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Researches into the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism
Notes of an Enquiry into the Phenomena
called Spiritual during the years 1870-1873
- William Crookes -

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LIKE A traveler exploring some distant country, the wonders of which have hitherto been known only through reports and rumors of a vague or distorted character, so for four years I have been occupied in pushing an enquiry into a territory of natural knowledge which offers almost virgin soil to a scientific man. As the traveler sees in the natural phenomena he may witness the action of forces governed by natural laws, where others see only the capricious intervention of offended gods, so have I endeavoured to trace the operation of natural laws and forces, where others have seen only the agency of supernatural beings, owning no laws, and obeying no force but their own free will. As the traveler in his wanderings is entirely dependent on the good will and friendliness of the chiefs and the medicine men of the tribes amongst whom he sojourns, so have I not only been aided in my enquiry in a marked degree by some of those who possess the peculiar powers I have sought to examine, but have also formed firm and valued friendships amongst many of the recognized leaders of opinion whose hospitalities I have shared. As the traveler sometimes sends home, when opportunity offers, a brief record of progress, which record, being necessarily isolated from all that has led up to it, is often received with disbelief or ridicule, so have I on two occasions selected and published what seemed to be a few striking and definite *facts*; but having omitted to describe the preliminary stages necessary to lead the public mind up to an appreciation of the phenomena and to show how they fitted into other observed facts, they were also met, not only with incredulity, but with no little abuse. And, lastly, as the traveler, when his exploration is finished and he returns to his old associates, collects together all his scattered notes, tabulates them, and puts them in order ready to be given to the world as a connected narrative, so have I, on reaching this stage of my enquiry, arranged and put together all my disconnected observations, ready to place before the public in the form of a volume.

The phenomena I am prepared to attest are so extraordinary and so directly oppose the most firmly rooted articles of scientific belief - amongst others, the ubiquity and invariable action of the force of gravitation - that, even now, on recalling the details of what I witnessed, there is an antagonism in my mind between *reason*,

which pronounces it to be scientifically impossible, and the consciousness that my senses, both of touch and sight - and these corroborated, as they were, by the senses of all who were present, - are not lying witnesses when they testify against my preconceptions.

But the supposition that there is a sort of mania or delusion which suddenly attacks a whole room full of intelligent persons who are quite sane elsewhere, and that they all concur to the minutest particulars, in the details of the occurrences of which they suppose themselves to be witnesses, seems to my mind more incredible than even the facts they attest.

The subject is far more difficult and extensive than it appears. Four years ago I intended only to devote a leisure month or two to ascertain whether certain marvelous occurrences I had heard about would stand the test of close scrutiny. Having, however, soon arrived at the same conclusion as, I may say, every impartial enquirer, that there was "something in it," I could not, as a student of Nature's laws, refuse to follow the enquiry wheresoever the facts might lead. Thus a few months have grown into a few years, and were my time at my own disposal it would probably extend still longer. But other matters of scientific and practical interest demand my present attention; and, inasmuch as I cannot afford the time requisite to follow the inquiry as it deserves, and as I am fully confident it will be studied by scientific men a few years hence, and as my opportunities are not now as good as they were some time ago, when Mr. D. D. Home was in good health, and Miss Kate Fox (now Mrs. Jencken) was free from domestic and maternal occupations, I feel compelled to suspend further investigation for the present.

To obtain free access to some persons abundantly endowed with the power I am experimenting upon, now involves more favour than a scientific investigator should be expected to make of it. Spiritualism amongst its more devout followers is a religion. The mediums, in many cases young members of the family, are guarded with a seclusion and jealousy which an outsider can penetrate with difficulty. Being earnest and conscientious believers in the truth of certain doctrines which they hold to be substantiated by what appear to them to be miraculous occurrences, they seem to hold the presence of scientific investigation as a profanation of the shrine. As a personal favour I have more than once been allowed to be present at meetings that presented rather the form of a religious ceremony than of a spiritualistic *séance*. But to be admitted by favour once or twice, as a stranger might be allowed to witness the Eleusinian mysteries, or a Gentile to peep within the Holy of Holies, is not the way to ascertain facts and discover laws. To gratify curiosity is one thing; to carry on systematic research is another. I am seeking the truth continually. On a few occasions, indeed, I have been allowed to apply tests and impose conditions; but only once or twice have I been permitted to carry off the priestess from her shrine, and in my own house, surrounded by my own friends, to enjoy opportunities of

testing the phenomena I had witnessed elsewhere under less conclusive conditions⁽¹⁾. My observations on these cases will find their due place in the work I am about to publish.

(1) In this paper I give no instances and use no arguments drawn from these exceptional cases. Without this explanation it might be thought that the immense number of facts I have accumulated were principally obtained on the few occasions here referred to, and the objection would naturally arise of insufficiency of scrutiny from want of time.

Following the plan adopted on previous occasions, - a plan which, however much it offended the prejudices of some critics, I have good reason to know was acceptable to the readers of the *Quarterly Journal of Science* - I intended to embody the results of my labour in the form of one or two articles for this journal. However, on going over my notes, I find such a wealth of facts, such a superabundance of evidence, so overwhelming a mass of testimony, all of which will have to be marshalled in order, that I could fill several numbers of the Quarterly. I must therefore be content on this occasion with an outline only of my labours, leaving proof and full details to another occasion.

My principal object will be to place on record a series of actual occurrences which have taken place in my own house, in the presence of trustworthy witnesses, and under as strict test conditions as I could devise. Every fact which I have observed is, moreover, corroborated by the records of independent observers at other times and places. It will be seen that the facts are of the most astounding character, and seem utterly irreconcilable with all known theories of modern science. Having satisfied myself of their *truth*, it would be moral cowardice to withhold my testimony because my previous publications were ridiculed by critics and others who knew nothing whatever of the subject, and who were too prejudiced to see and judge for themselves whether or not there was truth in the phenomena; I shall state simply what I have seen and proved by repeated experiment and test, and "I have yet to learn that it is irrational to endeavour to discover the causes of unexplained phenomena."

At the commencement, I must correct one or two errors which have taken firm possession of the public mind. One is that *darkness* is essential to the phenomena. This is by no means the case. Except where darkness has been a necessary condition, as with some of the phenomena of luminous appearances, and a few other instances, everything recorded has taken place *in the light*. In the few cases where the phenomena noted have occurred in darkness I have been very particular to mention the fact; moreover, some special reason can be shown for the exclusion of light, or the results have been produced under such perfect test conditions that the suppression of one of these senses has not really weakened the evidence.

Another common error is that the occurrences can be witnessed only at certain times and places - in the rooms of the medium, or at hours previously arranged; and arguing from this erroneous supposition, an analogy has been insisted on between the phenomena called spiritual and the feats of legerdemain by professional "conjurers", and "wizards," exhibited on their own platform and surrounded by all the appliances of their art.

To show how far this is from the truth, I need only say that, with very few exceptions, the many hundreds of facts I am prepared to attest - facts which to imitate by known mechanical or physical means would baffle the skill of Houdin, a Bosco, or an Anderson, backed with all the resources of elaborate machinery and the practice of years - have all taken place in my own house, at times appointed by myself, and under circumstances which absolutely precluded the employment of the very simplest instrumental aids.

A third error is that the medium must select his own circle of friends and associates at a *séance*; that these friends must be thorough believers in the truth of whatever doctrine the medium enunciates; and that *conditions* are imposed on any person present of an investigating turn of mind, which entirely preclude accurate observation and facilitate trickery and deception. In reply to this I can state that (with the exception of the very few cases: to which I have alluded in a previous paragraph where, whatever might have been the motive for exclusiveness, it certainly was not the veiling of deception) I have chosen my own circle of friends, have introduced any hardheaded unbeliever whom I pleased, and have generally imposed my own terms, which have been carefully chosen to prevent the possibility of fraud. Having generally ascertained some of the conditions which facilitate the occurrence of the phenomena, my modes of conducting these inquiries have generally been attended with equal and, indeed, in most cases with more, success than on other occasions, where, through mistaken notions of the importance of certain trifling observances, the conditions imposed might render less easy the detection of fraud.

I have said that darkness is not essential. It is however, well-ascertained fact that when the force is weak a bright light exerts an interfering action on some of the phenomena. The power possessed by Mr. Home is sufficiently strong to withstand this antagonistic influence; consequently, he always objects to darkness at his *séances*. Indeed, except on two occasions, when, for some particular experiments of my own, light was excluded, everything which I have witnessed with him has taken place in the light. I have had many opportunities of testing the action of light of different sources and colours, such as sunlight, diffused daylight, moonlight, gas, lamp, and candle light electric light from a vacuum tube, homogeneous yellow light, etc. The interfering rays appear to be those at the extreme end of the spectrum.

I now proceed to classify some of the phenomena which have come under my notice, proceeding from the simple to the more complex, and briefly giving under each heading an outline of some of the evidence I am prepared to bring forward. My readers will remember that, with the exception of cases specially mentioned, the occurrences have taken place *in my own house, in the light, and with only private friends present* besides the medium. In the contemplated volume I propose to give in full detail the tests and precautions adopted on each occasion, with names of witnesses. I only briefly allude to them in this article.

CLASS I

The Movement of Heavy Bodies with Contact, but without Mechanical Exertion

This is one of the simplest forms of the phenomena observed. It varies in degree from a quivering or vibration of the room and its contents to the actual rising into the air of a heavy body when the hand is placed on it. The retort is obvious that if people are touching a thing when it moves, they push it, or pull it, or lift it; I have proved experimentally that this is not the case in numerous instances, but as a matter of evidence I attach little importance to this class of phenomena by itself, and only mention them as a preliminary to other movements of the same kind, but without contact.

These movements (and indeed I may say the same of every kind of phenomenon) are generally preceded by a peculiar cold air, sometimes amounting to a decided wind. I have had sheets of paper blown about by it, and a thermometer lowered several degrees. On some occasions, which I will subsequently give more in detail, I have not detected any actual movement of the air, but the cold has been so intense that I could only compare it to that felt when the hand has been within a few inches of frozen mercury.

CLASS II

The Phenomena of Percussive and Other Allied Sounds

The popular name of "raps" conveys a very erroneous impression of this class of phenomena. At different times, during my experiments, I have heard delicate ticks, as with the point of a pin; a cascade of sharp sounds as from an induction coil in full work; detonations in the air; sharp metallic taps; a crackling like that heard when a fractional machine is at work; sounds like scratching; the twittering of a bird, etc.

These sounds are noticed with almost every medium, each having a special peculiarity; they are more varied with Mr. Home, but for power and certainty I have met with no one who at all approached Miss Kate Fox. For several months I enjoyed

almost unlimited opportunity of testing the various phenomena occurring in the presence of this lady, and I especially examined the phenomena of these sounds. With mediums, generally it is necessary to sit for a formal *séance* before anything is heard; but in the case of Miss Fox it seems only necessary for her to place her hand on any substance for loud thuds to be heard in it, like a triple pulsation, sometimes loud enough to be heard several rooms off. In this manner I have heard them in a living tree - on a sheet of glass - on a stretched iron wire - on a stretched membrane - a tambourine - on the roof of a cab - and on the floor of a theatre. Moreover, actual contact is not always necessary; I have had these sounds proceeding from the floor, walls, etc., when the medium's hands and feet were held - when she was standing on a chair-when she was suspended in a swing from the ceiling- when she was enclosed in a wire cage - and when she had fallen fainting on a sofa. I have heard them on a glass harmonicon - I have felt them on my own shoulder and under my own hands. I have heard them on a sheet of paper, held between the fingers by a piece of thread passed through one corner. With a full knowledge of the numerous theories which have been started, chiefly in America, to explain these sounds, I have tested them in every way that I could devise, until there has been no escape from the conviction that they were true objective occurrences not produced by trickery or mechanical means.

An important question here forces itself upon the attention. *Are the movements and sounds governed by intelligence?* At a very early stage of the enquiry, it was seen that the power producing the phenomena was not merely a blind force, but was associated with or governed by intelligence: thus the sounds to which I have just alluded will be repeated a definite number of times, they will come loud or faint, and in different places at request and by a pre-arranged code of signals, questions are answered, and messages given with more or less accuracy.

The intelligence governing the phenomena is sometimes manifestly below that of the medium. It is frequently in direct opposition to the wishes of the medium: when a determination has been expressed to do something which might not be considered quite right, I have known urgent messages given to induce a reconsideration. The intelligence is sometimes of such a character as to lead to the belief that it does not emanate from any person present.

Several instances can be given to prove each of these statements, but the subject will be more fully discussed subsequently, when treating of the source of the intelligence.

CLASS III

The Alteration of Weights of Bodies

I have repeated the experiments already described in this Journal, in different forms, and with several mediums. I need not further allude to them here.

CLASS IV

Movements of Heavy Substances when at a distance from the Medium

The instances in which heavy bodies, such as tables, chairs, sofas, etc., have been moved, when the medium has not been touching them, are very numerous. I will briefly mention a few of the most striking. My own chair has been twisted partly round, whilst my feet were off the floor. A chair was seen by all present to move slowly up to the table from a far corner, when all were watching it; on another occasion an arm chair moved to where we were sitting, and then moved slowly back again (a distance of about three feet) at my request. On three successive evenings a small table moved slowly across the room, under conditions which I had specially pre-arranged, so as to answer any objection which might be raised to the evidence. I have had several repetitions of the experiment considered by the Committee of the Dialectical Society to be conclusive, viz., the movement of a heavy table, in full light, the chairs turned with their backs to the table, about a foot off, and each person kneeling on his chair, with hands resting over the backs of the chairs, but not touching the table. On one occasion this took place when I was moving about so as to see how everyone was placed.

CLASS V

The Rising of Tables and Chairs off the Ground, with out Contact with any Person

A remark is generally made when occurrences of this kind are mentioned: Why is it only tables and chairs which do these things? Why is this property peculiar to furniture? I might reply that I only observe and record facts, and do not profess to enter into the Why and Wherefore; but indeed it will be obvious that if a heavy inanimate body in an ordinary dining-room has to rise off the floor, it cannot very well be anything else but a table or a chair. That this propensity is not specially attached to furniture I have abundant evidence, but like other experimental demonstrators, the intelligence or power, whatever it may be, which produces these phenomena can only work with the materials which are available.

On five separate occasions a heavy dining-table rose between a few inches and 1 1/2 feet off the floor, under special circumstances, which rendered trickery impossible. On another occasion a heavy table rose from the floor in full light, while I was holding the medium's hands and feet. On another occasion the table rose from the floor, not only when no person was touching it, but under conditions which I had prearranged so as to assure unquestionable proof of the fact.

CLASS VI

The Levitation of Human Beings

This has occurred in my presence on four occasions in darkness. The test conditions under which they took place were quite satisfactory, so far as the judgment was concerned; but ocular demonstration of such a fact is so necessary to disturb our pre-formed opinions as to "the naturally possible and impossible," that I will here only mention cases in which the deductions of reason were confirmed by the sense of sight.

On one occasion I witnessed a chair, with a lady sitting on it, rise several inches from the ground. On another occasion, to avoid the suspicion of this being in some way performed by herself, the lady knelt on the chair in such a manner that its four feet were visible to us. It then rose about three inches, remained suspended for about ten seconds, and then slowly descended. At another time two children, on separate occasions, rose from the floor with their chairs, in full daylight, under (to me) most satisfactory conditions; for I was kneeling and keeping close watch upon the feet of the chair, and observing that no one might touch them.

The most striking cases of levitation which I have witnessed have been with Mr. Home. On three separate occasions have I seen him raised completely from the floor of the room. Once sitting in an easy chair, once kneeling on his chair, and once standing up. On each occasion I had full opportunity of watching the occurrence as it was taking place.

There are at least a hundred recorded instances of Mr. Home's rising from the ground, in the presence of as many separate persons, and I have heard from the lips of the three witnesses to the most striking occurrence of this kind - the Earl of Dunraven, Lord Lindsay, and Captain C. Wynne - their own most minute accounts of what took place. To reject the recorded evidence on this subject is to reject all human testimony whatever; for no fact in sacred or profane history is supported by a stronger array of proofs.

The accumulated testimony establishing Mr. Home's levitations is overwhelming. It is greatly to be desired that some person, whose evidence would be accepted as conclusive by the scientific world - if indeed there lives a person whose testimony *in favour* of such phenomena would be taken - would seriously and patiently examine the alleged facts. Most of the eyewitnesses to these levitations are now living, and would, doubtless, be willing to give their evidence. But, in a few years, such *direct* evidence will be difficult, if not impossible, to be obtained.

CLASS VII

Movement of Various Small Articles without Contact with any Person

Under this heading I propose to describe some special phenomena which I have witnessed. I can do little more here than allude to some of the more striking facts, all of which, be it remembered, have occurred under circumstances that render trickery impossible. But it is idle to attribute these results to trickery, for I would again remind my readers that what I relate has not been accomplished at the house of a medium, but in my own house, where preparations have been quite impossible. A medium, walking into my dining room, cannot, while seated in one part of the room with a number of persons keenly watching him, by trickery make an accordion play in *my own* hand when I hold it keys downwards, or cause the same accordion to float about the room playing all the time. He cannot introduce machinery which will wave window curtains or pull up Venetian blinds eight feet off, tie a knot in a handkerchief and place it in a far corner of the room, sound notes on a distant piano, cause a card-plate to float about the room, raise a water-bottle and tumbler from the table, make a coral necklace rise on end, cause a fan to move about and fan the company, or set in motion a pendulum when enclosed in a glass case firmly cemented to the wall.

CLASS VIII Luminous Appearances

These, being rather faint, generally require the room to be darkened. I need scarcely remind my readers again that, under these circumstances, I have taken proper precautions to avoid being imposed upon by phosphorised oil or other means. Moreover, many of these lights are such as I have tried to imitate artificially, but cannot.

Under the strictest test conditions, I have seen a solid self-luminous body, the size and nearly the shape of a turkey's egg, float noiselessly about the room, at one time higher than any one present could reach standing on tiptoe, and then gently descend to the floor. It was visible for more than ten minutes, and before it faded away it struck the table three times with a sound like that of a hard solid body. During this time the medium was lying back, apparently insensible, in an easy chair.

I have seen luminous points of light darting about and settling on the heads of different persons; I have had questions answered by the flashing of a bright light a desired number of times in front of my face. I have seen sparks of light rising from the table to the ceiling, and again falling upon the table, striking it with an audible sound. I have had an alphabetic communication given by luminous flashes occurring before me in the air, whilst my hand was moving about amongst them. I have seen a luminous cloud floating upwards to a picture. Under the strictest test conditions, I have more than once had a solid, self-luminous, crystalline body placed in my hand

by a hand which did not belong to any person in the room. *In the light*, I have seen a luminous cloud hover over a heliotrope on a side table, break a sprig off, and carry the sprig to a lady; and on some occasions I have seen a similar luminous cloud visibly condense to the form of a band and carry small objects about. These, however, more properly belong to the next class of phenomena.

CLASS IX

The Appearance of Hands, either Self-Luminous or Visible by Ordinary Light

The forms of bands are frequently *felt* at dark *séances*, or under circumstances where they cannot be seen. More rarely I have seen the hands. I will here give no instances in which the phenomenon has occurred in darkness, but will simply select a few of the numerous instances in which I have seen the bands in the light.

A beautifully formed small hand rose up from an opening in a dining-table and gave me a flower; it appeared and then disappeared three times at intervals, affording me ample opportunity of satisfying myself that it was as real in appearance as my own. This occurred in the light in my own room, whilst I was holding the medium's hands and feet.

On another occasion, a small band and arm, like a baby's, appeared playing about a lady who was sitting next to me. It then passed to me and patted my arm and pulled my coat several times.

At another time, a finger and thumb were seen to pick the petals from a flower in Mr. Home's buttonhole, and lay them in front of several persons who were sitting near him.

A hand has been repeatedly seen by myself and others playing the keys of an accordion, both of the medium's hands being visible at the same time, and sometimes being held by those near him.

The hands and fingers do not always appear to me to be solid and life-like. Sometimes, indeed, they present more the appearance of a nebulous cloud partly condensed into the form of a hand. This is not equally visible to all present. For instance, a flower or other small object is seen to move; one person present will see a luminous cloud hovering over it, another will detect a nebulous looking hand, whilst others will see nothing at all but the moving flower. I have more than once seen, first an object move, then a luminous cloud appear to form about it, and, lastly, the cloud condense into a shape and become a perfectly-formed hand. At this stage the hand is visible to all present. It is not always a mere form, but sometimes appears

perfectly life-like and graceful, the fingers moving, and the flesh apparently as human as that of any in the room. At the wrist, or arm, it becomes hazy, and fades off into a luminous cloud.

To the touch, the hand sometimes appears icy cold and dead, at other times, warm and life-like, grasping my own with the firm pressure of an old friend.

I have retained one of these hands in my own, firmly resolved not to let it escape. There was no struggle or effort made to get loose, but it gradually seemed to resolve itself into vapour, and faded in that manner from my grasp.

CLASS X

Direct Writing

This is the term employed to express writing which is not produced by any person present. I have had words and messages repeatedly written on privately-marked paper, under the most rigid test conditions, and have heard the pencil moving over the paper in the dark. The conditions pre-arranged by myself have been so strict as to be equally convincing to my mind as if I had seen the written characters formed. But as space will not allow me to enter into full particulars, I will merely select two instances in which my eyes as well as ears were witnesses to the operation.

The first instance which I shall give took place, it is true, at a dark *séance*, but the result was not less satisfactory on that account. I was sitting next to the medium, Miss Fox, the only other persons present being my wife and a lady relative, and I was holding the medium's two hands in one of mine, whilst her feet were resting on my feet. Paper was on the table before us, and my disengaged hand was holding a pencil.

A luminous hand came down from the upper part of the room, and after hovering near me for a few seconds, took the pencil from my hand, rapidly wrote on a sheet of paper, threw the pencil down, and then rose up over our heads, gradually fading into darkness.

My second instance may be considered the record of a failure. "A good failure often teaches more than the most successful experiment." It took place in the light, in my own room, with only a few private friends and Mr. Home present. Several circumstances, to which I need not further allude, had shown that the power that evening was strong. I therefore expressed a wish to witness the actual production of a written message such as I had heard described a short time before by a friend. Immediately an alphabetic communication was made as follows: "We will try." A

pencil and some sheets of paper had been lying on the centre of the table; presently the pencil rose up on its point and after advancing by hesitating jerks to the paper, fell down. It then rose, and again fell. A third time it tried, but with no better result. After three unsuccessful attempts, a small wooden lath, which was lying near upon the table, slid towards the pencil, and rose a few inches from the table; the pencil rose again, and propping itself against the lath, the two together made an effort to mark the paper. It fell, and then a joint effort was again made. After a third trial the lath gave it up, and moved back to its place, the pencil lay as it fell across the paper, and an alphabetic message told us - "We have tried to do as you asked, but our power is exhausted."

CLASS XI

Phantom Forms and Faces

These are the rarest of the phenomena I have witnessed. The conditions requisite for their appearance appear to be so delicate, and such trifles interfere with their production, that only on very few occasions have I witnessed them under satisfactory test conditions. I will mention two of these cases.

In the dusk of the evening, during a *séance* with Mr. Home at my house, the curtains of a window about eight feet from Mr. Home were seen to move. A dark, shadowy, semitransparent form, like that of a man, was then seen by all present standing near the window, waving the curtain with his hand. As we looked, the form faded away, and the curtains ceased to move.

The following is a still more striking instance. As in the former case, Mr. Home was the medium. A phantom form came from a corner of the room, took an accordion in its hand, and then glided about the room playing the instrument. The form was visible to all present for many minutes, Mr. Home also being seen at the same time. Coming rather close to a lady who was sitting apart from the rest of the company, she gave a slight cry, upon which it vanished.

CLASS XII

Special Instances Which Seem to Point to the Agency of an Exterior Intelligence

It has already been shown that the phenomena are governed by an intelligence. It becomes a question of importance as to the source of that intelligence. Is it the intelligence of the medium, of any of the other persons in the room, or is it an exterior intelligence? Without wishing at present to speak positively on this point, I may say that whilst I have observed many circumstances which appear to show that the will and intelligence of the medium have much to do with the phenomena(2), I

have observed some circumstances which seem conclusively to point to the agency of an outside intelligence, not belonging to any human being in the room. Space does not allow me to give here all the arguments which can be adduced to prove these points, but I will briefly mention one or two circumstances out of many.

(2) I do not wish my meaning to be misunderstood. What I mean is, not that the medium's will and intelligence are actively employed in any conscious or dishonest way in the production of the phenomena, but that they sometimes appear to act in an unconscious manner.

I have been present when several phenomena were going on at the same time, some being unknown to the medium. I have been with Miss Fox when she has been writing a message automatically to one person present, whilst a message to another person on another subject was being given alphabetically by means of "raps," and the whole time she was conversing freely with a third person on a subject totally different from either. Perhaps a more striking instance is the following:

During a *séance* with Mr. Home, a small lath, which I have before mentioned, moved across the table to me, in the light, and delivered a message to me by tapping my hand; I repeating the alphabet, and the lath tapping me at the right letters. The other end of the lath was resting on the table, some distance from Mr. Home's hands.

The taps were so sharp and clear, and the lath was evidently so well under control of the invisible power which was governing its movements, that I said, "Can the intelligence governing the motion of this lath change the character of the movements, and give me a telegraphic message through the Morse alphabet by taps on my hand?" (I have every reason to believe that the Morse code was quite unknown to any other person present, and it was only imperfectly known to me.) Immediately I said this, the character of the taps changed, and the message was continued in the way I had requested. The letters were given too rapidly for me to do more than catch a word here and there, and consequently I lost the message; but I heard sufficient to convince me that there was a good Morse operator at the other end of the line, wherever that might be.

Another instance. A lady was writing automatically by means of the planchette. I was trying to devise a means of proving that what she wrote was not due to "unconscious cerebration." The planchette, as it always does, insisted that, although it was moved by the hand and arm of the lady, the *intelligence* was that of an invisible being who was playing on her brain as on a musical instrument, and thus moving her muscles. I therefore said to this intelligence, "Can you see the contents of this room?" "Yes," wrote the planchette. "Can you see to read this newspaper?" said I, putting my finger on a copy of the *Times*, which was on a table behind me, but without looking at it. "Yes," was the reply of the planchette. "Well," I said, "if you

can see that, write the word which is now covered by my finger, and I will believe you." The planchette commenced to move. Slowly and with great difficulty the word "however" was written. I turned round and saw the the word "however" was covered by the tip of my finger.

I had purposely avoided looking at the newspaper when I tried this experiment, and it was impossible for the lady, had she tried, to have seen any of the printed words, for she was sitting at one table, and the paper was on another table behind, my body intervening.

CLASS XIII

Miscellaneous Occurrences of a Complex Character

Under this heading I propose to give several occurrences which cannot be otherwise classified owing to their complex character. Out of more than a dozen cases, I will select two. The first occurred in the presence of Miss Kate Fox. To render it intelligible I must enter into some details.

Miss Fox had promised to give me a *séance* at my house one evening in the spring of last year. Whilst waiting for her, a lady relative, with my two eldest sons, aged fourteen and eleven, were sitting in the dining-room where the *séances* were always held, and I was sitting by myself, writing in the library. Hearing a cab drive up and the bell ring, I opened the door to Miss Fox, and took her directly into the dining-room. She said she would not go upstairs, as she could not stay very long, but laid her bonnet and shawl on a chair in the room. I then went to the dining-room door, and telling the two boys to go into the library and proceed with their lessons, I closed the door behind them, locked it, and (according to my usual custom at *séances*) put the key in my pocket.

We sat down, Miss Fox being on my right hand and the other lady on my left. An alphabetic message was soon given to turn the gas out, and we thereupon sat in total darkness, I holding Miss Fox's two hands in one of mine the whole time. Very soon a message was given in the following words: "We are going to bring something to show our power"; and almost immediately afterwards we all heard the tinkling of a bell, not stationary, but moving about in all parts of the room: at one time by the wall, at another in a further comer of the room, now touching me on the head, and now tapping against the floor. After ringing about the room in this manner for fully five minutes, it fell upon the table close to my hands.

During the time this was going on no one moved, and Miss Fox's hands were perfectly quiet. I remarked that it could not be my little hand-bell which was ringing, for I left that in the library. (Shortly before Miss Fox came I had occasion to refer to a

book which was lying on a corner of a book-shelf. The bell was on the book, and I put it on one side to get the book. That little incident had impressed on my mind the fact of the bell being in the library.) The gas was burning brightly in the hall outside the dining-room door so that this could not be opened without letting light into the room, even had there been an accomplice in the house with a duplicate key, which there certainly was not.

I struck a light. There, sure enough, was my own bell lying on the table before me. I went straight into the library. A glance showed that the bell was not where it ought to have been. I said to my eldest boy, "Do you know where my little bell is?" "Yes, papa," he replied, "there it is," pointing to where I had left it. He looked up as he said this, and then continued, "No - it's not there, but it was there a little time ago." "How do you mean? - has anyone come in and taken it?"

"No," said he, "no one has been in; but I am sure it was there, because when you sent us in here out of the dining-room, J. (the youngest boy) began ringing it so that I could not go on with my lessons, and I told him to stop." J. corroborated this, and said that, after ringing it, he put the bell down where he had found it.

The second circumstance which I will relate occurred in the light, one Sunday evening, only Mr. Home and members of my family being present. My wife and I had been spending the day in the country, and had brought home a few flowers we had gathered. On reaching home, we gave them to a servant to put them in water. Mr. Home came soon after, and we at once proceeded to the dining-room. As we were sitting down, a servant brought in the flowers which she had arranged in a vase. I placed it in the centre of the dining-table, which was without a cloth. This was the first time Mr. Home had seen these flowers.

After several phenomena had occurred, the conversation turned upon some circumstances which seemed only explicable on the assumption that matter had actually passed through a solid substance. Thereupon a message was given by means of the alphabet: "It is impossible for matter to pass through matter, but we will show you what we can do." We waited in silence. Presently a luminous appearance was seen hovering over the bouquet of flowers, and then, in full view of all present, a piece of China-grass 15 inches long, which formed the centre ornament of the bouquet, slowly rose from the other flowers, and then descended to the table in front of the vase between it and Mr. Home. It did not stop on reaching the table, but went straight through it, and we all watched it until it had entirely passed through. Immediately on the disappearance of the grass, my wife, who was sitting near Mr. Home, saw a hand come up from under the table between them, holding the piece of grass. It tapped her on the shoulder two or three times with a sound audible to all, then laid the grass on the floor, and disappeared. Only two persons saw the hand,

but all in the room saw the piece of grass moving about as I have described. During the time this was taking place, Mr. Home's hands were seen by all to be quietly resting on the table in front of him. The place where the grass disappeared was 18 inches from his hands. The table was a telescope dining table, opening with a screw; there was no leaf in it, and the junction of the two sides formed a narrow crack down the middle. The grass had passed through this chink, which I measured, and found to be barely $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide. The stem of the piece of grass was far too thick to enable me to force it through this crack without injuring it, yet we had all seen it pass through quietly and smoothly; and on examination, it did not show the slightest signs of pressure or abrasion.

Theories to Account for the Phenomena Observed

First Theory: The phenomena are all the results of tricks, clever mechanical arrangements, or legerdemain; the mediums are imposters, and the rest of the company fools.

It is obvious that this theory can only account for a very small proportion of the facts observed. I am willing to admit that some so-called mediums of whom the public have heard much are arrant imposters who have taken advantage of the public demand for spiritualistic excitement to fill their purses with easily-earned guineas; whilst others who have no pecuniary motive for imposture are tempted to cheat, it would seem, solely by a desire for notoriety. I have met with several cases of imposture, some very ingenious, others so palpable that no person who has witnessed the genuine phenomena could be taken in by them. An enquirer into the subject finding one of these cases at his first initiation is disgusted with what he detects at once to be an imposture; and he not unnaturally gives vent to his feelings, privately or in print, by a sweeping denunciation of the whole genus "medium." Again, with a thoroughly genuine medium, the first phenomena which are observed are generally slight movements of the table, and faint taps under the medium's hands or feet. These, of course, are quite easy to be imitated by the medium, or anyone at the table. If, as sometimes occurs, nothing else takes place, the skeptical observer goes away with the firm impression that his superior acuteness detected cheating on the part of the medium, who was consequently afraid to proceed with any more tricks in *his* presence. He, too, writes to the newspapers exposing the whole imposture, and probably indulges in moral sentiments about the sad spectacle of persons, apparently intelligent, being taken in by imposture which he detected at once.

There is a wide difference between the tricks of a professional conjurer, surrounded by his apparatus, and aided by any number of concealed assistants and confederates, deceiving the senses by clever sleight of hand on his own platform, and the phenomena occurring in the presence of Mr. Home, which take place in the

light, in a private room that almost up to the commencement of the *séance* has been occupied as a living room, and surrounded by private friends of my own, who not only will not countenance the slightest deception, but who are watching narrowly everything that takes place. Moreover, Mr. Home has frequently been searched before and after *séances* and he *always* offers to allow it. During the most remarkable occurrences I have occasionally held both his hands, and placed my feet on his feet. On no single occasion have I proposed a modification of arrangements for the purpose of rendering trickery less possible which he has not at once assented to, and frequently he has himself drawn attention to tests which might be tried.

I speak chiefly of Mr. Home, as he is so much more powerful than most of the mediums I have experimented with. But with all I have taken such precautions as place trickery out of the list of possible explanations.

Be it remembered that an explanation to be of any value must satisfy *all* the conditions of the problem. It is not enough for a person, who has perhaps seen only a few of the inferior phenomena, to say, "I suspect it was all cheating," or "I saw how some of the tricks could be done."

Second Theory: The persons at a *séance* are the victims of a sort of mania or delusion, and imagine phenomena to occur which have no real objective existence.

Third Theory: The whole is the result of conscious or unconscious cerebral action.

Fourth Theory: The result of the spirit of the medium, perhaps in association with the spirits of some or all of the people present.

These two theories are evidently incapable of embracing more than a small portion of the phenomena, and they are improbable explanations for even those. They may be dismissed very briefly.

I now approach the "Spiritual" theories. It must be remembered that the word "spirits" is used in a very vague sense by the generality of people.

Fifth Theory: The actions of evil spirits or devils, personifying who or what they please, in order to undermine Christianity and ruin men's souls.

Sixth Theory: The actions of a separate order of beings, living on this earth, but invisible and immaterial to us. Able, however, occasionally to manifest their presence. Known in almost all countries and ages as demons (not necessarily bad), gnomes, fairies, kobolds, elves, goblins, Puck, etc.

Seventh Theory: The actions of departed human beings - the spiritual theory *par excellence*.

Eighth Theory: (*The Psychic Force Theory*). This is a necessary adjunct to the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th theories, rather than a theory by itself.

According to this theory the "medium," or the circle of people associated together as a whole, is supposed to possess a force, power, influence, virtue, or gift, by means of which intelligent beings are enabled to produce the phenomena observed. What these intelligent beings are is a subject for other theories.

It is obvious that a "medium" possesses a *something* which is not possessed by an ordinary being. Give this *something* a name. Call it 'x' if you like. Mr. Serjeant Cox calls it Psychic Force. There has been so much misunderstanding on this subject that I think it best to give the following explanation in Mr. Serjeant Cox's own words:

"The Theory of *Psychic Force* is in itself merely the recognition of the now almost undisputed fact that under certain conditions, as yet but imperfectly ascertained, and within a limited, but as yet undefined, distance from the bodies of certain persons having a special nerve organization, a Force operates by which, without muscular contact or connection, action at a distance is caused, and visible motions and audible sounds are produced in solid substances. As the presence of such an organization is necessary to the phenomenon, it is reasonably concluded that the Force does, in some manner as yet unknown, proceed from that organization. As the organism is itself moved and directed within its structure by a Force which either is, or is controlled by, the Soul, Spirit, or Mind (call it what we may) which constitutes the individual being we term 'the Man,' it is an equally reasonable conclusion that the Force which causes the motions beyond the limits of the body is the same Force that produces motion within the limits of the body. And, inasmuch as the external force is seen to be often directed by Intelligence, it is an equally reasonable conclusion that the directing Intelligence of the external force is the same Intelligence that directs the Force internally. This is the force to which the name of *Psychic Force* has been given by me as properly designating a force which I thus contend to be traced back to the Soul or Mind of the Man as its source. But I and all who adopt this theory of Psychic Force as being the agent through which the phenomena are produced, do not thereby intend to assert that this Psychic Force may not be sometimes seized and directed by some other Intelligence than the Mind of the Psychic. The most ardent Spiritualists practically admit the existence of Psychic Force under the very inappropriate name of Magnetism (to which it has no affinity whatever), for they assert that the Spirits of the Dead can only do the acts attributed to them by using the Magnetism (that is, the Psychic Force) of the

Medium. The difference between the advocates of Psychic Force and the Spiritualists consists in this - that we contend that there is as yet insufficient proof of any other directing agent than the Intelligence of the Medium, and no proof whatever of the agency of Spirits of the Dead; while the Spiritualists hold it as a faith, not demanding further proof, that Spirits of the Dead are the sole agents in the production of all the phenomena. Thus the controversy resolves itself into a pure question of *fact*, only to be determined by a laborious and long-continued series of experiments and an extensive collection of psychological *facts*, which should be the first duty of the Psychological Society, the formation of which is now in progress."