardly capable of expression in logical formulæ; and proof of the existence of spirits, discarnate but not necessarily divorced from all material embodiment, might conceivably be obtained, of like quality, which should be sufficient to produce practical conviction. And if there are spirits at all, to trust them on the same terms as we trust our fellow-mortals would be our most prudent as it would be our only practicable policy.

The old foundations of the Spiritualist belief, then, have been undermined by recent additions to our knowledge. But just as the faith might have seemed to be tottering to its final fall, it has been buttressed anew out of its ruins, and now stands to the eye more firmly established than before. In so far as this added support is derived from the laborious investigations of Dr. Hodgson and his colleagues on the trance revelations of Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Thompson, and other clairvoyant mediums, the final result will no doubt depend on the manner in which the trance personalities meet the test already indicated. If in the course of the next two or three decades attempts to obtain information which is outside the knowledge of any terrestrial intelligence meet with as little success as they have met with up to the present time, it will seem a reasonable conclusion that the *soi-disant* spirits are only, in the last analysis, creatures of the medium's imagination. If the test is satisfied, a notable advance will have been made in the direction of proving personal immortality.

But an argument of another kind has assumed prominence of recent years. The remarkable speculations of the late Frederic Myers have gone far to vindicate, on new lines, the Spiritualist contention, and to bring it once more as an open question before the court of science. The special interest of his theory lies in its assimilation of those latest results of experimental psychology, which on a superficial consideration might seem fatal to the claims of Spiritualism. To offer an adequate summary of Mr. Myers' views within the present limits of space would be impracticable,<sup>1</sup> but briefly and baldly stated his position is that recent investigations demonstrate, below the superficial consciousness which

*and Life*, pp. 252, 253). On the second point see F. H. Bradley, in the *Fortnightly Review* for December, 1885, on "The Evidences of Spiritualism."

<sup>1</sup> The reader is referred for a fuller exposition of the theory to Mr. Myers' forthcoming work, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*.

commonly passes for the whole personality of the man, the existence of a huge psychic organism, as yet imperfectly expressed in terms either of action or thought. To adopt his own simile, our work-a-day consciousness may be compared to the visible spectrum: it is but a fraction, and a seemingly accidental fraction, of a larger whole. Of the invisible portion of this psychic spectrum orthodox psychology recognises only one, and that the inferior, moiety. Or, to choose what is perhaps a more exact simile, consciousness is regarded by psychologists as fulfilling in the body corporeal functions similar to those discharged by a newspaper in the body politic. Each represents in highly condensed form the multifarious operations of the organism. And alike in both the share of representation accorded to any particular activity is determined by its need rather than by its intrinsic importance. Foreign relations, the reaction on an ever-changing environment, the acquisition of new knowledge, the cultivation of new modes of action, and interests yet more ephemeral than these, fill the columns of the newspaper as they occupy the field of our waking thoughts. But alike in the individual and in the public consciousness, the activities on which the whole complex mechanism depend, the labours of unnumbered millions in the vast organisation of industry, the ceaseless movements of blood and lymph, the ceaseless growth and change of tissue, all the things which are too deeply knit up with the essential fabric to need continual supervision and direction, go on for the most part unrecorded. But if in times of popular disturbance the editor should temporarily abdicate his functions, or if the man fall into sleep or trance, these subterranean activities may at once become articulate. Mr. Myers, accepting so far the ordinary psychological view that sleep and trance introduce us to a more primitive state of consciousness, and bring us nearer to the merely organic life which we share with the savage and the brute, holds that in these lapses from waking consciousness we may also gain glimpses of faculties as yet unexercised and unbreathed, the mere existence of which is proof that man is called to nobler destinies and equipped for a larger stage than this material life can furnish. Only in these conditions of partial psychic dissolution, or on rare occasions of stress and danger, when the ordinary machinery of the organism is unequal to its task, do these hidden faculties make their power and presence felt. As if behind the editorial chair there should stand a more august presence, content for the most part to delegate its office, but able,

when the need is urgent, to voice and direct a nation's policy.

Now the strength of the position here presented lies in this, that it makes the ordinary Spiritualist argument superfluous. Mr. Myers does not, indeed, reject that argument. Whilst admitting that many, perhaps most, of the trance personalities are but dream-figures, created out of the subject's own fantasy, he finds in certain cases proof of communion with spirits of the dead. But if his main contention is well-founded, Spiritualists can afford to dispense with these dubious revelations. Whether or not the conditions of another world permit its denizens to hold halting communication with those here is a question of slight and transitory import, if we have it in our power to demonstrate, from its own inherent properties, that the life of the soul is not bound up with the life of the body. If in states of trance or ecstasy the soul has knowledge of things distant and things hidden, can foretell the future and read the past as an open book, it seems a lawful inference that, as such faculties have assuredly not been acquired in the process of terrestrial evolution, and find but little employment or justification here, they must testify to a world of higher uses, and an evolution not conditioned by our material environment. In a word, such faculties must be regarded not as vestigial, but as rudimentary; a promise for the future, not an idle inheritance from the past.

It is important to note that the theory here baldly outlined is not a mere philosophical speculation founded on assumptions which are incapable of verification, but a scientific hypothesis, based on the interpretation of certain alleged facts. As such, we have to consider not merely the validity of the inference, but the authenticity of the facts. It is from this quarter that Mr. Myers' position is most assailable. That, if prevision, retrocognition, clairvoyance, and other transcendent faculties can be proved to inhere in the soul, the soul's independence of the body is made manifest, need not perhaps be disputed. But the evidence seems at present far from sufficient to establish, hardly sufficient perhaps to justify the speculation.

Taken altogether, the evidence for clairvoyance, prevision, and the other supramundane faculties postulated by the theory falls far short, alike in bulk and in quality, of the evidence for telepathy. And that evidence, as we know, is in common estimation held as insufficient. Even if the operation of telepathy should be as clearly demonstrated,

say, as that of the cathode rays, it does not follow that the transcendental position would be strengthened by the demonstration. The little band of investigators—amongst them Mr. Myers himself—who are mainly responsible for the hypothesis of telepathy have, wisely perhaps, refrained from committing themselves to any theory of its mode of action. That mind should affect mind (so runs their cautious statement of the problem) in a new mode may mean no more than that brain can act upon brain by means of ethereal vibrations hitherto unsuspected. The power itself may be but a last relic of our discarded inheritance from the past, a long-disused faculty dragged from the dim lumber-room of a primitive consciousness, and galvanised into a belated and halting activity.

In fine, the first question is not what new agencies may be inferred from the facts, but whether the facts justify the inference of any new agency at all. We have traced throughout the history of recent mysticism, from the sixteenth century onwards, the prevalence of a belief in some power of divining the unspoken thoughts of other minds, of exercising influence by the unspoken will, of discerning things extraneous to the scope of the ordinary senses. The mere existence, however, of a belief in such powers, prevalent throughout the civilised world, persisting from generation to generation, and supported by an ever-increasing volume of testimony, raises but a faint presumption that the belief is well-founded. We learn from the whole history of witchcraft and kindred superstitions, and from the extraordinary persistence down to our own day, and amongst persons of some scientific attainments, of the belief in fluidic emanations from magnets, crystals, drugs, and other substances, that belief in such agencies is apt in such material to breed its own justification.

Moreover, the case is weakened by the observation that the psychological facts, upon which the belief is based, have been accompanied, sporadically at first, but of late years with increasing frequency, by facts of another kind, obviously explicable as due to trickery or other familiar causes; and that both sets of facts have for the most part met with equal credence from contemporary witnesses. The question, therefore, is reduced to one of evidence. The task before us is the patient analysis of the existing evidence, and the attempt, preferably by direct experiment, to acquire new evidence on the subject. As regards the historical testimony to the transmission of thought and clairvoyance, I have already

recorded my personal conviction that it amounts to very little. I have thought it expedient to devote some space to its recital and analysis, because it forms a necessary element in the problem; but, owing to the defectiveness of the records and the ignorance, on the part of the earlier observers, of now recognised sources of error, we can have little assurance of its value. It is only because of the accumulation, in recent years, both by observation and by direct experiment, of facts pointing in the same direction, that we can feel justified in regarding the matter as an open question; and the recent evidence loses perhaps more than it gains by juxtaposition with the historical records. Mrs. Piper would be a much more convincing apparition if she could have come to us out of the blue, instead of trailing behind her a nebulous ancestry of magnetic somnambules, witchridden children, and ecstatic nuns.

But the study of the past furnishes us with an equally emphatic warning against an error of an opposite character. There is a superstition of incredulity; and the memory of that discreditable episode in the history of science in these islands, the contemptuous rejection for nearly two generations of the accumulating evidence for hypnotic anæsthesia and kindred phenomena, should suffice to teach us that even the extravagances of mysticism may contain a residuum of unacknowledged and serviceable fact. We must not, for the second time, throw away the baby with the water from the bath.

THE END



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**White (Percy).** A PASSIONATE PILGRIM.