

The Arts and Crafts of Spirit Materialisation.

THREE EXPERIMENTS AS SEEN FROM THE OTHER SIDE.

I.—FROM THIS SIDE.

MANY persons who have claimed to be materialising mediums have been exposed as clever jugglers, tricksters or conjurers. This has been done so often that it has become monotonous. It seemed, therefore, a welcome change if Mr. and Mrs. Tomson, who are giving a music-hall performance of "The Master Mystery" at the Hippodrome, could be proved to be not merely clever performers of an undiscoverable trick, but persons in possession of that psychic power which enables them to materialise the spirit form. They no more claim to be spiritualists than fraudulent materialising mediums claim to be conjurers. But personal pretensions count for nothing. It is not what a person claims that matters, it is what he actually can do.

My first effort to induce the Tomsons to submit themselves to a test experiment at a private house was baffled by the veto of the music-hall manager under whom they were then working. He said he was quite certain they would fail if subjected to the rigorous tests which I would impose to exclude the possibility of trickery, and that as he did not want his show injured by exploding the Mystery, I must wait until their engagement terminated.

That was not very hopeful. But as the Tomsons professed themselves willing to submit to any conditions, I waited until they were free, and last month they gave me three experimental sittings—two in my own house and one in the house of a friend, the result of which satisfied me that whatever may be the conjuring abilities of these successful performers, they possess psychic powers without which it would be impossible for them to perform some of their feats.

The tests varied in stringency. At the first, although severe, they were nothing compared with those applied at the second and third meetings. At the second *séance* Mrs. Tomson was, at her own request, in opposition to my own emphatic protest, subjected to a close medical or surgical examination by three fully-qualified doctors, who certified that before she entered the cabinet they were absolutely certain that Mrs. Tomson had no extraneous substance whatever concealed on her person, in her hair or *inside her person*. At all three *séances* both Mr. and Mrs. Tomson were completely divested of all their clothing and redressed from head to foot in clothes furnished by me. No

attendant was allowed other than the members of the committee chosen to make the search complete. At the second and third *séances* no friend or relative of the Tomsons was permitted to be present. In all three the cabinet was an improvised structure made out of screens and curtains supplied by me and put together by members of the committee under the eyes of the company. In the third *séance* the cabinet was put together by Sir Oliver Lodge. How severe was the preliminary examination may be seen from the following copy of the certificate signed and handed in to the committee of the third *séance* before Mrs. Tomson was allowed to enter the cabinet:—

CERTIFICATE AS TO SEARCH AND EXAMINATION OF MRS. TOMSON.

I hereby certify that I have seen Mrs. Tomson absolutely divested of all her clothes. That I have seen those articles of apparel removed from the room. That I have examined the full body of the nude form of Mrs. Tomson both back and front, from the hair of her head to the soles of her feet. I certify that she has nothing whatever on the outside of her person. I also certify that after the examination was complete, and I was satisfied that Mrs. Tomson was in a state of nature without any plastrons or other devices upon her person, by which she could conceal any articles to be subsequently used as apports or for the draping of figures, I saw the clothes belonging to our hostess brought into the room, which I then subjected to a close examination to see that there was nothing concealed in the pockets or in the lining of such garments. I then saw Mrs. Tomson dressed in the clothes thus provided for her, after which I signed this statement declaring that the examination has been conducted in a most searching manner, and that I, the undersigned, am satisfied that at this moment Mrs. Tomson has nothing upon her person excepting the articles of apparel supplied to her by the hostess, which have been thoroughly searched, and which I am satisfied are of dark material, and contain nothing that could be used as an apport, or for the white drapery of figures.

(Signed) L. F. B.
E. M. S.
S. P. T.

January 22nd, 1909.

A similar certificate was signed by Mr. Fielding, Mr. Baggalley and Mr. Douglas Murray as to the result of their examination of Mr. Tomson.

Notwithstanding these rigorous precautions the following phenomena were witnessed at all the three *séances*:—

1. The production of flowers and ferns in varying quantities from within the cabinet.
2. The appearance of Mrs. Tomson outside the cabinet, clad from head to foot in a heavy, white, beautifully draped dress fitting close to her figure, over which was thrown a white veil, although Mrs. Tomson when she went into the cabinet was dressed solely in black.

3. The appearance of materialised spirit forms which were declared by one or more of the sitters to resemble their deceased relatives in feature, gesture and speech.

The first and second of these occurred at all three *séances*. The third only occurred at the first.

As to how these phenomena were produced the Tomsons say nothing. The explanations tendered by various members of the three committees merely serve as illustrations of the readiness of a certain class of professional sceptics to believe that Jonah swallowed the whale in order to evade the necessity of believing that the whale swallowed Jonah. The conclusions, the inferences, the explanations, do not matter. The only thing that is important is the fact that such and such phenomena actually did occur under such and such conditions, and that apparently they can, under similar or more favourable conditions, always be produced.

II.—FROM THE OTHER SIDE.

So far I have written solely from the point of view of observers on this side. I should not, however, have recorded the experiments here were it not that, for the first time, I believe, since such experiments began, I have in my possession communications from the other side, written either by my own automatic hand or by that of another automatic writer, hands which were controlled, or, if you like, which purported to be controlled, by the disembodied intelligences of deceased friends who co-operated with us in the experiment. Both before and after each *séance* we had such communications purporting to emanate from the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers and from my son Willie. And after all the sittings were over I asked the Myers control to use another hand than mine to write out a report for the readers of the REVIEW OF REVIEWS of his impressions of the series of sittings. He acceded to this request on condition that I would allow him to annotate the script with my hand and supplement it by extracts from what he had previously written immediately after the sittings.

AUTOSCRIP T FROM "F. W. H. MYERS."

Here is the annotated report, automatically written by the hand of Miss H., supplemented, as requested, from Mr. Myers' previous observations, and in particular by my own son's most interesting account of the process of transfiguration and materialisation in which he himself took part.

"By an apparently simultaneous impulse in each of the two worlds there has recently been a

united attempt to give scientific demonstration of the fact that not only does the individual personality survive the casting of its physical envelope, but that it possesses the power, under certain conditions, to re-assume temporarily the outward similitude of that former physical envelope.

"But we on our side and you on yours, while being united in the one great common effort, have had a somewhat different end in view.

"With you it was the endeavour to demonstrate that 'materialisation' was an undeniable fact; while with us—that is to say, those of us who have accepted that fact (and there is here almost as much scepticism regarding it as with you)—the chief object was to ascertain by careful observation and experiment what are the actual necessary conditions for making materialisation possible.

"In this, as in all research work, progress is infinitely slow; and with us, as with you, there have been many efforts and many failures. My own difficulty has ever been, as you know, my utter inability to trust so-called 'professional mediums.' To that difficulty I need not, however, again refer in regard to the present circumstances; for I satisfied myself some time ago as to the extraordinary psychic faculty possessed by Mrs. Tomson, which in one way exceeds that of her husband, who, though he is both clairvoyant and clairaudient, does not in himself possess the attributes which alone enable a disembodied spirit to assume material form. What these subtle attributes may be is at present unknown both to us and to you. And it is in this field of experimental research that my own chosen work at present lies. I have observed that certain 'conditions' are necessary to make materialisation possible. I have also observed that Mrs. Tomson possesses in herself all those 'conditions' in a varying degree; and furthermore I have come to the definite conclusion that certain of those *necessary conditions* are to be found distributed in different degrees of different elements among a number of persons who, when assembled together, by each supplying some needful attribute would collectively form first that battery or condition which is found in Mrs. Tomson herself alone.

"For the full development and natural working of this mysterious and precious faculty, the perfect, the essential atmosphere, is sympathy. Scepticism, which is so often but another name for antagonistic disbelief, will ever be fatal.

"It seemed to me, however, that if scepticism, representing the north-east wind under the pseudonym of 'scientific investigation,' were diluted with a suffi-

ciency of the necessary sympathetic sunshine, we might obtain a moderate working atmosphere for conducting experiments on behalf of both sides.

"With this in view my fellow-workers (W. S., junr., Julia, Gurney and others) gladly agreed to cooperate with Mr. Stead. The first *séance*, held at Mr. Stead's town house (Jan. 9), was of what (on looking back upon it) I may describe as a somewhat amateurish character. Strict 'test conditions' were carefully arranged, and as a matter of fact the results of the sitting were to us intensely satisfactory. I, keenly and critically, nay even sceptically observant, made myself for the first time acquainted with the primary conditions absolutely necessary for materialisation. I saw the causes of apparent and partial failure, and I may say that I think I clearly perceive the leading lines on which complete success will ultimately be achieved.

"To briefly summarise—the first sitting, then, was from our point of view extraordinarily good. Were I now to doubt the possibility of physical materialisation it would be to doubt the evidence of my own senses. But Mrs. Tomson's regrettable condition of emotional excitement before the commencement of the *séance* rendered her, as you know, quite unequal to the long-sustained strain. It is unnecessary for me to minutely recapitulate the tests. In accordance with my own earnestly expressed desire, Mr. Stead asked that any manifestation which might take place should be in accordance with the Divine Will.

"By the subdued light of a shaded lamp, and to the pleasant accompaniment of music, we unseen watchers smiled tolerantly in spite of ourselves as we saw the varying effect upon the small circle of sitters when the first apport (a large bouquet of various kinds of flowers) made its appearance. But the production of apports—the mere playthings of our world—was not the end we had in view.

"In spite of the very evident 'background' of scepticism, of which we were so keenly conscious, I was delighted that a number of our spirit-people were able to issue in succession from the cabinet, clothed as in 'the airy fabric of a vision,' to demonstrate by word and gesture that they were in very truth real, firm, solid, and tangible as yourselves."

AUTOSCRIP T FROM MY SON.

[One of the forms thus materialised was my son Willie, who passed over in December, 1907. I saw his face quite distinctly at the parting of the curtains, and his eager voice saying, "Father, Father, Father!" When I went forward Mrs. Tomson fell out of the

cabinet. Writing with my hand, Willie wrote the following account of the process in which he had taken part:—

"Around the medium there is an aura which is much more dense than that which surrounds you. It emanates from her body much as the small veins emanate from the arteries, and from this aura is drawn the material for materialisation and for transfiguration. In the latter case the spirit friends mould the drapery over the medium's body, using it as a kind of tailor's block, fit a mask more or less transparent over the features, and control the body. It is trance control *plus* the fitting over the medium of drapery and a semblance of the person controlling. For this the Medium's own aura is sufficient. It is more arduous when the full process of materialisation is undertaken. For then a new body must be constructed. It is not made complete in all its parts, the point being that of creating a recognisable entity. There is no need to elaborate all the details of the internal anatomy. For instance, I was only conscious of a head and bust. My arms were not complete; for my legs I had only the framework. It was impossible for me to have walked out. I was built up as in a kind of plaster cast around my spirit body. Of course, my spirit body was there, but it could not have supported my solid head and bust. They were building up my underpinnings. I should have felt like a man in armour. But I could use my vocal chords, and I did get out three words. For the full materialisation it is necessary to draw from other auras than that of the medium. The spirit artificers use the aura as raw material; they thicken and condense it, and mould it at will. It is a most interesting process. Julia helped. I did not put my hand to it, but remained passive. I should say that the medium would weigh less when I was built up, but that she and I would weigh together more than the medium alone. That means that the balance would be taken from the sitters, or some of them. Some yield much, others little or none. It is a somewhat risky and delicate process. We on our side need the support of your sympathetic thoughts. If we have that there is almost no limit to what we shall be able to do."]

"MYERS" AUTOSCRIP T (RESUMED).

"The second sitting, January 15th—that which took place at a private house at Regent's Park—was, from our standpoint, a thousandfold more successful than the first. We fought against conditions which I soon knew to be absolutely adverse. The room was a very Polar region of icy incredulity, mixed with an atmosphere of supercilious curiosity and, in some cases, of actual contempt. But for our absolute determination to force upon certain persons the evidence of their own senses we should have declined to allow the *séance* to proceed. However, I recalled with compunction the time when, had I been present in the body, my own mental attitude would have been

scarcely less bigoted and intolerant, and I lent my full support to the proceedings. Test conditions the most rigorous that were ever imposed upon any unhappy woman, and by which Mrs. Tomson was so completely 'depleted' and robbed of psychic force that every one of the twenty-five sitters had to be requested to separately enter the cabinet in order to contribute if possible to the necessary amount of power, yet did not prevent the eventual production of some small apports and the appearance of several beautiful spirit-forms clad in white draperies. All the apparitions but two were transfigurations. But there were two materialisations, one which came first and the other which dematerialised as you said. In truth, the success was more complete than I could have believed possible. For the conditions in the *séance* room were, for us, equivalent to the air you breathe when London is enwrapped in fog. Would you not consider the production of a good, clear photograph, taken in the midst of a fog, a more striking proof of the camera's power to see than even the best 'snap-shot' obtained on a sunny day? Clear air and sunshine give you your snap-shot easily, but *we* gave you, as it were, a clear photograph even in the midst of a dense fog! This we certainly did. And it is little to the credit of those of my scientific friends who were present that they have not frankly and openly said so.

"*Séance* number three (January 23rd), which to my great satisfaction took place at Mr. Stead's own residence, in which there are the accumulated beneficent influences of many good conditions, was, in its own way, equally a triumph. I wish you to understand that from our point of view this 'threefold experiment' has been from first to last successful. It has proved to many on this side that materialisation is a possibility, and it has given me much new insight, much new information, and enabled me to know, without any suspicion of doubt, that so far as we have gone we are standing upon firm ground. As the time for the third *séance* drew near I endeavoured to drive home the fact so persistently and cruelly—I may even say *brutally*—ignored, that the medium—whose sensitive, highly-strung organisation is the instrument on which we play—must be guarded, at whatever cost, from emotional disturbance of any kind.

"I was gratified by the presence of Sir Oliver Lodge at the third *séance*. It satisfies me to know that there is a united agreement that the test conditions were rigid (having been drawn up by a small committee of keen investigators), that the conditions were considered before the *séance* to have been satisfactorily complied with, that apports, in the shape of a large handful of different kinds of flowers, were produced, and that a number of forms appeared successively from the cabinet, some of which were complete materialisations, others transfigurations of the medium herself."

The Myers' report ends here. I add an extract

from what Mr. Myers wrote before the *séance*: "Please as little as possible in the way of preliminaries of a nature likely to disturb the sensitive equilibrium of the medium. The more I ponder over the former occasion the more I wonder that anything at all was achieved. I will briefly recount the essential conditions. 1. Sympathy. 2. Calm, scientific, deliberate observation, for the truth's sake (not insolent incredulity under that name). 3. No emotional excitement either in medium or sitters. 4. The benediction of God, asked in earnest supplication, that all may be in accordance with His will. 5. No discussion of any kind to take place in the presence of the medium. All arrangements, down to the smallest detail, completed in good time beforehand, so that Mr. Stead may take a few minutes' complete rest before the *séance* begins (this is important). 6. Subdued light, as before. These are *our* conditions. General details I leave to yourselves. With care I anticipate very good results." The circle, small though it was (eleven were present), was larger than I liked, and I here take this opportunity of saying that any future *séance* at which I may see my way to assist must be strictly limited to six persons. I do not propose to go into the different conclusions which were afterwards drawn by the sitters at these various *séances*. As I have elsewhere observed, *let facts speak for themselves*. Get a few reliable witnesses, sympathetic, level-headed persons who can agree exactly upon what they do hear and see, and who may be depended upon to adhere to their own statements afterwards, and never mind about 'conclusions,' than which nothing is more fallible!"

So much for the autograph. Of course, it may not be Mr. Myers who wrote the foregoing report, and it may not have been my son who explained how it was all done. But I saw my son's face and heard his voice, and so did the only other sitter, who sat exactly opposite the opening. His automatic writing not only came through me, but also through the same friend through whom he has constantly communicated ever since he passed over. Having therefore the evidence of my own senses confirmed by the auto writing of my son and Mr. Myers, I naturally have come to the only possible conclusion, viz., that whatever the Tomsons may do on the music-hall stage, they do possess psychic powers which on occasion can be used to produce phenomena under conditions so severe and so rigorously enforced as to preclude any possibility of fraud, trick, or collusion. Those who reject this conclusion admit that they cannot explain "the Master Mystery." For professional purposes the Tomsons no doubt prefer Sir Oliver Lodge's uncompromising rejection of any supernatural hypothesis, accompanied as it is by his frank admission that he cannot explain how it is done. For clever trickery spells wealth, and Spiritualism spells ruin. Therefore the Tomsons neither claim nor disclaim anything. But the facts are as above stated.