

EVENINGS WITH THE SPIRITS

"There are more things in heaven and earth,
Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy."¹

SHAKESPEARE.

ADMITTED! in sublunary affairs especially, so far as chicanery and duplicity are concerned, as the following truthful and ungarnished record of my experiences at a spiritual *séance* will testify. I was invited to join the magic circle by an esteemed friend, whose psychological proclivities induce him, like an earnest apostle, on all occasions to try and make a convert of anyone whose opinions on the theory of spiritualism are either vague or sceptical, and, consequently, at variance with his own. Notwithstanding this, I have a deep and abiding conviction of the genuineness of my friend's character, and a high appreciation of his intellectual and moral acquirements, and on all subjects, excepting alone Spiritualism, I should certainly be disposed to respect his judgment, and admire his sound common sense. His name, which "must be nameless now," is not only conspicuously identified with the subject, but he himself is one of its most earnest and active disciples; and in this country, where Spiritualism appears now to be gaining such an extensive influence, perhaps its foremost champion. He has for years past not only advocated with his pen, ably and argumentatively, all that can be said in favour of it, but, from purely disinterested motives, has spared neither pains nor money in investigating the nature of the varied phenomena which have been so often attributed to spiritual agency. A long experience of the subject both here and in America, its head-quarters, has had the effect of making him what he is. It may be well to observe here that Spiritualism is a decidedly contagious malady; and the weaker and softer sex are, as a rule, most susceptible of its influences. As far as my knowledge of the subject justifies me in expressing an opinion, I should assert that where one knows one man who believes in Spiritualism, at least five women may be found; but this is a fact which physiology can best account for. When, therefore, one meets with a man of the calibre above referred to, so completely led away, and his mind so utterly subjugated by what one can't call anything but a hobby; and when names eminent, as many are, both in science, literature, and art, are found subscribed to it, we are surely justified in trying to ascertain for ourselves the ways and means, and the whys and the wherefores, and it almost becomes our duty, if possible, to satisfy our own minds of the relation which, in the spirit world, cause bears to effect. Personal ex-

perience and observation are certainly likely to prove the most effective means of doing so, and thus enabling us to ascertain the nature of an influence which must be admitted to be regarded as potent in its operation, as it is represented to be mysterious and occult in its nature. As far as the writer's experience of the subject is concerned, he has no hesitation or difficulty whatever in forming a perfectly reasonable theory of his own about so-called Spiritualism, and it tends to no other conclusion than that it is, as practised at the present day, from beginning to end, a most flagrant and palpable hoax. It is a surprising fact, nevertheless, that intelligent people, when they have once taken up a hobby, or dignify it, if you like, by calling it a theory, and admitted in their own minds the truth and full force of its claims, how completely they preclude every possibility of testing its truth. When once they accept a doctrine as well founded, they don't trouble themselves, because they feel it would be superfluous to inquire into, or attempt to prove its truth, even by the most ordinary and reasonable tests; for this reason they are imposed upon to a degree which is absolutely incredible, and this from the simple fact that, in deference to a theory of their own, which ignores reason and common sense, they have wilfully and willingly predisposed themselves to accept and account for the most ordinary and common-place effects by the most unreasonable and extraordinary causes, imputing to a spiritual agency that which they are too blind to see is manifestly attributable to physical causes, and these very often of the simplest and most obvious kind; in other words, if they have common sense, they certainly have not the power to exercise it, and therefore may as well be without it so far as their pet theory is concerned. I had recently read, in the monthly magazine which professes to record the experiences of the spirit world, of the extraordinary mediumistic powers of a certain young lady, whose society from "morn till dewy eve" is courted to a surprising extent by the most aristocratic votaries of Spiritualism; and I am told, on the best authority, that scarcely a day passes but her marvellous powers are not brought to bear (let us hope for good) on some one or other of her credulous and wealthy patrons. We know that in all bodily ailments it is half the battle to have faith in the remedies prescribed, just as, under the influence of any mental disorder, we must, in seeking for solace, believe that the source from whence we ask and expect to receive it is sufficient and able to impart it. Miss N——, we will call her for the occasion, appears to be the medium of the day, just as the *Saturday Review* asserts that Mr. Tom Hohler is "the tenor of fashion," and through her (we suppose, of course, for a consideration) communications can be received and forwarded to the

spirit world. You can walk in, ladies and gentlemen, at he bidding, and be cheered, consoled, stimulated, and, possibly, if you have weak nerves, frightened too, just in proportion to the strength of your faith, by the spirit voices of those who were dear to you in life, and who, according to Miss N——'s teaching, attend on and visit us during our earthly pilgrimage. This is no new theory: on the contrary, an old but sublimely poetic and beautiful idea, which suggests the watchfulness of a guardian angel. And no wonder, if Miss N—— has the power to demonstrate, beyond doubt, the actual presence among us of these angelic satellites, that her creed should find so much favour; but manifestations of a still more extraordinary nature are dependent on the all-powerful will of this young lady. The highest and most recent development of spiritual life appears to be, not the sound of spirit voices heard through a speaking trumpet, nor the production of drawings by hands unseen, which are, so to speak, comparatively low types of, development, but in very truth, a profuse supply of spirit flowers actually blooming and fragrant, as if they had been transported "on wings as swift as meditation," direct from Elysian fields!

It was in the hope of witnessing this particular form of manifestation, which had become so common through Miss N——'s mediumship, that I was induced to attend the *séance*; and I certainly had no reason to be disappointed in its results, for I came away with tangible evidence, in the shape of a spiritual hollyhock in my button-hole, and in my waistcoat-pocket a piece of bread (I should imagine aërated), and an unripe gooseberry; I need scarcely add, with my mind fully made up as to the source from whence all these good things were so beneficently supplied. Before going into the details of the "sitting," it may not be out of place to say a few words about the medium, and also the company of which the circle was composed. I believed, and I think I am right in the supposition, that I was the only sceptic present. The meeting took place at the house of a professional man in the West Central District. He is a gentleman of high social status and recognised ability, and a decided and distinguished ornament to the profession to which he belongs. There were, at this time, I think, six gentlemen present, including myself, out of which I had a personal knowledge of two only, my friend before referred to, and Mr. B——, whose reputation as a leading scientific man was by no means confined to the company present, the greatest part of his life having been occupied in the deepest scientific researches, and several valuable and important discoveries are due to his talents. He is a profound thinker, an astute and logical reasoner, as well as a man of wide and general attainments, and naturally of the keenest powers of perception; but notwithstanding all this, a spiritualist

of the first water. It struck me as somewhat exceptional and curious that there was not a single representative of the cloth on this occasion present; the rest of the company was composed of ladies of mature and nameless ages, one the wife of a physician of some eminence, and the others, so far as I could judge, although strangers to me, from the general tone the conversation took before spirits were introduced, people decidedly superior in point of social and intellectual status, and certainly there was no one present to whom I could conscientiously attribute the slightest attempt at collusion; on the contrary, they seemed, one and all, thorough devotees, and quite incapable of anything like duplicity. I may add that the sum-total, medium included, made up the mystic number, thirteen! but then, we were not sitting to dine, so it did not much matter; our appetites were whetted for a more intellectual feast. It is, I believe, a practice in the spiritual profession for mediums invariably to keep their audiences waiting, I suppose on the assumption that the excitement and interest on which they are accustomed to trade and make good capital lose nothing by delay, but, on the contrary, increases in its intensity, which, of course, for the medium, makes matters so much the better. On the occasion of which the writer is striving to give a faithful account, it certainly appeared to be so. All kinds of speculations were indulged in to account for Miss N——'s absence, as the clock on the mantel-piece told us that she was just half-an-hour behind the time of her appointment; although signs of uneasiness and disappointment could be traced on almost every countenance, still there was an evident disposition to make every reasonable excuse. At length, when hope was on the point of giving place to despair, and during a lull in the conversation, a loud and startling double knock, was heard—not on the table, but the front door, and Miss N——'s name was announced. She was, of course, chaperoned, as mediums invariably are, in this instance, by her father. On her entering the room I was certainly struck with her appearance generally. In figure, she is what is best described by a fine woman, much above the ordinary height, and inclined to *embonpoint*, but notwithstanding this, unmistakeably dignified and graceful in her movements, and decidedly, although not a lady, a person of easy, agreeable, and natural manners. Her conversation is certainly not brilliant, but on the contrary rather common-place. I am, however, leaving the most important description till the last. If I was to assert that Miss N—— was handsome I should flatter her; and if I was to say she was not I should fail to do her justice. She certainly has a pretty, intelligent, but inexpressive face, good and regular features,—pleasing to look at, but indicating the exercise of no special or noticeable

faculties. On the whole, I should pronounce her of a passive and apathetic, rather than a nervous and excitable temperament. If any special attribute suggested itself, from her appearance and manners, a discriminating eye would be disposed to detect a certain histrionic aptitude, from the mere fact that it was obvious she had acquired an ease of manner among people infinitely her superiors, not from gentle birth, but from an evidently artificial experience. Her father was a man whose countenance would render it difficult for one to draw any conclusions from. It was like a sealed book, with an unpleasant-looking binding, which must be opened and read, and studied, to be appreciated and understood. He appeared to be considerably ill at ease, and might have taken with advantage a lesson from his daughter, as he was certainly out of his element, unless he purposely wished to appear so. Mr. N—— had little or nothing to say for himself, “yes” or “no” being about the extent of his conversational powers. He accompanied his daughter, admittedly, only as a chaperone, and purely from parental motives of propriety. That a young lady so attractive as we have described Miss N—— should have some sort of escort is very natural and plausible, particularly as she is so often under the influence of spirits! I was given to understand that Mr. N—— was one of those indifferent individuals who take no trouble to inquire into any subject, and that he came ostensibly in a kind of passive frame of mind, not exactly as a sceptic, but as a person convinced of facts, but totally ignorant of causes. He had of course witnessed most of the extraordinary phenomena attributed to his daughter’s powers, yet appeared to be perfectly careless and apathetic as to the “ways and means,” and the “whys” and “wherefores.” Whether he was *really* so or not, the following details of the *séance*, which was about to commence, will testify. There was no time to be lost, and the call was immediately made to commence operations, whereupon all the company adjourned to the adjacent room, which was approached by folding doors, and which had the appearance of an ordinary, but elegantly-appointed drawing-room. A round mahogany table was in the centre of the room, above which was a gaselier, and on the left, and facing the window, a pianoforte. I may here mention that previously, and at the suggestion of the hostess, the curtains of three windows had been drawn, so as to preclude every vestige of daylight. The gas was lit, and we proceeded to sit round the table as nearly as possible, in the following order, a lady separating each gentleman, and the medium and her father sitting next to each other, our hands, of course, being joined in the usual way. After sitting some five minutes, I became satisfied that the spirits did not exhibit any very eager anxiety to manifest themselves, as no

knocks or other indications of their presence occurred. At length, at the suggestion of the medium, one of the circle left the table, and proceeding to the pianoforte, commenced playing a very doleful invocation, which, in a few moments, had the effect of producing audible knocks. In answer to an inquiry from the medium, "Are any spirits present?" three knocks, which followed each other in quick succession, indicated the all-important answer, "Yes." By means of an alphabet, other questions were asked, and answers by no means satisfactory elicited, the spirit present being certainly not disposed to be communicative, and the intelligence he vouchsafed was neither edifying nor to be relied upon. But there are false spirits, as there have been false prophets, and, as far as I could ascertain from those present, the communications received bore no reference whatever, either to the knowledge or experience, past or present, of any one of the party. More music was then resorted to, and, with one or two exceptions, the whole of the circle joined in a well-known hymn, the effect of which, in total darkness, was anything but melodious, and, to me, sublimely ridiculous, as bordering too closely on the profane. It had, however, the desired effect, and knocks now came from the table, louder than before and in much quicker succession, the medium accounting for this by informing the company that there was now more than one spirit present. I was all anxiety to know when the floral manifestations would begin; and the medium having asked the spirits if they would produce us any flowers, the answer was given in the affirmative, and almost at the same moment, one could hear a sound, as if something light and flower-like had fallen; and on the lights being lit, three or four blossoms of hollyhock were found to be on the table. These were examined, particularly by our scientific friend, with microscopic exactness, and all kinds of speculations were indulged in as to the source from whence they came. My thoughts, being of "the earth, earthy," intuitively wandered to Covent-garden market, those of my associates were probably at this moment in Paradise. This was certainly extraordinary, and in breathless expectation we awaited even more singular manifestations. The lights were once more extinguished, and hollyhocks scattered in profusion on the table. I do not understand the language of flowers, but why hollyhocks are so plentiful in the spirit world, what followed may, to those curious to inquire, probably afford some vague clue. In this instance they were not, as before, simply deposited, or let fall in some cases with more force than their own weight would generate, but were actually thrown down, and some three or four of the company asserted that they were struck by the flowers on the head, face, and other parts of the body. My friend, referred to at the beginning, informed me that he had secured a flower, which I

requested him to give to me ; and disconnecting my hand from the lady who sat next to me, I groped about in the dark, endeavouring to find his ; at length our hands, after much sawing of air, came into contact, and I clasped with avidity the damp and cold blossom, and so tightly did I retain it in my grasp that, on examining it afterwards in the light, its beauty—nay its conformation and character, scarcely remained distinguishable. Again we proceeded to business, on each occasion, be it noted, in the blackness of darkness. All admitted the manifestations to be not only startling but highly successful. I scarcely took the same view. At length a gentleman who had hitherto been perfectly silent said, with a kind of Twist-like propensity : “ If they will produce the stem of the hollyhock, I will believe.” He had no sooner expressed this wish than the actual stem, stripped of its bloom, struck him. “ Here it is !” he exclaimed : “ wonderful, is it not ?”

This was the climax, and indicated, in the belief of every one, not only the evidence of spirit power, but spirit intelligence. I still continued to be not merely sceptical but obstinate in my conclusions ; for it appeared to me so obvious that the gentleman who had chaperoned the fair medium, and to whom we before referred as having a suspicious visage, had come with his pockets well stored with hollyhocks, and having exhausted the stock which he had previously distributed by single blossoms, now very opportunely produced all that remained of this particular spiritual commodity, viz. the stem. I did not, however, in the presence of the circle venture to propound this theory, which would assuredly not have met with a welcome reception—mediums, like all earnest-minded professors, being invariably on the alert and ready to turn to their advantage any opportunity of applying their art with additional force and under exceptional circumstances. Here, for example, a special request was made, and, by a happy and fortuitous coincidence, a special indication of spirit power was the result. Probably, from the same fertile source a blacking-bottle might have been produced, had it occurred beforehand to the medium that anyone of the company might be curious enough to ask for one. As there were no indications of anything like scepticism on the part of any of the company, and as my own individual opinions and inferences, which were already clearly formed, lay buried in the depths of my own bosom, the medium was induced—of course, at the instigation of the spirits—to unfold to us still more extraordinary revelations, the assumption being that we were all fit subjects and in a satisfactory condition of mind to receive them. On resuming our sitting, the stock of hollyhocks being exhausted, some small pieces of bread, cut with much precision, were produced on

the table in the same manner, and doubtless from the same repository as the flowers; and these, too, were examined with a degree of mystery which almost led one to doubt their reality. Then followed some fruit productions, in the form of unripe gooseberries, which certainly could have been swallowed intellectually with the possibility of much less personal inconvenience than would probably have attended any effort in the flesh to devour them. I had, however, less suspicion and reluctance in regard to the bread, a piece of which, at the earnest solicitation of my scientific friend, I ventured to eat; but it was not sufficiently large to testify its satisfying properties. Nevertheless, a piece I brought away with me has not "melted into thin air," but, through lapse of time, has become unmistakeably hard, and possesses all the characteristics of having undergone the usual kneading and baking processes; it furthermore, on minute examination, gives one the idea of having been sat upon in the days of its consistency, and so been flattened by contact with some more solid substance. At this stage of the proceedings I took leave of the circle, and while pondering on the events of the evening during my journey home, I positively wondered, and well-nigh stood appalled with surprise, at the idea of having tacitly and voluntarily submitted to have my common sense so outraged and insulted by such palpable and flagrant impositions. I reached home, however, now more than ever convinced that the best, and sometimes the wisest amongst us, are mad on some one point or other, and Spiritualism is certainly at the present time calculated to make no exception to this rule.

Before taking leave of my readers, I will endeavour to record briefly the experiences of two subsequent *séances* which I attended, but with a very different object to the former, viz., that I might be justified, from the results of my own investigations and experience, in exposing the wholesale trickery which another well-known medium resorts to under the cloak of so-called Spiritualism. Mediums belong to a profession which is almost exclusive; they live and fare sumptuously on the credulity of their fellows, and in this they are perhaps not so much to blame as those who are weak and foolish enough to patronise them. Though in England spiritualists are as "plentiful as blackberries," there are probably not more than half-a-dozen mediums who prosecute their calling with anything like a successful pecuniary issue; probably the most successful, in this respect, is the one I am about to introduce. Her fee for a sitting is 5s. a-head for a consultation at her own house, or £2 2s., and travelling expenses, if she attends professionally at the residences of her patrons. This lady commenced her career, I am told on the best possible authority, as a fortune-teller. Until some years ago her abode, although only at

that time an obscure parlour in the neighbourhood of Holborn, was thronged by those whose curiosity had been aroused by the extraordinary revelations of an article which appeared in one of our leading monthly magazines. Now, however, the tables are turned, and she has been led by the spirits, no doubt, into a more suitable and pretentious home. Here, at her present residence in the North-West District, spirits seem specially to congregate; here *séances* are almost daily held; here spirits deign to hold sweet converse with mortal men; and here, with the assistance of banjos and guitars, the divine comedy of Spiritualism is nightly acted, and spirit hands diffuse sweet music into mortal ears. The original medium, the mother of "the family," has, however, retired from the activity of spirit life, and deals now only, to use her own words, in "the still small voice." On her niece, however, the mantle has fallen, and it is to the all-powerful will of this young lady, who combines the relationship of niece and daughter-in-law, that the remarkable manifestations I am about to describe must be attributed. I may mention, that I was accompanied, on this occasion, by an esteemed and well-tried friend, Mr. H——, who was, nevertheless, quite a stranger to all spiritual experiences, but at the same time a very observant and well-informed man. My friend, Mr. C——, the prominent spiritualist, who took such an active part in the last *séance*, and who had not yet, it seemed, quite despaired of making a convert of me, also accompanied us. The ostensible object of this visit was to initiate my friend, Mr. H——, into the mysteries and realities of spirit life. We arrived at the residence of Mrs. M—— when the snow was lying thick on the ground, and Mr. M——, the son, a by no means prepossessing-looking personage, somewhat of the Stiggins type, opened the door and introduced us (as we had come by an appointment previously made by Mr. C——), to an ordinary sitting-room, where we found the mother, the ex-medium, an uncommonly stout, good-humoured looking old lady; his wife, a comfortable-looking person, on whom about thirty summers' suns had shone, with pleasant, and at times almost childlike manners; a mysterious-looking lady in black, of a somewhat shabby-genteel description, who admitted she, too, was a medium, "but only in a small way;" and a little girl, who was amusing herself by reading Shakespeare's plays. With the young lady, the son, before referred to, retired into an adjoining room, almost immediately we entered, leaving the occupants six in number. As a preliminary step, we were recommended to warm ourselves, and while doing so, I took a careful survey of the apartment, in which were two circular tables—one three feet in diameter, the other five feet, and much heavier—two ordinary sofas, two pianofortes, a guitar, a violin, and a plentiful supply of chairs. Having re-

covered from the effects of the cold, Mrs. M——, the ex-medium, proposed we should try the small table; so five of us proceeded to sit round it, with our hands resting upon the surface. Presently there was a slight motion; then a more violent rocking; then Mr. C—— asked, "Were any spirits present? and if so, would they manifest themselves?" Immediately sounds were produced, and the table began to rock to and fro, and tilt itself from the side exactly opposite to the medium. Then Mr. C—— asked, by means of an alphabet, if the spirit would communicate with us? Whereupon, three distinct knocks followed, and a name, purporting to be that of the spirit, was spelt out, but none recognised it, nor could any of us call to mind ever having known such a person. Some ordinary common-place questions were then asked, and answers equally common-place and varied spelt out, Mr. C—— pointing to each letter, and the knock indicating the one referred to. As nothing at all satisfactory was elicited, Mr. C—— ventured to expostulate in a friendly way with the spirit, which was evidently a lying spirit, and showed very little intelligence. It seemed, however, to take umbrage at this gentle reproof, and became unpleasantly demonstrative by agitating the table with increased violence, and in a manner unmistakably significant of its disapproval. The raps now became louder, and at the request of the medium the leg of my chair, which was next to his, was distinctly and audibly knocked, so much so that I clearly felt the vibrations. Mr. C——, who had constituted himself master of the ceremonies, then wrote on a piece of paper a request, the purport of which, so far as I could see, and he himself pledged his word, was only known to him, and having folded the paper carefully he placed it upon a table some four or five yards from that at which were we sitting. He had no sooner done this than we all rejoined our hands, and the evolutions which almost immediately affected the table became so eccentric, that we were compelled to stand up in order to follow it, for it evidently seemed to have a mission and purpose to fulfil. Three of the party then disconnected their hands from it, and it proceeded, strange to say, under the influence of the medium and myself, direct to the door, at which it remained stationary. The medium then suggested that it wanted to go upstairs; but no, no such thing, the two raps which at once followed indicated clearly enough that it indulged in no such erratic tendencies. It then proceeded to tilt itself at an angle of 45 degrees, and suddenly falling with its edge against the closed door, made, as my readers will easily imagine, a very unmistakable rap thereon. This process it repeated again and again, and the medium asserted that she counted, and probably she was correct, no less than ten raps. It then returned under the same con-

ditions to the place on which it had formerly stood. At this stage of the proceedings, a self-satisfied expression of countenance suffused the otherwise unimpeachable features of Mr. C——, while those of my friend showed unmistakable symptoms of surprise. I was now told to read the request made by Mr. C—— in writing, and which still lay on the table where he had originally placed it. I did so, and it ran thus—*Go and rap at the door ten times!* This was certainly a very curious result, and a positive triumph for the cause. If, however, the gyrations of the table were due to the manipulations—whether voluntary or involuntary—of the medium, all I wish to assert is this, that they were wonderfully skilfully performed. The table, as I stated before, was an ordinary circular table on a tripod, which branched from a single pedestal, on which it was supported, at a distance of about six or eight inches from the floor. I have, since witnessing this, more than once tried the experiment of moving such a table myself, and would suggest that any of my readers interested in the matter should, mainly for their own satisfaction, do the same. When tilted into a certain position, and the balance of its weight pretty equally distributed, it is absolutely astonishing how an almost imperceptible amount of force is sufficient to keep it thoroughly under our control, so that without any noticeable exertion, or, indeed, by an almost involuntary action, it can be made to proceed hither or thither at one's will. Here, in order to add a pleasing variety to the proceedings, it was suggested that a little music would be edifying, and the husband of the medium was thereupon summoned. He immediately obeyed the call, and seating himself on a sofa, at the farther corner of the room, proceeded to play a polka on the violin, the company remaining seated, as before. The music had no sooner commenced than it became apparent that the table was intoxicated with the dulcet sounds; in a moment it was raised two feet from the ground, all our hands only lightly touching its surface; it continued in this position at least three minutes, oscillating vertically, in perfect tune to the music—in fact, dancing in the air as perfectly as a one-legged table could be reasonably expected to do, and as much to the satisfaction of some as to the surprise of others. I may now mention, that the whole of the *séance* was conducted by an amount of gaslight barely sufficient to enable one to read, but still with a sufficient light for all present to see clearly what was going on. The medium, however, more than once hinted at the possibility of there being a little too much light under the table, reflected from the fire, to make the conditions perfectly satisfactory, and to obviate this a cloak was thrown over two chairs, which were stood in front of the fire. This precaution induced a thought in my mind that spirits may love darkness

rather than light "because their deeds," &c., I simply record all this as fact, and would reassert, that by whatever process the table was raised, it was so successfully applied as to entirely evade the possibility of detection. We one and all had opportunities of observing—and I certainly made the most of mine—that the legs or feet of the table, while it was suspended, were not, as far as we could ascertain, touched by anyone; and there was quite sufficient light to enable us to determine this if we could trust our eyes. Mr. C—— now made another request, which was written, folded up, and deposited, as before, on the table, and under similar circumstances the table faithfully fulfilled it, by proceeding to another part of the room, and then as it were jerking itself on to a sofa; it then—that is to say, immediately the medium's hands were taken off—remained perfectly still, the written request, which was afterwards read by one of the company, ran thus: "*Go and get upon the sofa.*" A book was then placed under the table, and at my request a certain page was named for the spirit to turn down. After a few minutes a rustling of the leaves was heard, and a page, but not the one I had selected, was found to be folded, but very clumsily; a paper and pencil was also deposited under the table, with the hope that the spirits, as they very often do, would write thereon, but this experiment, too, signally failed—perhaps the spirits present were scarcely educated up to this pitch. A guitar was then placed under the table, and held by the lady next to the window; its strings were instantly touched, and the whole instrument moved, but although plenty of sound, nothing affecting music, or even the sound of a chord, was produced. I asked to be allowed to take the guitar in my own hands; and sitting, as I was, next to the medium on the other side, I placed it between my legs, the base of the instrument resting on the floor; the same effects were produced. This experiment, however, was tried on that side of the table opposite to the medium, but neither sound nor movement was the result. I then asked, through the medium, if the spirit or spirits present would touch me. "Yes," was the answer; and almost simultaneously I felt a clutch precisely as if some one had laid hold of my ankle with their finger and thumb. I instantly endeavoured to grasp whatever it might be; but was only just in time to touch, with my hand, a palpable substance, which was removed with marvellous alacrity, and just in time to elude my grasp. Now I must leave my readers to draw their own inferences respecting this last manifestation. I have my own theory, that the feet and toes, with a little education and the same amount of training which our hands undergo, would be able to perform with credit many of the functions of the former. I myself, and no doubt many of my readers, have seen very excellent examples of toe-writing from the pen of those

whom some serious accident has deprived of the use of their hands ; at any rate, I see no reason why, under the protection of the folds of a heavy dress, a great many wonderful feats may not be performed. The wearing of boots, as the medium did in this case, is certainly rather opposed to this ; but if with the assistance of one foot a boot may be taken off, why may it not, by the same agency, be put on as occasion requires ? The company now seemed to be growing somewhat wearied of the performance ; and as the medium stated that she felt rather exhausted, a little respite was taken. During this interval, I casually inquired of her whether the size of the table had any effect on its capacity for being moved ? She replied, very indifferently, that she had never found it to be so. I then suggested to Mr. C—— that we should together test this on the large table, which was so cumbersome and heavy that with our united efforts we could barely lift it. We placed our hands upon it, Mr. C—— standing on one side, and I on the other ; but no effect at all was produced. The medium seeing this, left her seat and, approaching the table, placed her hands upon it. Almost immediately it tilted up, and then, as if by a sudden effort, raised itself about a foot from the ground, and then came down so heavily on the floor as to shake the contents of the room. After an interval of ten minutes' conversation, and being anxious to see and learn all we could, it was proposed to adjourn to a small adjacent room, and be there initiated into the more solemn mysteries of a dark *séance*, the only addition to the circle being Mr. M——, the medium's husband. There was nothing particularly noticeable in the room, except that it appeared to be rather "bare for lack of plenishing," and decidedly dingy. A round table stood in the centre ; over it a gaselier, around it a requisite number of chairs, and on it, some long paper tubes in the shape of speaking trumpets, which were very dirty, and had the appearance of having been well fingered. Beside them lay a guitar, tambourine, and violin. It is within the precincts of these four hallowed walls that the spirit of one John King, who departed this life nobody seems to know when, holds converse with those who come steadfast in the faith to hear the real sepulchral ring of a spirit voice. Who John King was in the flesh I could not clearly ascertain. In his disembodied state he is wont to represent himself as a rather too familiar spirit, and one addicted to the use of by no means choice language. The question was, would he manifest himself that night ? If he would, we were all anxiety to hear his voice and listen to any counsel he might vouchsafe to give us. Now came the awful moment ; the lights were extinguished, and, surrounded by an Egyptian darkness, our hands, at my special request, being joined in the usual way, and the medium and her husband, be it noted, sitting

next to each other. For a time no immediate manifestations appeared; then on a sudden we were startled by a tremendous crashing sound, as if something heavy had fallen upon the table. My friend convulsively clutched my hand, as if he were preparing himself for something awful. How joyfully I welcomed at that moment the sound of a familiar human voice, which was that of Mr. C—, who, in the calmest and most dignified tones, challenged the mystic visitor thus: "Is that you, John?" "Yes, it is," the spirit replied, with an unearthly voice, hollow-sounding, and quite different from the voice of any of those present. This was John King with a vengeance, and his voice seemed to come from all parts of the room. Then another crashing sound followed, then the tambourine shook, and was beaten violently. John King by this time seemed to be less perturbed in spirits, and evinced some disposition to be communicative, and as the emotion of the circle subsided, their curiosity seemed in proportion to increase. John talked a vast deal of nonsense, and conversed freely with anyone who volunteered to ask a question. He, however, gave us no information either in regard to himself or his condition, and his replies, although characterised by an amount of rough-and-ready wit, were undignified, and singularly devoid of anything like gravity and intelligence. If a question difficult to answer was put, some such reply as this followed, "Don't ask stupid questions"—and if any indications of scepticism were manifest, John King accused us of "treating him worse than a common conjuror." While this spirit voice was audible, I took frequent occasion to speak with the medium and her husband, and, in each instance, found them in their places. This made the illusion so much the stronger. However, with a view of testing the matter conclusively, I let go my friend's hand on the one side, and that of the medium (in the small way) on the other, and, taking a match-box quietly from my pocket, was on the point of striking a light, when in the most peremptory tones, the voice, addressing me by name, was heard by all to say, "Put that box down." This, I must say, somewhat staggered me, but on reflection it became apparent that my next door neighbour, the medium (in the small way), suspecting from the fact of my having released my hand from hers that some plot was brewing, conveyed her suspicions to the acting medium, and no doubt the medium imparted this knowledge, probably through the speaking-trumpet, to our spiritual friend, Mr. King. This is, at least, the conclusion I came to on the matter. Then came a still small voice, or, if it is possible, as the Laureate asserts, "the sound of a voice that is still." This was none other than Kate's voice. Who Kate is or was, I could not well understand. The medium said it was Kate's voice, and I took it for granted it was. She did

not, however, appear to be on speaking terms with Mr. King; probably she treated him as an inferior spirit, who inhabited a lower sphere than her own. What she vouchsafed to say was addressed chiefly to me, in gentle and persuasive tones, urging me "to be calm," and "have faith;" probably this last injunction was a wise one, as I certainly possessed very little. John King at this stage of the proceedings seemed less disposed to be communicative, and his answers becoming dry, abrupt, and in some instances unmistakably vulgar, it was deemed expedient to put an end to the *séance*, but previous to this, my friend, Mr. H—, inquired if he would favour him with his company at a private *séance* at his house, to which John conditionally, but somewhat rudely assented, by stating that "if he came he hoped there would be a goodly supply of grapes and champagne for supper." Then the medium bade us listen to the departure of the spirits; and a sound, resembling that of a cat shod in walnut-shells, was heard gradually to die away in the distance; and so ended this remarkable exhibition of spiritual eccentricity. I have simply, however, recorded the facts, but have no hesitation whatever in asserting that the voices were the voices of a ventriloquist, and not of spirits. Nevertheless, the whole proceedings, although not calculated to inspire any great amount of awe, were no doubt executed with consummate skill, by whom I must leave my readers to decide. It is a curious and significant fact, that when the circle was first formed the medium announced the conditions to be unfavourable, consequently certain changes were resorted to, in this case, for example, by the medium changing her seat to that next her husband on the one side, and Mr. C— on the other, the medium (in a small way) separating myself and Mr. H— on the opposite side of the table. Whatever of spirituality there may be in the requirement of such changes, which are very frequently resorted to, it is quite clear that the result of them is invariably favourable to trickery and deception. We now took leave of the company; I in a condition of mind somewhat puzzled to account for all I had seen; Mr. C—, triumphant with exultation at the success of the manifestations, and seemingly impressed with an idea that facts so convincing and overwhelming would turn me into a spiritualist on the spot; Mr. H— apparently oscillating between the possibility of truth and the probability of trickery; in fact he was utterly unable to account for what he had seen, or to make up his mind on the subject one way or the other. A proposal was then made that a third *séance* should be held at his own house, which is situated in a suburban district, some eight or ten miles from town. The services of the medium and her husband were for the usual consideration secured, and they attended by a previously made appointment at seven o'clock

on — the —, the twofold objects of this meeting being to ascertain first whether the phenomena we had witnessed at their own residence would be as satisfactorily developed at Mr: H——'s house; and secondly, if it were so, to take every reasonable means of detecting the causes which produced them. The company on this occasion comprised myself, our host and hostess, a lady who was specially introduced as a "healing medium" by Mr. C——, and three other gentlemen (two of them strangers to me), the other Captain B——, an intimate friend of mine; but neither possessed any previous knowledge or experience of the subject. To record the proceedings of this sitting would be simply to recapitulate the details of the preceding one. We all sat, with the exception of the husband of the medium, round an ordinary circular table, in the centre of a large and well-appointed dining-room. The gas being, at the suggestion of the medium, lowered, raps were soon heard, first on the table, and then seemingly on the walls. The spirit present then engaged to spell out, with the alphabet, my friend Captain B——'s name, but in this it signally failed; it then volunteered to remind him that he had been saved from death through the timely interposition of the spirit of one John B——; but this was an episode in his experience of which he was totally ignorant. Mr. C—— hereupon made the same excuses as before for the fallibility of spirits, by asserting that the information afforded by them was not always to be relied upon, and so it appeared. The usual amount of rapping took place, and precisely the same experiments were tried, but in no single instance did they succeed. The only satisfactory illustration of the evening's entertainment was a novel request made by Mr. C——, viz., that the spirits would deposit in an empty tumbler, placed beneath the table, three coins, in the following succession: first, a half-crown, secondly a shilling, and thirdly a sixpence, these being laid on the floor close to the tumbler. In the course of a few minutes a jingling in the glass was heard, and the request was faithfully fulfilled, in the order prescribed. This, however, only goes to support the theory I advanced, that it is quite possible for a well-practised pair of feet to accomplish such a result. Although it was the unanimous opinion that the medium was throughout actively engaged, still she betrayed no outward evidence of this, and although subjected to the severest scrutiny of all eyes, she appeared by no means ill at ease; or when obviously under suspicion, indicated the slightest want of confidence in herself. She was evidently all observant, but assumed the most perfect and studied indifference to all that was taking place around and beneath her. At this stage of the proceedings I purposely left the circle with a view, by the closest examination, of trying to detect the part of anyone any symptoms of trickery, and my atten-

was more particularly directed to any movement I might see under the table. On observing this, the medium immediately proposed that the company should draw as near to one another as possible, and so my object was defeated. A sitting was now proposed at a smaller table, and after the usual knocks were elicited, Mr. C—— made a written request, which he folded up as on the previous occasion. Straightway the table proceeded to fulfil it, and moved off, with the hands of the medium and Captain B—— alone upon it, to the spot on which I was standing. Captain B—— was evidently astonished at this, and asserted that the table had, he was convinced, some motive power. On my requesting the medium to remove her hands, the table at once became stationary and the knocks were no longer audible, which to my mind clearly proves that the medium was throughout manipulating it. Being by this time anxious to renew our acquaintance with our spiritual friend, John King, we repaired to a smaller room, Mr. M——, the medium's husband, accompanying us. We sat round the table precisely as before, the gas being previously extinguished. John King introduced himself in his usual demonstrative and unceremonious manner; was more vulgar in his conversation and remarks, and betrayed, if possible, a greater amount of ignorance in answering the various questions put to him, and which, as an intelligent spirit, he certainly ought to have been able to answer in a more satisfactory manner. On scientific subjects he was completely nonplussed, and his information generally, especially in respect to geography, indicated a minimum of intelligence and a grievous neglect of education. Kate, too, condescended on this occasion to put in an appearance, but her "still small voice," according to the reliable testimony of our hostess, came into such unpleasant proximity as to savour unmistakably of alcohol. Captain B——'s vigilance was mainly instrumental in detecting a flagrant attempt at imposition. Immediately before the gas was extinguished, he took in at a glance the disposition of the various instruments which were placed upon the table, and which consisted of two speaking-trumpets, a drum, and a tambourine—the latter, he observed, was placed immediately in front of him. The sitting was commenced, he holding the hand of Mr. M——, the husband of the medium, on the one side, and my own on the other. Before any manifestations occurred, he contrived to pass the tambourine to his left hand and immediately in front of me, and having disconnected his hand from mine, placed it *chevaux-de-frise* like on the exact spot where the tambourine originally lay. His hand was almost immediately struck, but as no sound resulted, Mr. M——, the medium's husband, was doubtless taken aback; and, passing his right hand in the supposed direction of the instrument, it came into sudden contact with Captain

B——'s, and this gentleman retained it for a sufficient time to convince himself, from its feeling and temperature, that it was certainly no spirit hand, but on the contrary, afforded him tangible evidence that the two hands were those of one and the same person. By this time I felt that I had had quite sufficient experience of Spiritualism to last me for a long time to come, and expressed my determination to leave the circle at once. Whereupon John King assured me, in a stentorian voice, that if I ventured to do so, "he would break my head;" however, I braved his threats, and took my departure into another room, and awaited the arrival of the rest of the company. The usual fees having been paid, the mediums very soon after took their departure, apparently rather crestfallen, and by no means satisfied with the indications of scepticism which more than one of the company did not hesitate to give expression to. I must apologise to my readers for giving so lengthened an account of proceedings, which, though truthfully recorded, appear monstrously absurd and childish, and yet are important when associated with so grave and serious a subject as Spiritualism. We afterwards sat in council, compared notes, drew our own inferences, and having discussed the matter from a most liberal point of view, we one and all, with the exception of Mr. C—— (who had previously taken his departure), came to the unanimous conclusion, that from beginning to end, we had been the victims of a most flagrant and palpable hoax, and we are hereby prepared to assert that if Spiritualism is a reality, it certainly does not exist in the form in which the most popular mediums of the present day would represent it.

E. L.
