

MY VISIT TO THE "MYSTERIOUS RAPPINGS," AND WHAT THEY BROUGHT ME.

OF course I had heard of them. Considering they had followed the lady who had it revealed to her she was a "Medium" from America to England, and had actually undertaken their philanthropic mission of knocking for the public benefit in London at the very moderate charge of five guineas the *séance*: considering they evinced a very laudable ambition of seeing their powers advertised in the *Times*, and also entertained so strong a prejudice for the overheated atmosphere of rooms, and for making themselves heard from under tables, as to induce some members of the school of Mr. Dickens to assert the solution of the mystery as consisting in the "Medium" rapping with her toe-joints from beneath the table, when she had first properly prepared them for this operation by the relaxing qualities of heat: considering, I say, that these spirit rappers bore such useful and amiable characters (particularly to their Mediums), and with all their mission-messages from the other world, still held to just a sense of the needs and proprieties of this—it is not to be wondered at that I should have heard of them, still less that I should take the first opportunity of visiting them. Behold me, then, started with a friend, deeply bitten with the mesmeric mania, and avowedly open to the belief of intercourse with spirits by thought-reading, clairvoyance, volition, and other such mystic elements of the mind.

We arrive at the door. A cold, grey, leaden London sky, murky and comfortless. Our blood runs shivering through our veins as we stand at this portal of the "weird mansion," till a very heavy matter-of-fact looking girl relieves our anxiety, and ushers us in through a small dingy floor-clothed hall, up a faded staircase, into the very chamber of mysteries itself. We are astonished to find it so like the common run of furnished lodgings in London. The fire looks comfortable for the day, and there is a mahogany claw table in front of us, covered by a scanty cloth, on which is placed a small printed card of the alphabet, and a common black lead pencil. We are told that the "Medium" will soon put in appearance. Meanwhile my friend is already full to overflowing of these spirit mysteries. He tells me the case of one unbeliever, who, sitting quietly listening to these sounds, was so audacious as to assert that his senses must have something more tangible whereby to credit the supernatural, when suddenly he felt himself seized upon by some invisible power, and shaken mercilessly from head to foot, belief being in this case instilled into him after the fashion of a black draught, "well shaken before taken." Another man was held up to me who, having seated himself near the table when the spirits were asked to move it, was actually almost run over by the velocity with which they obeyed the request. As for my friend himself, he favoured me with a vague theory that these wonderful guesses proceed from the Medium, who is in this case an unconscious thought-reader; but as this would seem to imply some trickery, by which the raps are made to agree with her thought-reading, we dare not (with the example of the unbelieving gentleman before our eyes) embrace, to say the least of it, so very doubtful an opinion.

By this time we are comfortably worked up into a state of expectancy, and look with somewhat of awe on the Medium as she enters—a fair looking young woman, with a colourless complexion, and very quiet manners, impressing you with at least *her* thorough belief in these spirit visits. She sits down and discourses on the weather, and other usually interesting topics of English conversation, throwing in now and then a remark about the spirits, as though the whole thing was to her the most natural and every day occurrence.

We have not been seated long, before we hear them knocking, rap-rap—rap-rap-rap, from under the table close to our feet. We speak, we question them accordingly, as we are desired. They answer, still by raps; they spell out their names, rapping as we come to the right letters, not always correctly, but then the good "Medium" is their interpreter to us, and so they are sure at last to rectify what blunders may have been made. Blessed spirits they must be! for they are all happy, all with us, all watching over us. We get excited at last by this intercourse with the spirit world, and the beauty and poetry of sentiment that dwells amongst them—in the way, at least, that the "Medium" interprets their rapping language. But she does not rest here; she tells us how we may some day be a "Medium" ourselves, and this is the most delightful and wonderful thing of all. She describes how the spirits best like to choose out their Mediums, and advises us, for this purpose, to sit a circle of four or five friends and relations together round a common deal table, for five nights consecutively, for the space of about an hour, our hands resting on the table, our minds calm and unemployed; at the end of that time one or other of us is likely to become a "Medium," to hear the mystic rappings, to see the table spin round obedient to our uttered wishes for the spirits to move it. Decidedly we are every moment becoming more believers; this disclosing of the secrets of the prison-house, this putting the power to be Mediums into our own hands, thereby giving us also the chance of five guinea *séances*, and all the other little perquisites the spirits are so condescending as to lend themselves to, come to us with such force of disinterested generosity, that we at once feel ourselves inclined to embrace the spirit creed, and declare to the whole earth that there is no other intercourse held with the unseen world save by an alphabet, a black lead pencil, and rapping under tables; and that this is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Well, but we have not done yet with the spirits. The remembrance of a friend who died in his passage out to America by the explosion of the steam-packet comes into my head, and I ask "if the spirit I am thinking of is present?" Rap, tap, rap (three raps going to a yes, and two to a no). Will he spell out his name? He will—nay more, he does it correctly. Will he spell out to me how he passed into the spirit world? (The spirits do not recognise death in our acceptation of the word), and the raps sounding at each character informs me it was "by hot water."

This idea of his being parboiled, however true, is certainly unpleasant, still, nothing daunted, I ask if he will ever visit me again? Yes. When? I spell out "soon," but can get no further answer. Shall I ever be a Medium myself? This seems uncertain. I think the spirits

must be getting either tired or mystified, and just now the Medium requests them for my edification to move the table. They do not seem willing at first, but after a little gentle coaxing, such as "Will the spirits be so very obliging—will the spirits, to please me," &c., the table slowly and heavily is seen to turn, though the movement is so slight you have to look first at yourself and then at the things on the table, to see that there really is any motion. As this finishes the *séance* (the spirits after this last exertion being always unwilling to answer further questions), we drop the red gold into the hand of the Medium, and find ourselves standing outside in the dull light of a January London day, somewhat oppressed and mystified, and altogether uncomfortable. How tame is the little French dinner we formerly revelled in; how matter-of-fact and unspiritually comfortable the blazing fire on the hearth, and the waiter's cheerful face flitting in and out. We have no wish to stir from the hotel this evening. We tell ourselves in our new philosophy that the whole life of London is an acted farce, played by puppets, which are but actuated according as the spirit from within moves them, and that we shall never know our real position until we have passed without this fleshy incumbrance into the spirit world.

There is an offence against the potent majesty of "I" in this conclusion. To know oneself no better than a doll moved by strings at the pleasure of the showman from within is certainly lowering to human vanity. Then comes the question, "What power have I over this master chief, my body's spirit?" if it pulls me one way, how can I incline the other? if it possesses itself of my senses, and sways me through them, how am I to be blamed if I obey the impulse? This again suggests the doctrine of responsibility and free will, and altogether, what with the wine, the dinner, the fire, and the theorising, I suspect both mind and body were acted upon, as by a dreamy opiate, or rather the spirit-god was drowsy with his vain endeavours to creep out of me to join the brotherhood, finding still the bonds of flesh too strong to contend against. Be this as it may, I was not at all sorry to seek my bedchamber, where both body and mind were soon wrapped in the elysium of repose—a dreamless slumber, as it seemed to me, such as comes over us when we have exhausted both mind and body, and the whole system seems to sleep together. It might have been about four or five when I awoke. The grey dawn was stealing in, and, like a pale ghost, memory arose with it, bringing one incident after another out of the uncertain mists of sleep to the full light of day and consciousness. I heard the cabs rolling by at intervals, and a distant cock-crowing in some unknown court-yard, saw in the imperfect daylight the shadows sleeping amidst the dark recesses of the chamber; and still lay pleasantly in that delicious quiescence where sleep has left you, and dreams crushed and lost in the day's life come back like old friends, and take their stand around your pillow. Suddenly a noise broke in upon me that might have aroused the dead. At first I thought it was the kitchen boiler that must have exploded; but then it seemed to come more from the next room, which was indeed my private sitting-room. Louder and louder grew the volume of sound. I could think of nothing but that the end of the world had really come, so strange and inexplicable was the confusion of noises. I sat up in bed, but could see nothing; the door was closed between me and the sitting-

room, and, honestly, I confess I did not care to get up and open it. Still the noise continued. I could hear through it the cabs going on their way, but such a hissing, roaring, cracking, splitting, it was never my fate to listen to before. I could liken it to nothing but the sound of paddle-wheels clogged and fighting with the waters, and the roaring of a great caldron bursting and mingling itself—seething, hissing, foaming—with the ocean elements. At last, when the noise had reached its height, it gradually abated, and in about five minutes, more or less, from the time I first heard it, all was again perfect silence, the cab's roll came once more at intervals, and the shadowed chamber seemed the very abode of stillness. Still I had *heard* all these phantom noises. Is it to be wondered at that I should read in them how my friend had redeemed his promise of visiting me "soon?" Verily, my dear readers, "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." After all, I do not know why we are so strenuous in denying the spiritual or supernatural. We feel that we are surrounded by a host of witnesses, and are told, "Are they not all ministering spirits?" To be sure their communion with this world is rather lame as carried out by their "rapping" interviews, but after all there is generally a grain of truth even in the darkest mass of error. The world is, however, peculiarly an infidel, on all points where she can neither touch, taste, nor handle; therefore, though my convictions remain the same, and I may be forgiven for not disputing my own sense of hearing, I yet prudently refrain from offering any opinion on the subject, and listen with a quiet smile to sage remarks "of imagination running away with people—of wine and fire-light producing drowsiness—and a French dinner, indigestion and nightmare."

THE MOTHER'S FAREWELL.

BY J. E. CARPENTER.

TAKE her—she will ne'er deceive thee,
I, that loved her from her birth,
Know that she will never grieve thee,
Never wrong thy household hearth;
Take her to thy tender keeping,
Trust her—I have proved her well—
Chide me not that I am weeping,
'Tis a mother's fond farewell.

Take her—she will prove a blessing,
Purer heart none ever knew:
Sister! 'tis thy last caressing!
Brother! 'tis thy last adieu!
Yet we part with her in sorrow,
Though we know thou lov'st her well,
Blessings on the coming morrow
Breathes a mother's last farewell.