

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

Modern Spiritualism dates from March, 1848; it being then that, for the first time, intelligent communications were held with the unknown cause of the mysterious knockings and other sounds, similar to those which had disturbed the Mompesson and Wesley families in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This discovery was made by Miss Kate Fox, a girl of nine years old, and the first recognised example of an extensive class now known as mediums. It is worthy of remark, that this very first "modern spiritual manifestation" was subjected to the test of unlimited examination by all the inhabitants of the village of Hydesville, New York. Though all were utter sceptics, no one could discover any cause for the noises, which continued, though with less violence, when all the children had left the house. Nothing is more common than the remark, that it is absurd and illogical to impute noises, of which we cannot discover the cause, to the agency of spirits. So it undoubtedly is when the noises are merely noises; but is it so illogical when these noises turn out to be signals, and signals which spell out a fact, which fact, though wholly unknown to all present, turns out to be true? Yet, on this very first occasion, twenty-six years ago, the signals declared that a murdered man was buried in the cellar of the house; it indicated the exact spot in the cellar under which the body lay; and upon digging there, at a depth of six or seven feet, considerable portions of a human skeleton were found. Yet more; the name of the murdered man was given, and it was ascertained that such a person had visited that very house and had disappeared five years before, and had never been heard of since. The signals further declared that he, the murdered man, was the signaller; and as all the witnesses had satisfied themselves that the signals were not made by any living person or by any assignable cause, the logical conclusion from the facts was, that it *was* the spirit¹ of the murdered man; although such a conclusion might be to some in the highest degree improbable, and to others in the highest degree absurd.

The Misses Fox now became involuntary mediums, and the family (which had removed to the city of Rochester) were accused of imposture, and offered to submit the children to examination by a committee of townsmen appointed in public meeting. Three committees were successively appointed; the last, composed of violent sceptics who had accused the previous committees of stupidity

(1) It may be as well here to explain that the word "spirit," which is often considered to be so objectionable by scientific men, is used throughout this article (or at all events in the earlier portions of it) merely to avoid circumlocution, in the sense of the "intelligent cause of the phenomena," and not as implying "the spirits of the dead," unless so expressly stated.

or connivance. But all three, after unlimited investigation, were forced to declare that the cause of the phenomena was undiscoverable. The sounds occurred on the wall and floor while the mediums, after being thoroughly searched by ladies, "stood on pillows, barefooted, and with their clothes tied round their ankles." The last and most sceptical committee reported that, "They had heard sounds, and failed utterly to discover their origin. They had proved that neither machinery nor imposture had been used; and their questions, *many of them being mental*, were answered correctly." When we consider that the mediums were two children under twelve years of age, and the examiners utterly sceptical American citizens, thoroughly resolved to detect imposture, and urged on by excited public meetings, it may perhaps be considered that even at this early stage the question of imposture or delusion was pretty well settled in the negative.

In a short time persons who sat with the Misses Fox found themselves to have similar powers in a greater or less degree; and in two or three years the movement had spread over a large part of the United States, developing into a variety of strange forms, encountering the most violent scepticism and the most rancorous hostility, yet always progressing, and making converts even among the most enlightened and best educated classes. In 1851, some of the most intelligent men in New York—judges, senators, doctors, lawyers, merchants, clergymen, and authors—formed themselves into a society for investigation. Judge Edmunds was one of these; and a sketch of the kind and amount of evidence that was required to convince him will be given further on. In 1854 a second spiritual society was formed in New York. It had the names of four judges and two physicians among its vice-presidents, showing that the movement had by this time become respectable, and that men in high social positions were not afraid of identifying themselves with it. A little later Professor Mapes, an eminent agricultural chemist, was led to undertake the investigation of Spiritualism. He formed a circle of twelve friends, most of them men of talent and sceptics, who bound themselves to sit together weekly, with a medium, twenty times. For the first eighteen evenings the phenomena were so trivial and unsatisfactory, that most of the party felt disgusted at the loss of time; but the last two sittings produced phenomena of so startling a character, that the investigation was continued by the same circle *for four years, and all became spiritualists*.

By this time the movement had spread into every part of the Union, and, notwithstanding that its adherents were abused as impostors or dupes, that they were in several cases expelled from colleges and churches, and were confined as lunatics, and that the whole thing was "explained" over and over again, it has continued

to spread up to the present hour. The secret of this appears to have been, that the explanations given never applied to the phenomena continually occurring, and of which there were numerous witnesses. A medium was raised in the air in a crowded room in full daylight. ("Modern American Spiritualism," p. 279.) A scientific sceptic prepared a small portable apparatus by which he could produce an instantaneous illumination; and, taking it to a dark séance at which numerous musical instruments were played, suddenly lighted up the room while a large drum was being violently beaten, in the certain expectation of revealing the impostor to the whole company. But what they all saw was the drumstick itself beating the drum, with no human being near it. It struck a few more blows, then rose into the air and descended gently on to the shoulder of a lady. (Same work, p. 337.) At Toronto, Canada, in a well-lighted room, an accompaniment to a song was played on a closed and locked piano. (Same work, p. 463.) Communications were given in raised letters on the arm of an ignorant servant girl who often could not read them. They sometimes appeared while she was at her household work, and after being read by her master or mistress would disappear. (Same work, p. 196.) Letters closed in any number of envelopes, sealed up or even pasted together over the whole of the written surface, were read and answered by certain mediums in whom this special power was developed. It mattered not what language the letters were written in; and it is upon record that letters in German, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Chinese, French, Welsh, and Mexican, have been correctly answered in the corresponding languages by a medium who knew none of them. (Judge Edmunds's "Letters on Spiritualism," pp. 59—103, Appendix.) Other mediums drew portraits of deceased persons whom they had never known or heard of. Others healed diseases. But those who helped most to spread the belief were, perhaps, the trance speakers, who, in eloquent and powerful language, developed the principles and the uses of Spiritualism, answered objections, spread abroad a knowledge of the phenomena, and thus induced sceptics to inquire into the facts; and inquiry was almost invariably followed by conversion. Having repeatedly listened to three of these speakers who have visited this country, I can bear witness that they fully equal, and not unfrequently surpass, our best orators and preachers; whether in finished eloquence, in close and logical argument, or in the readiness with which appropriate and convincing replies are made to all objectors. They are also remarkable for the perfect courtesy and suavity of their manner, and for the extreme patience and gentleness with which they meet the most violent opposition and the most unjust accusations.

Men of the highest rank and greatest ability became convinced

by these varied phenomena. No amount of education, of legal, medical, or scientific training, was proof against the overwhelming force of the facts, whenever these facts were systematically and perseveringly inquired into. The number of spiritualists in the Union is, according to those who have the best means of judging, from eight to eleven millions. This is the estimate of Judge Edmonds, who has had extensive correspondence on the subject with every part of the United States. The Hon. R. D. Owen, who has also had great opportunities of knowing the facts, considers it to be approximately correct; and it is affirmed by the editors of the "Year Book of Spiritualism" for 1871. These numbers have been held to be absurdly exaggerated by persons having less information, especially by strangers who have made superficial inquiries in America; but it must be remembered that the spiritualists are to a very limited extent an organized body, and that the mass of them make no public profession of their belief, but still remain members of some denominational church—circumstances that would greatly deceive an outsider. Nevertheless, the organization is of considerable extent. There were in America, in 1870, 20 State associations and 105 societies of spiritualists, 207 lecturers, and about the same number of public mediums.

In other parts of the world the movement has progressed more or less rapidly. Several of the more celebrated American mediums have visited this country, and not only made converts in all classes of society, but led to the formation of private circles and the discovery of mediumistic power in hundreds of families. There is scarcely a city or a considerable town in continental Europe at the present moment where spiritualists are not reckoned by hundreds, if not by thousands. There are said, on good authority, to be fifty thousand avowed spiritualists in Paris and ten thousand in Lyons; and the numbers in this country may be roughly estimated by the fact that there are four exclusively spiritual periodicals, one of which has a circulation of five thousand weekly.

DEDUCTIONS FROM THE PRECEDING SKETCH.

Before proceeding to a statement of the evidence which has convinced the more educated and more sceptical converts, let us consider briefly the bearing of the undoubted fact, that (to keep within bounds) many thousands of well-informed men, belonging to all classes of society and all professions, have, in each of the great civilised nations of the world, acknowledged the objective reality of these phenomena; although, almost without exception, they at first viewed them with dislike or contempt, as impostures or delusions. There is nothing parallel to it in the history of human thought; because there never before existed so strong and appa-

rently so well-founded a conviction that phenomena of this kind never have happened and never can happen. It is often said, that the number of adherents to a belief is no proof of its truth. This remark justly applies to most religions whose arguments appeal to the emotions and the intellect but not to the evidence of the senses. It is equally just as applied to a great part of modern science. The almost universal belief in gravitation, and in the undulatory theory of light, does not render them in any degree more probable; because very few indeed of the believers have tested the facts which most convincingly demonstrate those theories, or are able to follow out the reasoning by which they are demonstrated. It is for the most part a blind belief accepted upon authority. But with these spiritual phenomena the case is very different. They are to most men so new, so strange, so incredible, so opposed to their whole habit of thought, so apparently opposed to the pervading scientific spirit of the age, that they cannot and do not accept them on second-hand evidence, as they do almost every other kind of knowledge. The thousands or millions of spiritualists, therefore, represent to a very large extent men who have witnessed, examined, and tested the evidence for themselves, over and over and over again, till that which they had at first been unable to admit *could* be true, they have at last been compelled to acknowledge *is* true. This accounts for the utter failure of all the attempted "exposures" and "explanations" to convince one solitary believer of his error. The exposers and explainers have never got beyond those first difficulties which constitute the *pons asinorum* of Spiritualism, which every believer has to get over, but at which early stage of investigation no converts are ever made. By explaining table-turning, or table-tilting, or raps, you do not influence a man who was never convinced by these, but who, in broad daylight, sees objects move without contact, and behave as if guided by intelligent beings; and who sees this in a variety of forms, in a variety of places, and under such varied and stringent conditions, as to make the fact to him just as real as the movement of iron to the magnet. By explaining automatic writing (which itself convinces no one but the writer, and not always even him), you do not affect the belief of the man who has obtained writing when neither pencil nor paper were touched by any one; or has seen a hand not attached to any human body take up a pencil and write; or, as Mr. Andrew Leighton, of Liverpool, testifies, has seen a pencil rise of itself on a table and write the words—"*And is this world of strife to end in dust at last?*" Thus it is that there are so few recantations or perverts in Spiritualism; so few, that it may be truly said there are none. After much inquiry and reading I can find no example of a man who, having acquired a good personal knowledge of all the chief phases of the

phenomena, has subsequently come to disbelieve in their reality. If the "explanations" and "exposures" were good for anything, or if it were an imposture to expose or a delusion to explain, this could not be the case, because there are numbers of men who have become convinced of the facts, but who have not accepted the spiritual theory. These are, for the most part, in an uncomfortable and unsettled frame of mind, and would gladly welcome an explanation which really explained anything—but they find it not. As an eminent example of this class, I may mention Dr. J. Lockhart Robertson, long one of the editors of the *Journal of Mental Science*—a physician who, having made mental disease his special study, would not be easily taken in by any psychological delusions. The phenomena he witnessed fourteen years ago were of a violent character; a very strong table being, at his own request and in his own house, broken to pieces while he held the medium's hands. He afterwards himself tried to break a remaining leg of the table, but failed to do so after exerting all his strength. Another table was tilted over while all the party sat on it. He subsequently had a sitting with Mr. Home, and witnessed the usual phenomena occurring with that extraordinary medium—such as the accordion playing "most wonderful music without any human agency," "a shadow hand, not that of any one present, which lifts a pencil and writes with it," &c., &c.; and he says that he can "no more doubt the physical manifestations of (so called) Spiritualism than he would any other fact—as, for example, the fall of an apple to the ground of which his senses informed him." His record of these phenomena, with the confirmation by a friend who was present, is published in the "Dialectical Society's Report on Spiritualism," p. 247; and, at a meeting of Spiritualists in 1870, he reasserted the facts, but denied their spiritual origin. To such a man the Quarterly Reviewer's explanations are worthless; yet it may be safely said, that every advanced Spiritualist has seen more remarkable, more varied, and even more inexplicable phenomena than those recorded by Dr. Robertson, and are therefore still further out of reach of the arguments referred to, which are indeed only calculated to convince those who know little or nothing of the matter.

EVIDENCE OF THE FACTS.

The subject of the evidences of the objective phenomena of Spiritualism is such a large one that it will be only possible here to give a few typical examples, calculated to show how wide is their range, and how conclusively they reach every objection that the most sceptical have brought against them. This may perhaps be best done by giving, in the first place, an outline of the career of two or three well-known mediums; and, in the second, a sketch of the experiences