

## A SEANCE WITH THE PROGRESSIVE SPIRITUALISTS.

IN our young days we were wont to exercise the marvellous by fastening a key in a certain Book, referring to a certain Ruth. The Book, suspended on the tips of two fingers, would follow or recede from a pointed digit during the well-known incantation. Whether it was that wisdom came with age, or from constant friction with life's realities, we cannot say, but in after years we could not tolerate the miserable dodges of table moving, hat turning, blood writing, floating bodies, flying banjos, and other exploded manifestations, and we thought we had lived to see them die. But, as Goethe says, "Some men will only get rid of their superstitions when they can shake off their shadows," and there are people around us who, not content with a laudable pursuit of the duties of this life, must pry into the unseen and unknown future.

Last Saturday evening, we were present at the annual meeting of the Progressive Spiritualists, which was held at the Mechanics' Institution. An excellent tea was provided, nice and homely; no magnetism in the spoons, not the slightest tremor in the crockery, nor even spirit in the tea. Had a stranger dropped among us, he would have taken us for a select body of Sunday school teachers, or possibly solid, weighty Quakers. Tea over, the company, which numbered about fifty, adjourned to another room. Here there was a table loaded with "spiritual literature," among the number a penny broadsheet, with the ominous title of *Daybreak*. It was some comfort to see that the whole budget sprang from the land of Barnum and Davenports, though radiating from a Glasgow centre. On other tables there were photographs, stereo pictures, microscopes and objects, which some thoughtful and considerate friend had brought. But alas! these, too, were material. Even the microscopes, with their "visions of the unseen world," showing the delicate fibres, the glorious dust, the beautiful mechanism of nature, otherwise invisible, were discarded. They savoured of the earth earthy.

Having taken our seats, the Secretary, who, by the way, appeared to us too much of the matter-of-fact species to believe in the system for which he is officiating, called upon one of the company to take the chair. The gentleman took the chair with becoming diffidence. He had "made no preparation," neither had he "any idea what would be the programme of the evening," but said he "had every faith in the aid of the spirits." We learned that for many years he had been a sincere believer in spiritualism, and that, as a reward for his faithful devotion, the spirits—not decanter tenants—were constant visitors at his house. So constant and regular had these visits become that, were they to cease, he should miss them, as though one of his own family were taken from his domestic circle. Further, that table moving, rapping, and the like, were the order of day and night at his house. This and much more was said by the gentleman, who, in other respects, appeared to be of the most calm, gentle, and affectionate temperament. He came back to the material world by calling on the secretary to read the report. Contrary to our expectations, there was nothing startling or appalling in it. It was short, pithy, and to the point. It told us that the funds were in a prosperous state, arising mainly from the proceeds of the "Hardinge Lectures." The "spirits" relied for financial support from the substantial world, but, with a true spirit of gratitude, the funds were to be expended in providing lectures, distributing tracts, forming circles, giving public "manifestations," in fact, in preparing a grand assault that would bring all man and womankind within the mystic fold of spiritualism.

The "spirits" moved a vealy, though amiable looking gentleman, who got on his legs to move a resolution. He candidly confessed his ignorance of the "laws of nature," but gloried in a confession of his "firm belief in the aid, presence, and influence of spirits." These spirits are odd subjects, certainly, for one or more of them took possession of a member, and was actually endeavouring to make him second a motion and move an amendment. However, these material and worldly things were surmounted. A gentleman from Yorkshire gave us "a bit of his mind"—a rignarole about body, mind and spirit, far too lofty for our common intellect. Yet, we could not fail to perceive that he was evidently heart and soul a spiritualist; he really seemed to believe what he said. His oration was suddenly interrupted by a faint cry. The room was close and hot, and we, in our simplicity, thought one of the ladies had fainted. On the contrary, however, the lights were lowered,

when up started a young lady. She held one hand firmly over her eyes, marched up to the chairman's side, and faced round to the audience. After many pantomimic gestures, she began to speak. The young lady was a "medium"—a spirit had taken possession of her, and "spoke unto us." Having given certain particulars as to parentage and residence, the spirit concluded with a flourish in favour of spiritualism, and a promise of its "filling the whole earth." The "medium" fell exhausted into a chair, but revived again very shortly, and brought her uplifted hand with a whack on the table. This was evidently a spiritual sign for pencil and paper, for these materials were handed to the "medium," who dashed the name down in a jiffy, and then the "spirit" was understood to retire to its own home. While the "medium" was finding her senses, the chairman calmly explained that the "spirit" we had just heard had been with them before. "This was the second visit of the spirit of a young lady who departed this life last October." In her first visit, she gave an account of herself, which, on reference to the directory, was found to be correct, so far as name, number, and street were concerned; and the name just written by the "medium" was a confirmation of it all. This palaver ended, the "medium" took her place among us, "sitting in her right mind."

Our Yorkshire friend, whom we liked for his earnestness, but pitied for his extreme simplicity, once more resumed his oration, and did his best to lead us into the mysterious labyrinths of spiritualism. Let us try to give our readers a specimen. Suppose Brown steals Smith's *Sphinx*. Smith knoweth not the thief in the flesh, yet, in the spirit-world, the fact of this theft would be so palpable on the face or surface of the spirit of Brown, that when the two spirits meet hereafter, as they assuredly would, Smith's spirit would exclaim, "Good heavens, Brown! it was you who stole my *Sphinx*!" But time, which waits for neither men nor spirits, was passing on, and the company were anxious for "manifestations." A "circle" was formed round an oblong table. The "circle" consisted of three ladies and seven gentlemen, all professed spiritualists, with several "mediums" amongst them. The table was large and heavy, all the more acceptable for moving and turning, but though hands were laid upon it, and silence reigned, not a "manifestation" would it give. Fifteen minutes passed, and not a sign. We began to think the rounds of Kentish fire, roars of laughter, strains of music that were wafted from regions below, evidently from people enjoying their "Trip to Ireland," would interfere with the spiritual programme. Another five minutes, and then a sign came forth, in the shape of a solid, firm voice, shouting, "Holloa! holloa! I know you! Where am I? I feel rum in women's clothes," and many similar exclamations, all proceeding from our friend the young lady who had acted as "medium" previously. She kept her seat at the table, but opened her eyes, and used them, as well as her hands and tongue, most naturally. One of the brethren asked the spirit to give his name, but he declined to do this, volunteering instead the information that he "cum from t'other side Darby." Another friend said to the spirit—"Tell me my name." The spirit looked at him, and exclaimed, "How should I know yore name? I never seed yo before." And then the "medium" lapsed into an apparent insensible state. The chairman, who, by-the-bye, had been most gentle and attentive to the "medium," explained that the spirit that we had heard, that had possession of the "medium," was "the spirit of a countryman who lives the other side Derby." He had paid them many visits, and the reason why the spirit would not divulge his name in public was because his wife was jealous, and associated these doings with a certain "gentleman in black." One of the company present ventured to suggest that there was something "repulsive in the thought of it being possible that the spirit of a new countryman, a clodhopper, could possess the body of a young girl." Poor fellow, he was evidently wavering on the borders of scepticism, and the spirits called him to account. The "medium" was again struck, but by a different spirit, "that of a young lady who died last December," and who—good gracious!—had been among us all the evening, and had heard our remarks. The medium stood up, and, with closed eyes and uplifted hands, exclaimed, "Has not God made all men? Who is he, where is he that dares to call one of His creatures a clod? Who is he that thinks the spirits cannot do as they will?" And again, "If you want to send a telegram, you would not try to send it through that window (pointing to a dense blank wall), but you would seek some suitable medium. So with the spirit world; the spirit of that countryman, whose body was rude and uncouth, was pure, delicate, and holy, and would act in perfect unison with the most perfect body he might feel inclined to enter." We then heard another appeal in behalf of the profession, another signal for writing materials, another name written, words spelled out from the fingers, ending with a song of "Good night," and then the "medium" swooned back to common sense again.

What a relief it would have been, had we been told, as we left, that we had been witnessing a burlesque. But no. These men and women, many of them evidently of superior stamp, all of good education, certainly intended us to believe that their belief was implicit in all that we had seen and heard.

Can such things be,  
And overcome us like a summer cloud,  
Without our special wonder?