

SPIRITUALISM

— FROM THE —

Standpoint of Mental Science

HELEN WILMANS POST



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STANDPOINT OF MENTAL SCIENCE.

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If some one should inquire of me to-night what I know about spiritualism, I believe I should answer: "*Nothing at all.*" And yet I have the egotism to think that I know more about it than almost any one. You can make your own deduction from this inconsistency; but when you make it, do not conclude that there is any disrespect for either spiritualism or spiritualists intended by me; for surely there is not. I was a spiritualist in belief for thirty years. During the greater part of that time I believed, with all the fervor of my nature, that spiritualism was all that its adherents claimed for it. I believed that the spirits of the dead came back and communicated with us. I held converse with what I then thought to be spirits, and I saw what seemed to be spirits with my naked eyes; and I knew then and know now that it was not all trickery.

But if it is not trickery, what is it? I do not know what it is; and I do not deny that it may be the spirits of the dead; but since I began to investigate the latent or unawakened powers of the human mind I find so many wonders in it, I often think that if I knew more, it might turn out that all the phenomena now passing

under the head of spirit communication could be accounted for by our mental action.

Of all the things in the world the one thing that is least understood is the power latent in the minds of men. It was more than fifty years ago that the celebrated Fox sisters began to attract attention because they had some mysterious power of causing raps to come on the tables and chairs, and even of sounding in the air when there was nothing for them to sound on.

Before I ever heard of these sisters I and a brother a few years younger than myself had the experience with similar manifestations, and were mightily frightened about it. This brother was only a child of about twelve years of age. The raps came on the head board of his bed and in other places where he was. Being stuffed full of belief in the devil and of the innate wickedness of human beings, he thought himself an awful sinner; and it is a fact that he almost lost his mind. The different members of the family were in the habit of sitting up with him of nights to give him some encouragement in bearing his infliction. In the course of a year or two he seemed to get somewhat used to it, but he never enjoyed it, and it made him more or less nervous. In the meantime I had begun to be haunted in the same manner. I was not affected by it as my brother was, though I never liked it. Whatever the influence might have been it did not come at my will, but usually when I was very intent on doing something, studying a lesson or thinking deeply. Finally the rapping increased; the noises followed me up and down the room

The theory about the Fox sisters had then come out and the belief of spirits had been attached to it. Then I began to ask questions, but got nothing satisfactory. Sometimes we would think we had a sensible answer but it would almost always be contradicted immediately after.

It seems possible to me at this time that these raps or sittle explosions were magnetic emanations from ourselves. I am the more ready to accept this theory from another phenomenon that frequently occurred later on in my life. It often happened when I was leaving a room in a hurry. I would start toward the closed door and before I quite reached the door it would give forth a straining sound as if it were trying to open itself. This has occurred very many times, but never when I had taken thought and tried to produce the effect. It was only when I was thinking of something else and started impetuously to leave the room.

I told you last Sunday evening that thought was an actual substance. Might it not be that my thought reached the door before I did and communicated my intention to it? If thought can go out from one person to another and make its impression on that person, as we all know it can do, why should we consider it impossible that it should impart itself to a substance much more negative than a human body? The mind of man has never prospected in this direction; therefore as yet we know very little about it. But it is now stated as a fact, and proven so by hundreds of witnesses, that there is a young man in the state of Illinois who can

lean a cane against the wall and after looking at it intently for a few minutes the cane will rise to a perpendicular position and make a very evident effort to go to him. In some instances it actually does go to him by a series of short jumps. Does not this look as if he had infused it with his thought? Does this seem impossible? What did Jesus mean when he said, "If ye have faith like a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to the mountain be thou removed and cast into the sea, and it shall be done." And again did not his thought kill the fig tree?

Friends, do not be afraid of believing too much. Credulity is the prolific mother of great truths. Incredulity is a barren thing. What does the old song say? "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." This sentiment may justly be transposed to illustrate our subject—

Better thou to have believed,
E'en though cruelly deceived,
Than die wrapped in the folds of doubt.
Low down within their earthy mold,
Lie myriad seeds all stark and cold,
Un til belief their souls unfold,
And let their leaves and blossoms out.

Incredulity is the bane of progress. It is the stumbling block of a thousand pure and noble aspirations; it has been the death knell of untold ideas whose force and splendor might have moved the world. I may be guilty of many follies, but incredulity is not one of them.

If the suggestion by which I have attempted to account for the raps that attended me is correct, namely, that the dynamic force of thought produced them, why may not the same thing be used to account for the still greater manifestations of so-called spiritualism? Let us see if it can be made to do so. In these remarks I am assuming that these manifestations are genuine.

In my investigation of spiritualism I discovered at least that the phenomena was genuine, much of it at least. Of course it had counterfeiters; there is nothing of any importance that has not. The counterfeit is usually proof of the genuine. But if there has only been one instance of so-called spirit manifestation, that is sufficient to prove the possibility of its claims. There has not only been one instance of genuine manifestation, but thousands of them. This being true, is it not a foolish thing to brand the whole belief as fraudulent and turn away from it?

Everything means something. To simply aver that these outcroppings of unknown force mean nothing, and to pass them by as unworthy of investigation is surely the grossest folly, and proves one's mental inadequacy to read, or even to see the signs of the times. The difference between the man of genius and the boor is in mental seeing. The genius sees things; he not only sees things, but he reaches down below that which is apparent to find the unseen source. Nor does he stop here; his imagination—which is the wings of his mind—bears him aloft in the effort to trace the future

effect of the discovery he has made. The boor sees nothing; his brain, as compared with that of the genius, is a lump of putty, almost unmarked by the myriad of systematized nerves and magnetic plates in the more highly evolved brain.

Why, friends, the secret of success is mental seeing. Therefore I ask you in these lectures I am giving, to come with me and see things. And let us not hesitate to look closely even at that which the world has unthinkingly tabooed, and on which it has turned its back. Spiritualism is one of these things. Are you aware of the fact that many of the purest and most loving souls in the world to-day are Spiritualists? For my part I want to believe in it, and would be glad to tell you that I feel certain of its truth, but I cannot do so. Such tremendous powers in the human mind are opening up to my investigation with such rapidity in the last years that I am forced to search the depths of its undiscovered mysteries before I go to another world, and that the world of departed spirits, for a solution of even such startling phenomena as those presented by Spiritualism.

In trying to explain the raps, I have only touched the smallest part of the manifestations. Let us examine that phenomenon called levitation; the power by which the law of gravitation is temporarily overcome. I was in a room one night where a few neighbors had met and the talk turned upon this subject. There was no professional medium present. One of the men told us that he could lift heavy articles at will

by touching them, and often without touching them simply by being near them and fixing his mind upon them. He brought out a heavy kitchen table and placed it on the floor of the sitting room. He passed his hands over it a few times, and then, with his hands simply touching the top of it, he lifted it as high as his head. I then got on top of the table and it went up as easily as before. Then three men got on it with me and it went up again until our heads touched the ceiling. Perhaps the strangest part of this experience was that we felt as if we had ceased to weigh anything. Every one of us felt as light as a feather, and recognized that we were helpless to keep the table down.

The man could not explain how he did it; he laughed at the suggestion that it was spirit manifestation; all he knew about it was that there were times when he *knew* he could do it; if a doubt of his power to do it crept into his mind, he failed; he had to have the feeling of certainty about it, and then he could succeed.

Hume, one of the greatest of the spiritual mediums, floated out of a third-story window lying on his back, made a circle above the heads of the people and entered his window again. This was in London, and it was estimated that ten thousand people saw it. Hume said it was accomplished by spirit help.

I am not satisfied with this explanation. In my researches with the hope of discovering new truth I have found that there is no such thing as an absolute law of gravity. The law of gravity is that power inherent

in the earth which draws things to it; it is not a law of itself, but only the reflex action of the one supreme law called the Law of Attraction. This law attracts objects upward, and not downward. Let me illustrate: We plant a seed in the ground. It sends out some feelers to get a knowledge of where it is, and then starts upward toward the sun. It flouts the law of gravity and says: "You have no right to hold me down to your cold breast; I am going upward." It does go upward until its small desire is exhausted, and it dies. As a dead thing the earth claims it by virtue of greater size. It is the dead to the dead.

After ages of preparation we find the earth sufficiently quickened in her life impulses through the constant attraction of the sun, to be able to bring forth a better life than a blade of grass. This time we will say that it is a little bug; hatched on the bosom of the earth, it refuses to stay there; it declares its independence of the earth by unfolding a pair of wings and soaring upward. If the law of gravity was truly a law, it would not permit the bug to do this. It would put its compulsion on the bug and hold it close to itself. To be consistent in this theory called gravitation the earth would do more than simply draw the bug to its surface; it would draw it to its centre, from which the impulse to pull things downward must come; failing in this through the density of its crust, it would at least hold the bug so firmly that nothing could remove it.

That even so weak a thing as a bug can overcome

the law of gravity calls for a readjustment of our philosophy. However, in the course of a few weeks the bug dies, and then the earth has no trouble in claiming it. How is it that the law of gravity could act on the bug dead, but not on the bug living? It is because the bug while living is the embodiment of intelligent desire; and intelligent desire even in so weak a thing as a bug or a blade of grass is attracted away from the earth, and not toward it. It is only when this upward attraction is ended by the death of the bug, when its desire for a higher life or a fuller expression of life ceases, that the bug falls to the ground; this, then, is what takes place in death. So we see that desire, aspiration, intelligence, all lift the creature away from the earth and toward the sun; and that as soon as these attributes cease, the creature falls back upon the earth.

What, then, is the cause of the creature's death? Surely it is the absence of aspiration and intelligence. But the bug has such a very small amount of these things, you say. Yes, this is true, and this fact greatly favors my argument. In the course of time there are creatures upon the earth that possess more intelligence and greater aspiration, and these creatures manifest greater power in maintaining their lives to a longer period. They yield more slowly to the earth's downward pull. They do yield in the course of time, and the earth swallows them up.

All life is expressed in aspiration and intelligence; aspiration and intelligence have a lifting power; death is the absence of aspiration and intelligence. As evo-

lution progresses there come other creatures which express still more aspiration and intelligence, on up through a thousand forms of life, until man is reached. When man first appeared on the globe his aspiration and intelligence were only a trifle above that of the brute. But the races of men improve; they constantly increase in aspiration and intelligence, this intelligence taking the form of a knowledge that always operates in the direction of gratifying desire or aspiration. In every upward step man grows farther from the dumb, blind attraction of the earth; in other words, he becomes more alive and less dead; he becomes more subject to the upward attraction—the source of light and heat; and less subject to the downward pull of the earth. In this way he is surely overcoming gravitation, and has been overcoming it ever since the highest manifestation of life was as low in the scale of evolution as the bug or the blade of grass, and even lower.

It is because I see this tendency of evolution beyond a doubt, that I know—actually know—that it will soon be in man's power to overcome death in this world. To become more and more free from the downward tendency toward the earth; to become more and more in obedience to the upward tendency that lifts away from the earth, can readily be accomplished by the acquisition of greater intelligence and loftier aspiration; and no member of the race is debarred from this. Such acquisition is in the direct line of the conquest of death here in the flesh. To understand this fully in

vests the person with a strange sense of power; it seems to cut him loose from the bonds that hold him down. And when we know that these bonds are not real, but only the beliefs of ignorance, we will rise free from them.

It is because I hold to this opinion that many persons scoff at the entire system of Mental Science. These ideas have actually been called a profanation of the religion of Christ; but they are not. Christ must have taught them. The Bible gives repeated evidence of this fact. Indeed it is my belief that the entire Bible is based upon the hope of man's power to overcome death. I could cite many passages to prove it, did I not rather prove it by the gospel of natural growth.

But, to return again to the fact that under certain conditions it is possible to overcome the—so-called—law of gravity. The one experience of my own that I referred to is not my only one. I had two other evidences of the fact of physical levitation under conditions that admitted of no doubt. Now what was the motor power in these instances? I believe it was thought. I believe it was the same thing that caused the cane to come to a horizontal position and advance unaided along the floor.

But whose thought? Possibly it was the thought of the person operating. He said plainly there were times when he could do it, and other times when he could not. He could not account for these times, but there

were times when he *knew* he could do it. At other times he doubted it, and his doubt prevented it.

I have noticed the same thing in my efforts to heal patients. There are times when—no matter what ails the patient, or how desperately sick he may be, I will *know* that I can cure him; and when I have this feeling of absolute knowing I do cure him very rapidly. At other times I will not quite know that I can do it. I will believe I can, but the belief will have some element of doubt in it, and the least bit of doubt prevents perfect results. In cases of this kind I keep trying to overcome the doubt and come out into a high place above it, where I can get a vision of the infinite health and vitality of the universal Life Principle. When I can do this all doubt vanishes, and I feel indescribable power; a power that I can exert only for the healing of the sick, but which another person with different inclinations from mine might use in lifting weights, and in doing many things in the line of overcoming the—so-called—law of gravity.

I know that in my chosen line of work it is *thought* that enables me to lift a patient from the downward road of death to the upward road of life. And I know that the lifting of dumb weights, as in levitation, is a similar work, only expressed on a different plane. My conclusion is that man with his wonderful brain is capable of doing anything he wishes to do as soon as he *believes understandingly* that he can do it. Now to believe understandingly is to come into the condition of knowing; to believe with only a partial understand-

ing is to do partial work; work that sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails. For myself I know that I am gradually overcoming the doubts that mar perfect work, and that I am slowly but surely coming into the place of understanding where I shall realize that man is an absolute power in himself, and can speak the word of command to everything negative to him.

There are other forms of spiritualistic manifestation that might be explained by such words as hypnotism, somnambulism, etc. Whether the explanation would not be more difficult to believe than to accept the spiritualistic theory in all the breadth of its claims I shall not pretend to determine. I have seen the most wonderful examples of the materialization of spirits, and yet nothing that may not be produced by thought when we know more of the power of thought. There are many things done in actual life for which as yet we have no way of accounting. Look at that religious exercise still conducted in many parts of India, of walking through fire. The natives dig a shallow pit and spend days in heating stones to a white heat in it. Ordinary observers cannot go within rods of it, and yet the excited dervishes walk in it barefooted and sit on the stones, frequently remaining a half hour, and yet not a hair of their bodies is burned, and their scant garments are uninjured. This performance was regarded as a myth by the whole outside world until within the last few years, when the easy facilities of travel have virtually brought the farthest corners of

the earth to our door, and the thing has been witnessed by thousands of our citizens.

And how is it done? It is done by the power of the trained mind to overcome matter. If the mind—developed to a point where it can do so mighty a thing as this when influenced by what I call the *knowing*; that is, by the understanding of its own power—what can it not do? Who shall prescribe its limit?

I think from what I have said, it will be readily perceived that I have no prejudice against spiritualism. So far from having prejudice against it, I would be glad to know that its claims are true. It seems to me that among all the beliefs now held by men that none is more humane or more lovingly and tenderly beautiful than this. To believe that our loved ones do exist, and that they are happy and near us, with the power of communicating with us, is a noble and consoling belief. Compare such a belief with one that dooms man to an endless hell because of a few mistakes made in this life. Compare it with the gospel of infant damnation, and draw your own conclusion. Stand these beliefs side by side, the one representing a happy world outside of this, though invisible, where the ignorant are taught, and the weak uplifted and ministered to, until intelligence and strength redeems them, and the other as represented by the unending horrors of an orthodox hell; and who can hesitate which side to espouse.

But there are many things in spiritualism I positively cannot endorse. This thing of a person consulting his spirit guides—so-called—for advice upon subjects

where his own brain should act understandingly, is a virtual denial of the ability of the brain to do its own thinking. Anything whatever that tends to the subversion of individuality, as this does, can have but one effect; leads unfailingly to weakness. Our brains are for our own use, and the worst heresy in this world is to deny ourselves the privilege of using them upon all occasions. To use our own brains is, of course, to take the risk of making mistakes. But why should we hesitate on that account, when we learn nothing except through our mistakes; when our mistakes are really the only teachers we have; the only stepping stones to a higher life than we now know. To me, every mistake is a lesson; I investigate it, and I arise higher on the ladder of *knowing* in consequence of it.

To know is to be. All power is in the knowing. But—I ask this audience, yes, and the whole world—how are we to achieve the knowing wrapped as we are in the garment of a hard and impenetrable criticism, so inexorable and uncharitable, so bigoted and cruel, that we will not even open our minds enough to investigate the creeds of other people, but condemn them unhesitatingly, even when no smattering of what they teach has ever entered our conception.

Friends, I am not making a plea for spiritualism, and I am not making an effort to pull it down. I am simply trying to be just. I confess again, as I did in the first part of this lecture, that I do not know whether its claims are true or not. But I do know one thing, that as long as the light of reason is left to illuminate the

road I am travelling that I shall never confess myself so limited, so unjust, so bigoted, so prejudiced and so *dishonest* as to make the most sweeping condemnation of any system of thought simply because it is new and not yet understood by me. I value the integrity of my individual thought power far above such a possibility.

In all I have taught through my writings and lessons I have never asked a living soul to endorse me or my views; I have only asked the people to arouse from the slumber of the dead thought, in which their reasoning powers are now buried, and come out beyond the old cut and dried opinions where nine-tenths of the race are actually embalmed and mummified, and make an effort to do their own thinking. For I know that all the salvation there is, is self salvation; and self salvation can come in no other way but through the minds of men and women trained to do their own reasoning.



