



the Spirits', Book

According to the TEACHINGS *of*
SPIRITS *of* HIGH DEGREE *and*
transmitted through MEDIUMS

Allan Kardec



THE SPIRITS' BOOK

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SPIRITUALIST PHILOSOPHY

THE SPIRITS' BOOK

CONTAINING

THE PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITIST DOCTRINE

ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL; THE NATURE OF SPIRITS AND THEIR
RELATIONS WITH MEN; THE MORAL LAW; THE PRESENT LIFE, THE FUTURE LIFE,
AND THE DESTINY OF THE HUMAN RACE.

According to the teachings of
Spirits of high degree, transmitted
through various mediums

COLLECTED AND SET IN ORDER

BY **ALLAN KARDEC**

Translated from the Hundred and Twentieth Thousand

BY **ANNA BLACKWELL**

TO
THE DEVOTED WIFE
OF
ALLAN KARDEC

THIS TRANSLATION IS
AFFECTIONALITY INSCRIBED.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

IN presenting to her countrymen a work which has long since obtained a wide acceptance on the Continent, the translator has thought that a brief notice of its author, and of the circumstances under which it was produced, might not be without interest for English readers.

Léon-Dénizarth-Hippolyte Rivail, better known by his *nom de plume* of ALLAN KARDEC, was born at Lyons, on the 4th of October 1804, of an old family of Bourg-en-Bresse, that had been for many generations honourably distinguished in the magistracy and at the bar. His father, like his grandfather, was a barrister of good standing and high character; his mother, remarkably beautiful, accomplished, elegant, and amiable, was the object, on his part, of a profound and worshipping affection, maintained unchanged throughout the whole of his life.

Educated at the Institution of Pestalozzi, at Yverdun (Canton de Vaud), he acquired at an early age the habit of investigation and the freedom of thought of which his later life was destined to furnish so striking an example. Endowed by nature with a passion for teaching, he devoted himself, from the age of fourteen, to aiding the studies of those of his schoolfellows who were less advanced than himself; while such was his fondness for botany, that he often spent an entire day among the mountains, walking twenty or thirty miles, with a wallet on his back, in search of specimens for his herbarium. Born in a Catholic country, but educated in a Protestant one, he began, while yet a mere boy, to meditate on the means of bringing about a unity of belief among the various Christian sects—a project of religious reform at which he laboured in silence for many years, but necessarily without success, the elements of the desired solution not being at that time in his possession.

Having finished his studies at Yverdun, he returned to Lyons in 24, with the intention of devoting himself to the law; but various acts of religious intolerance to which he unexpectedly found himself subjected led him to renounce the idea of fitting himself for the bar, and to take up his abode in Paris, where he occupied himself for some time in translating Telemachus and other standard French books for youth into German. Having at length determined upon his career, he purchased, in 1828, a large and flourishing educational establishment for boys, and devoted himself to the work of teaching, for which, by his tastes and acquirements, he was peculiarly fitted. In 1830 he hired, at his own expense, a large hall in the Rue de Sèvres, and opened therein courses of gratuitous lectures on Chemistry, Physics, Comparative Anatomy, and Astronomy. These lectures, continued by him through a period of ten years, were highly successful, being attended by an auditory of over five hundred persons of every rank of society, many of whom have since attained to eminence in the scientific world.

Always desirous to render instruction attractive as well as profitable, he invented an ingenious method of computation, and constructed a mnemotechnic table

of French history, for assisting students to remember the remarkable events and discoveries of each reign.

Of the numerous educational works published by him may be mentioned, A Plan for the Improvement of Public Instruction, submitted by him in 1828 to the French Legislative Chamber, by which body it was highly extolled, though not acted upon; A Course of Practical and Theoretic Arithmetic, on the Pestalozzian System, for the use of Teachers and Mothers (1829); A Classical Grammar of the French Tongue (1831); A Manual for the use of Candidates for Examination in the Public Schools; with Explanatory Solutions of various Problems of Arithmetic and Geometry (1848); Normal Dictations for the Examinations of the Hotel de Ville and the Sorbonne, with Special Dictations on Orthographic Difficulties (1849) These works, highly esteemed at the time of their publication, are still in use in many French schools; and their author was bringing out new editions of some of them at the time of his death.

He was a member of several learned societies; among others, of the Royal Society of Arras, which, in 1831, awarded to him the Prize of Honour for a remarkable essay on the question, "What is the System of Study most in Harmony with the Needs of the Epoch?" He was for several years Secretary to the Phrenological Society of Paris, and took an active part in the labours of the Society of Magnetism, giving much time to the practical investigation of somnambulism, trance, clairvoyance, and the various other phenomena connected with the mesmeric action. This brief outline of his labours will suffice to show his mental activity, the variety of his knowledge, the eminently practical turn of his mind, and his constant endeavour to be useful to his fellow-men.

When, about 1850, the phenomenon of "table-turning" was exciting the attention of Europe and ushering in the other phenomena since known as "spiritist", he quickly divined the real nature of those phenomena, as evidence of the existence of an order of relationships hitherto suspected rather than known — viz., those which unite the visible and invisible worlds.

Foreseeing the vast importance, to science and to religion, of such an extension of the field of human observation, he entered at once upon a careful investigation of the new phenomena. A friend of his had two daughters who had become what are now called "mediums." They were gay, lively, amiable girls, fond of society, dancing, and amusement, and habitually received, when "sitting" by themselves or with their young companions, "communications" in harmony with their worldly and somewhat frivolous disposition. But, to the surprise of all concerned, it was found that, whenever he was present, the messages transmitted through these young ladies were of a very grave and serious character; and on his inquiring of the invisible intelligences as to the cause of this change, he was told that "spirits of a much higher order than those who habitually communicated through the two young mediums came expressly for him, and would continue to do so, in order to enable him to fulfil an important religious mission."

Much astonished at so unlooked for an announcement, he at once proceeded to test its truthfulness by drawing up a series of progressive questions in relation to the various problems of human life and the universe in which we find ourselves, and submitted them to his unseen interlocutors, receiving their answers to the same through the instrumentality of the two young mediums, who willingly consented to devote a couple of evenings every week to this purpose, and who thus obtained, through table-rapping and planchette-writing, the replies which have become the basis of the spiritist theory, and which they were as little capable of appreciating as of inventing.

When these conversations had been going on for nearly two years, he one day remarked to his wife, in reference to the unfolding of these views, which she had followed with intelligent sympathy: "It is a most curious thing! My conversations with the invisible intelligences have completely revolutionised my ideas and convictions. The instructions thus transmitted constitute an entirely new theory of human life, duty, and destiny, that appears to me to be perfectly rational and coherent, admirably lucid and consoling, and intensely interesting. I have a great mind to publish these conversations in a book; for it seems to me that what interests me so deeply might very likely prove interesting to others." His wife warmly approving the idea, he next submitted it to his unseen interlocutors, who replied in the usual way, that it was they who had suggested it to his mind, that their communications had been made to him, not for himself alone, but for the express purpose of being given to the world as he proposed to do, and that the time had now come for putting this plan into execution. "To the book in which you will embody our instructions," continued the communicating intelligences, "you will give, as being our work rather than yours, the title of *Le Livre des Esprits* (THE SPIRITS' BOOK); and you will publish it, not under your own name, but under the pseudonym of ALLAN KARDEC¹. Keep your own name of Rivail for your own books already published; but take and keep the name we have now given you for the book you are about to publish by our order, and, in general, for all the work that you will have to do in the fulfilment of the mission which, as we have already told you, has been confided to you by Providence, and which will gradually open before you as you proceed in it under our guidance."

The book thus produced and published sold with great rapidity, making converts not in France only, but all over the Continent, and rendering the name of ALLAN KARDEC "a household word" with the readers who knew him only in connection with it; so that he was thenceforth called only by that name, excepting by his old personal friends, with whom both he and his wife always retained their family-name. Soon after its publication, he founded The Parisian Society of Psychologic Studies, of which he was President until his death, and which met every Friday evening at his house, for the purpose of obtaining from spirits, through writing mediums, instructions in elucidation of truth and duty.

He also founded and edited until he died a monthly magazine, entitled La Revue

1. An old Briton name in his mother's family.

Spirite, *Journal of Psychologic Studies*, devoted to the advocacy of the views set forth in *The Spirits' Book*.

Similar associations were speedily formed all over the world. Many of these published periodicals of more or less importance in support of the new doctrine; and all of them transmitted to the Parisian Society the most remarkable of the spirit-communications received by them. An enormous mass of spirit-teaching, unique both in quantity and in the variety of the sources from which it was obtained, thus found its way into the hands of ALLAN KARDEC by whom it was studied, collated, coordinated, with unwearied zeal and devotion, during a period of fifteen years. From the materials thus furnished to him from every quarter of the globe he enlarged and completed *THE SPIRITS' BOOK*, under the direction of the spirits by whom it was originally dictated; the "Revised Edition" of which work, brought out by him in 1857 (vide "Preface to the Revised Edition," p. 19) has become the recognised textbook of the school of Spiritualist Philosophy so intimately associated with his name. From the same materials he subsequently compiled four other works, viz., *The Mediums' Book* (a practical treatise on Medianimity and Evocations), 1861; *The Gospel as Explained by Spirits* (an exposition of morality from the spiritist point of view), 1864; *Heaven and Hell* (a vindication of the justice of the divine government of the human race), 1865; and *Genesis* (showing the concordance of the spiritist theory with the discoveries of modern science and with the general tenor of the Mosaic record as explained by spirits), 1867. He also published two short treatises, entitled *What is Spiritism?* and *Spiritism Reduced to its Simplest Expression*.

It is to be remarked, in connection with the works just enumerated, that ALLAN KARDEC was not a "medium," and was consequently obliged to avail himself of the medianimity of others in obtaining the spirit-communications from which they were evolved. The theory of life and duty, so immediately connected with his name and labours that it is often erroneously supposed to have been the product of his single mind or of the spirits in immediate connection with him, is therefore far less the expression of a personal or individual opinion than are any other of the spiritualistic theories hitherto propounded; for the basis of religious philosophy laid down in his works was not, in any way, the production of his own intelligence, but was as new to him as to any of his readers, having been progressively educed by him from the concurrent statements of a legion of spirits, through many thousands of mediums, unknown to each other, belonging to different countries, and to every variety of social position.

In person, ALLAN KARDEC was somewhat under middle height. Strongly built, with a large, round, massive head, well-marked features, and clear grey eyes, he looked more like a German than a Frenchman. Energetic and persevering, but of a temperament that was calm, cautious, and unimaginative almost to coldness, incredulous by nature and by education, a close, logical reasoner, and eminently practical in thought and deed, he was equally free from mysticism and from enthusiasm. Devoid of ambition, indifferent to luxury and display, the modest

income he had acquired from teaching and from the sale of his educational works sufficed for the simple style of living he had adopted, and allowed him to devote the whole of the profits arising from the sale of his spiritist books and from the *Revue Spirite* to the propagation of the movement initiated by him. His excellent wife relieved him of all domestic and worldly cares, and thus enabled him to consecrate himself entirely to the work to which he believed himself to have been called, and which he prosecuted with unswerving devotion, to the exclusion of all extraneous occupations, interests, and companionships, from the time when he first entered upon it until he died. He made no visits beyond a small circle of intimate friends, and very rarely absented himself from Paris, passing his winters in the heart of the town, in the rooms where he published his *Revue*, and his summers at the Villa Ségur, a little semi-rural retreat which he had built and planted, as the home of his old age and that of his wife, in the suburban region behind the Champ de Mars, now crossed in every direction by broad avenues and being rapidly built over, but which at that time was a sort of waste land that might still pass for “the country.”

Grave, slow of speech, unassuming in manner, yet not without a certain quiet dignity resulting from the earnestness and single-mindedness which were the distinguishing traits of his character, neither courting nor avoiding discussion, but never volunteering any remark upon the subject to which he had devoted his life, he received with affability the innumerable visitors from every part of the world who came to converse with him in regard to the views of which he was the recognised exponent, answering questions and objections, explaining difficulties, and giving information to all serious inquirers, with whom he talked with freedom and animation, his face occasionally lighting up with a genial and pleasant smile, though such was his habitual sobriety of demeanour that he was never known to laugh.

Among the thousands by whom he was thus visited were many of high rank in the social, literary, artistic, and scientific worlds. The Emperor Napoleon III., the fact of whose interest in spiritist-phenomena was no mystery, sent for him several times, and held long conversations with him at the Tuileries upon the doctrines of **THE SPIRITS' BOOK**.

Having suffered for many years from heart-disease, ALLAN KARDEC drew up, in 1869, the plan of a new spiritist organisation, that should carry on the work of propagandism after his death. In order to assure its existence, by giving to it a legal and commercial status, he determined to make it a regularly constituted joint-stock limited liability publishing and book-selling company, to be constituted for a period of ninety-nine years, with power to buy and sell, to issue stock, to receive donations and bequests, etc. To this society, which was to be called “The Joint Stock Company for the Continuation of the Works of ALLAN KARDEC,” he intended to bequeath the copyright of his spiritist writings and of the *Revue Spirite*.

But ALLAN KARDEC was not destined to witness the realisation of the project in which he took so deep an interest, and which has since been carried out with

entire exactitude by his widow.

On the 31st of March 1869, having just finished drawing up the constitution and rules of the society that was to take the place from which he foresaw that he would soon be removed, he was seated in his usual chair at his study-table, in his rooms in the Rue Sainte Anne, in the act of tying up a bundle of papers, when his busy life was suddenly brought to an end by the rupture of the aneurysm from which he had so long suffered. His passage from the earth to the spirit-world, with which he had so closely identified himself, was instantaneous, painless, without a sigh or a tremor; a most peaceful falling asleep and reawaking-fit ending of such a life.

His remains were interred in the cemetery of Montmartre, in presence of a great concourse of friends, many hundreds of whom assemble there every year, on the anniversary of his decease, when a few commemorative words are spoken, and fresh flowers and wreaths, as is usual in Continental graveyards, are laid upon his tomb.

It is impossible to ascertain with any exactness the number of those who have adopted the views set forth by ALLAN KARDEC; estimated by themselves at many millions, they are incontestably very numerous. The periodicals devoted to the advocacy of these views in various countries already number over forty, and new ones are constantly appearing. The death of ALLAN KARDEC has not slackened the acceptance of the views set forth by him, and which are believed by those who hold them to be the basis, but the basis only, of the new development of religious truth predicted by Christ; the beginning of the promised revelation of “many things” that have been “kept hidden since the foundation of the world,” and for the knowledge of which the human race was “not ready” at the time of that prediction.

In executing, with scrupulous fidelity, the task confided to her by ALLAN KARDEC, the translator has followed, in all quotations from the New Testament, the version by Le Maistre de Sacy, the one always used by ALLAN KARDEC.

ANNA BLACKWELL

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

IN the first edition of this work, we announced our intention to publish a Supplement treating of points for which it had been impossible to find room in that edition, or which might be suggested by subsequent investigations; but the new matter proved to be so closely connected with what had been previously published as to render its publication in a separate volume inexpedient. We therefore preferred to await the reprinting of the work, taking advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to fuse the whole of the materials together, to suppress redundancies, and to make a more methodical arrangement of its contents. This new edition may consequently be considered as a new work, although the principles originally laid down have undergone no change, excepting in a very few instances which will be found to constitute complements and explanations rather than modifications.

This conformity of the teachings transmitted, notwithstanding the diversity of the sources from which they have emanated, is a fact of great importance in relation to the establishment of spiritist doctrine. Our correspondence shows us, moreover, that communications, identical (in substance, if not in form) with those embodied in the present work, have been obtained in various quarters, and even, in some instances, previously to the publication of *THE SPIRITS' BOOK*, which has served to systematise and to confirm them. History, on the other hand, proves that most of the ideas herein set forth have been held by the most eminent thinkers of ancient and of modern times, and thus gives to them the additional sanction of its testimony.

INTRODUCTION

I

FOR new ideas new words are needed, in order to secure clearness of language by avoiding the confusion inseparable from the employment of the same term for expressing different meanings. The words spiritual, spiritualist, spiritualism, have a definite acceptance; to give them a new one, in order to apply them to the doctrine set forth by spirits, would be to multiply the causes of amphibology, already so numerous. Strictly speaking, Spiritualism is the opposite of Materialism; every one is a Spiritualist who believes that there is in him something more than matter, but it does not follow that he believes in the existence of spirits, or in their communication with the visible world. Instead, therefore, of the words SPIRITUAL SPIRITUALISM, we employ, to designate this latter belief, the words SPIRITIST, SPIRITISM, which, by their form, indicate their origin and radical meaning, and have thus the advantage of being perfectly intelligible; and we reserve the words spiritualism, spiritualist, for the expression of the meaning attached to them by common acceptance. We say, then, that the fundamental principle of the spiritist theory, or Spiritism, is the relation of the material world with spirits, or the beings of the invisible world; and we designate the adherents of the spiritist theory as spiritists.

In a special sense, "THE SPIRITS' BOOK" contains the doctrine or theory of spiritism; in a general sense, it appertains to the spiritualist school, of which it presents one of the phases. It is for this reason that we have inscribed the words Spiritualist Philosophy on its title-page.

II

There is another word of which it is equally necessary to define the meaning, because it is the keystone of every system of morality, and also because, owing to the lack of a precise definition, it has been made the subject of innumerable controversies; we refer to the word soul. The divergence of opinion concerning the nature of the soul is a result of the variety of meanings attached to this word. A perfect language, in which every idea had its own special term, would save a vast deal of discussion; for, in that case, misunderstanding would be impossible.

Some writers define the soul as being the principle of organic life, having no existence of its own, and ceasing with the life of the body. According to this purely Materialistic belief, the soul is an effect, and not a cause.

Others consider the soul as being the principle of intelligence, the universal agent, of which each being absorbs a portion. According to them, there is, in the entire universe, only one soul, which distributes sparks of itself among all intelligent beings during their life; each spark, after the death of the being it has animated, returning to the common source, and blending again with the general whole, as brooks and

rivers return to the ocean from which they were produced. This opinion differs from the preceding one, inasmuch as, according to the latter hypothesis, there is in us something more than matter, something that remains in existence after our death; but, practically, it is much as though nothing remained of us, since, no longer possessing individuality, we should retain no consciousness of our identity.

According to this hypothesis, the universal soul is God, and each being is a portion of the Divinity. It is a species of Pantheism.

According to others, again, the soul is a moral being, distinct, independent of matter, and preserving its individuality after death. This acceptation of the word soul is certainly the one most generally received; because, under one name or another, the idea of a being that survives the body is found as an instinctive belief, and independently of all teaching, among all nations, whatever their degree of civilisation. This doctrine, according to which the soul is a cause and not an effect, is that of the spiritualists.

Without discussing the value of these opinions, and considering the subject merely under its philological aspect, we say that these three applications of the word soul constitute three distinct ideas, each of which demands a different term. "Soul" has, therefore, a triple meaning, and is employed by each school according to the special meaning it attributes to that word. In order to avoid the confusion naturally resulting from the use of the same word to express three different ideas, it would be necessary to confine the word to one of these three ideas; it would not matter to which, provided the choice were clearly understood. We think it more natural to take it in its most common acceptation; and for this reason we employ the word SOUL to indicate the *immaterial and individual being which resides in us*, and survives the body. Even if this being did not really exist, and were only a product of the imagination, a specific term would still be needed to designate it.

For want of such a term for each of the other ideas now loosely understood by the word soul, we employ the term vital principle to designate the material and organic life which, whatever may be its source, is common to all living creatures, from the plant to man. As life can exist without the thinking faculty, the vital principle is something distinct from independent of it.

The word vitality would not express the same idea. According to some, the vital principle is a property of matter; an effect produced wherever matter is found under certain given conditions; while, in the opinion of the greater number of thinkers, it resides in a special fluid, universally diffused, and of which each being absorbs and assimilates a portion during life, as inert bodies absorb light; the vital principle being identical with the vital fluid, which is generally regarded as being the same as the animalised electric fluid, designated also as the magnetic fluid, the nervous fluid, etc.

However this may be, one fact is certain, for it is proved by observation, viz., that organic beings possess in themselves a force which, so long as it exists, produces the phenomena of life; that physical life is common to all organic beings, and is

independent of intelligence and thought; that intelligence and thought are faculties peculiar to certain organic species; and, lastly, that, among the organic species endowed with intelligence and thought, there is one which is endowed with a special moral sense that gives it an incontestable superiority over the others, viz., human species.

It is evident that, being employed according to various acceptations, the term soul does not exclude either Materialism or Pantheism. Spiritualists themselves understand the term soul according to one or other of the first two definitions, without denying the distinct immaterial being, to which, in that case it would give some other name. This word, therefore, is not the representative of an opinion; it is a Protean term, defined by each after his own fashion, and thus giving rise to interminable disputes.

We might also avoid confusion, even while employing the word soul in the three senses defined above, by adding to it some qualifying term that should specify the point of view from which we consider it, or the mode in which we apply it. It would be, in that case, a generic word, representing at once the principles of material life, of intelligence, and of the moral faculty, each of which would be distinguished by an attribute, as is done, for example, with the word gas, by adding the words hydrogen, oxygen, etc. Thus we might say—and it would, perhaps, be the best plan to adopt—vital soul for the principle of material life, intellectual soul for the principle of intelligence, and spiritual soul for the principle of our individuality after death; in which case the vital soul would be common to all organic beings, plants, animals, and men; the intellectual soul would be the peculiar property of animals and men; and the spiritual soul would belong to men only.

We have thought it all the more important to be explicit in regard to this point, because the spiritist theory is naturally based on the existence in us of a being independent of matter, and that survives the body. As the word soul will frequently recur in the course of this work, it was necessary to define the meaning we attach to it, in order to avoid all misunderstanding.

We now come to the principal object of this preliminary explanation.

III

Spiritist doctrine, like all new theories, has its Supporters and its opponents. We will endeavour to reply to some of the objections of the latter, by examining the worth of the reasons on which they are based, without, however, pretending to be able to convince everybody, but addressing ourselves to those who, without prejudices or preconceived ideas, are sincerely and honestly desirous of arriving at the truth; and will prove to them that those objections are the result of a too hasty conclusion in regard to facts imperfectly observed.

Of the facts referred to, the one first observed was the movement of objects, popularly called “table-turning.” This phenomenon, first observed in America (or rather, renewed in that country, for history proves it to have been produced in the

most remote ages of antiquity), was attended with various strange accompaniments, such as unusual noises, raps produced without any ostensible cause, etc. From America this phenomenon spread rapidly over Europe and the rest of the world. It was met at first with incredulity; but the movements were produced by so many experimenters, that it soon became impossible to doubt its reality.

If the phenomenon in question had been limited to the movement of inert objects, it might have been possible to explain it by some purely physical cause. We are far from knowing all the secret agencies of nature, or all the properties of those which are known to us. Electricity, moreover, is not only multiplying, day by day, the resources it offers to mankind but appears to be about to irradiate science with a new light. It seemed, therefore, by no means impossible that electricity, modified by certain circumstances, or some other unknown agent, might be the cause of these movements. The fact that the presence of several persons increased the intensity of the action appeared to strengthen this supposition; for the union of these might not ineptly be regarded as constituting a battery, of which the power was in proportion to the number of its elements.

That the movement of the tables should be circular was in 110 way surprising, for the circular movements is of frequent occurrence in nature. All the stars move in circles; and it therefore seemed to be possible that in the movement of the tables we had a reflex on a small scale of the movement of the universe; or that some cause, hitherto unknown, might produce, accidentally, and, in regard to small objects, a current analogous to that which impels the worlds of the universe in their orbits.

But the movement in question was not always circular. It was often irregular, disorderly; the object moved was sometimes violently shaken, overthrown, carried about in various directions, and, in contravention of all known laws of statics, lifted from the ground and held up in the air. Still in all this, there was nothing that might not be explained by the force of some invisible physical agent. Do we not see electricity overthrow buildings, uproot trees and hurl to considerable distances the heaviest bodies, attracting or repelling, as the case may be?

The rappings and other unusual noises, supposing them to be due to something else than the dilatation of the wood, or other accidental cause, might very well be produced by an accumulation of the mysterious fluid; for does not electricity produce the loudest sounds?

Up to this point everything might be considered as belonging to the domain of physics and physiology. Without going beyond this circle of ideas, the learned might have found in the phenomenon referred to matter well worthy of serious study. Why was this not done? It is painful to be obliged to make the confession, but the neglect of the scientific world was due to causes that add one more proof to the many already given of the frivolity of the human mind. In the first place, the non-glamour of the object which mainly served as the basis of the earliest experimentations had something to do with this disdain. What an influence, in regard to even the most serious matters, is often exerted by a mere word! Without

reflecting that the movement referred to might be communicated to any object, the idea of tables became associated with it in the general mind, doubtless because a table, being the most convenient object upon which to experiment, and also because people can place themselves round a table more conveniently than round any other piece of furniture, was generally employed in the experiments referred to. But men who pride themselves on their mental superiority are sometimes so puerile as to warrant the suspicion that a good many keen and cultivated minds may have considered it beneath them to take any notice of what was commonly known as “the dance of tables.” If the phenomenon observed by Galvani had been made known by some unlearned person, and dubbed with some absurd nickname, it would probably have been consigned to the lumber-room, along with the divining-rod; for where is the scientist who would not in that case have regarded it as derogatory to occupy himself with the dance of frogs?

A few men of superior intellect, however, being modest enough to admit that nature might not have revealed to them all her secrets, conscientiously endeavoured to see into the matter for themselves; but the phenomena not having always responded to their attempts, and not being always produced at their pleasure, and according to their methods of experimenting, they arrived at an adverse conclusion in regard to them. The tables, however, despite that conclusion, continued to turn; and we may say of them, with Galileo, “Nevertheless, they move!” We may assert, still further, that the facts alluded to have been multiplied to such an extent that they have become naturalised among us, so that opinions are now only divided as to their nature.

And here let us ask whether the fact that these phenomena are not always produced in exactly the same way, and according to the wishes and requirements of each individual observer, can be reasonably regarded as constituting an argument against their reality? Are not the phenomena of electricity and chemistry subordinated to certain conditions, and should we be right in denying their reality because they do not occur when those conditions are not present?

Is it strange, then, that certain conditions should be necessary to the production of the phenomenon of the movement of objects by the human fluid, or that it should not occur when the observer, placing himself at his own individual point of view, insists on producing it at his own pleasure, or in subjecting it to the laws of phenomena already known, without considering that a new order of facts may, and indeed must, result from the action of laws equally new to us? Now, in order to arrive at a knowledge of such laws, it is necessary to study the circumstances under which those facts are produced; and such a study can only be made through long-sustained and attentive observation.

“But,” it is often objected, “there is evident trickery in some of the occurrences referred to.”

To this objection we reply, in the first place, by asking whether the objectors are quite sure that what they have taken for trickery may not be simply an order of

facts which they are not yet able to account for, as was the case with the peasant who mistook the experiments of a learned professor of physics for the tricks of a clever conjuror? But even admitting that there has been trickery in some cases, is that a reason for denying the reality of facts? Must we deny the reality of physics because certain conjurors give themselves the title of physicists?

Moreover, the character of the persons concerned in these manifestations should be taken into account, and the interest they may have in deceiving. Would they do so by way of a joke? A joke may amuse for a moment, but a mystification, if kept up too long, would become as wearisome to the mystifier as to the mystified. Besides, a mystification carried on from one end of the earth to the other, and among the most serious, honourable, and enlightened people, would be at least as extraordinary as the phenomena in question.

IV

If the phenomena we are considering had been limited to the movement of objects, they would have remained, as we have already remarked, within the domain of physical science; but so far was this from being the case, that they speedily proved to be only the forerunners of facts of a character still more extraordinary. For it was soon found that the impulsion communicated to inert objects was not the mere product of a blind mechanical force, but that it revealed the action of an intelligent cause, a discovery that opened up a new field of observation, and promised a solution of many mysterious problems. Are these movements due to an intelligent power? Such was the question first to be answered. If such a power exists, what is it? What is its nature? What its origin? Is it superhuman? Such were the secondary questions which naturally grew out of that first one.

The earliest manifestations of intelligence were made by means of the legs of tables, that moved up and down, striking a given number of times, and replying in this way by “yes” or “no” to the questions asked. Even here, it must be confessed, there was nothing very convincing for the incredulous, as these apparent answers might be an effect of chance. But fuller replies were soon obtained, the object in motion striking a number of blows corresponding to the number of each letter of the alphabet, so that words and sentences began to be produced in reply to the questions propounded. The correctness of these replies, their correlation with the questions asked, excited astonishment. The mysterious being who gave these replies, when questioned as to its nature, declared itself to be a “spirit” or “genius,” gave itself a name, and stated various particulars about itself. This is a circumstance of noteworthy importance, for it proves that no one suggested the idea of spirits as an explanation of the phenomenon, but that the phenomenon gave this explanation of itself. Hypotheses are often framed, in the positive sciences, to serve as a basis of argument; but such was not the case in this instance.

The mode of communication furnished by the alphabet being tedious and inconvenient, the invisible agent (a point worthy of note) suggested another, by advising the fitting of a pencil to a small basket. This basket, placed upon a sheet

of paper, was set in motion by the same occult power that moved the tables; but, instead of obeying a simple and regular movement of rotation, the pencil traced letters that formed words, sentences, and entire discourses, filling many pages, treating of the deepest questions of philosophy, morality, metaphysics, psychology, etc., and as rapidly as though written by the hand.

This suggestion was made simultaneously in America, in France, and in various other countries. It was made in the following terms, in Paris, on the 10th of June 1853, to one of the most fervent partisans of the new phenomena—one who, from the year 1849, had been busily engaged in the evocation of spirits: “Fetch the little basket from the next room; fasten a pencil to it; place it upon a sheet of paper; put your fingers on the edge of the basket.” This having been done, the basket, a few moments afterwards, began to move, and the pencil wrote, quite legibly, this sentence: “I expressly forbid your repeating to any one what I have just told you. The next time I write, I shall do it better.”

The object to which the pencil is attached being merely an instrument, its nature and form are of no importance, convenience being the only point to be considered. The instrument known as the planchette has since been generally adopted.

The basket, or planchette, will only move under the influence of certain persons gifted with a special power or faculty, who are called mediums,—that is to say, go—betweens, or intermediaries between spirits and men. The conditions which give this power depend on causes, physical and moral, that are as yet but imperfectly understood, for mediums are of all ages, of both sexes, and of every degree of intellectual development. The faculty of mediumship, moreover, is developed by exercise.

V

It was next perceived that the basket and the planchette only formed, in reality, an appendix to the hand. The medium, therefore, now held the pencil in his hand, and found that he was made to write under an impulsion independent of his will, and often with an almost feverish rapidity. In this way the communications were not only made more quickly, but also became more easy and more complete. At the present day, this method is the one most frequently employed, the number of persons endowed with the aptitude of involuntary writing being very considerable, and constantly increasing. Experience gradually made known many other varieties of the mediumistic faculty, and it was found that communications could be received through speech, hearing, sight, touch, etc., and even through the direct writing of the spirits themselves,—that is to say, without the help of the medium’s band, or of the pencil.

This fact established, an essential point still remained to be ascertained, viz., the nature of the medium’s action, and the share taken by him, mechanically and morally, in the obtaining of the replies. Two points of the highest importance, and that could not escape the notice of the attentive observer, sufficed to settle

the question. The first of these is the way in which the basket moves under the influence of the medium, through the mere laying of his fingers on its edges, and in such a manner that it would be impossible for him to guide it in any direction whatever. This impossibility becomes still more evident when two or three persons place their fingers at the same time on the same basket, for a truly phenomenal concordance of movements and of thoughts would be required between them, in order to produce, on the part of each, the same reply to the question asked. And this difficulty is increased by the fact that the writing often changes completely with each spirit who communicates, and that, whenever a given spirit communicates, the same writing re-appears. In such cases, the medium would have to train himself to change his handwriting an indefinite number of times, and would also have to remember the particular writing of each spirit.

The second point referred to is the character of the replies given, which are often, and especially when the questions asked are of an abstract or scientific nature, notoriously beyond the scope of the knowledge, and even of the intellectual capacity, of the medium, who, moreover, is frequently unaware of what he is made to write, since the reply, like the question asked, may be couched in a language of which he is ignorant, or the question may even be asked mentally. It often happens, too, that the basket, or the medium, is made to write spontaneously, without any question having been propounded, and upon some subject altogether unexpected.

The replies thus given, and the messages thus transmitted, are sometimes marked by such sagacity, profundity, and appropriateness, and convey thoughts so elevated, so sublime, that they can only emanate from a superior intelligence, imbued with the purest morality; at other times, they are so vapid, frivolous, and even trivial, that they cannot be supposed to emanate from the same source. This diversity of language can only be explained by the diversity of the intelligences who thus manifest themselves. Do these intelligences reside in the human race, or are they beyond the pale of humanity? Such is the next point to be cleared up, and of which the complete explanation will be found in the present work, such as it has been given by the spirits themselves.

The facts referred to, as being of an order beyond our usual circle of observation, do not occur mysteriously, but in broad daylight, so that every one can see them and ascertain their reality; they are not the privilege of a single individual, but are obtained by tens of thousands of persons every day at pleasure. These effects have necessarily a cause; and as they reveal the action of an intelligence and a will, they are evidently beyond the domain of merely physical effects.

Many theories have been broached in relation to this subject; these we shall presently examine, and shall then be able to decide whether they can account for all the facts now occurring. Let us, meanwhile, assume the existence of beings distinct from the human race, since such is the explanation given of themselves by the intelligences thus revealed to us, and let us see what they say to us.

VI

The beings who thus enter into communication with us designate themselves, as we have said, by the name of spirits or genie, and as having belonged, in many cases at least, to men who have lived upon the earth. They say that they constitute the spiritual world, as we, during our earthly life, constitute the corporeal world.

We will now briefly sum up the most important points of the doctrine which they have transmitted to us, in order to reply more easily to the objections of the incredulous.

“God is eternal, immutable, immaterial, unique, all-powerful, sovereignly just and good.

“He has created the universe, which comprehends all beings, animate and inanimate, material and immaterial.

“The material beings constitute the visible or corporeal world, and the immaterial beings constitute the invisible or spiritual world, that is to say, the spirit-world, or world of spirits.

“The spirit-world is the normal, primitive, eternal world, pre-existent to, and surviving, everything else.

“The corporeal world is only secondary; it might cease to exist, or never have existed, without changing the essentiality of the spiritual world.

“Spirits temporarily assume a perishable material envelope, the destruction of which, by death, restores them to liberty.

“Among the different species of corporeal beings, God has chosen the human species for the incarnation of spirits arrived at a certain degree of development; it is this which gives it a moral and intellectual superiority to all the others.

“The soul is an incarnated spirit, whose body is only its envelope.

“There are in man three things: (1) The body, or material being, analogous to the animals, and animated by the same vital principle; (2) The soul, or immaterial being, a spirit incarnated in the body; (3) The link which unites the soul and the body, a principle intermediary between matter and spirit.

“Man has thus two natures.: by his body he participates in the nature of the animals, of which it has the instincts; by his soul, he participates in the nature of spirits.

“The link, or perispirit, which unites the body and the spirit, is a sort of semi-material envelope. Death is the destruction of the material body, which is the grossest of man's two envelopes; but the spirit preserves his other envelope, viz., the perispirit, which constitutes for him an ethereal body, invisible to us in its normal state, but which he can render occasionally visible, and even tangible, as is the case in apparitions.

“A spirit, therefore, is not an abstract, undefined being, only to be conceived of by our thought; it is a real, circumscribed being, which, in certain cases, is appreciable

by the senses of sight, hearing, and touch.

“Spirits belong to different classes, and are not equal to one another either in power, in intelligence, in knowledge, or in morality. Those of the highest order are distinguished from those below them by their superior purity and knowledge, their nearness to God, and their love of goodness; they are “angels” or “pure spirits.” The other classes are more and more distant from this perfection; those of the lower ranks are inclined to most of our passions, hatred, envy, jealousy, pride, etc.; they take pleasure in evil. Among them are some who are neither very good nor very bad, but are teasing and troublesome rather than malicious are often mischievous and unreasonable, and may be classed as giddy and foolish spirits.

“Spirits do not belong perpetually to the same order. All are destined to attain perfection by passing through the different degrees of the spirit-hierarchy. This amelioration is effected by incarnation, which is imposed on some of them as an expiation, and on others as a mission.

Material life is a trial which they have to undergo many times until they have attained to absolute perfection; it is a sort of filter, or alembic, from which they issue more or less purified after each new incarnation.

“On quitting the body, the soul re-enters the world of spirits from which it came, and from which it will enter upon a new material existence after a longer or shorter lapse of time, during which its state is that of an errant or wandering spirit².

“Spirits having to pass through many incarnations, it follows that we have all had many existences, and that we shall have others, more or less perfect, either upon this earth or in other worlds.

“The incarnation of spirits always takes place in the human race; it would be an error to suppose that the soul or spirit could be incarnated in the body of an animal.

“A spirit’s successive corporeal existences are always progressive, and never retrograde; but the rapidity of our progress depends on the efforts we make to arrive at perfection.

“The qualities of the soul are those of the spirit incarnated in us; thus, a good man is the incarnation of a good spirit, and a bad man is that of an unpurified spirit.

“The soul possessed its own individuality before its incarnation; it preserves that individuality after its separation from the body.

“On its re-entrance into the spirit world, the soul again finds there all those whom it has known upon the earth, and all its former existences eventually come back to its memory, with the remembrance of all the good and of all the evil which it has done in them.

“The incarnated spirit is under the influence of matter; the man who surmounts this influence, through the elevation and purification of his soul, raises himself nearer to the superior spirits, among whom he will one day be classed. He who allows

2. There is, between this doctrine of reincarnation and that of metempsychosis, as held by certain sects, a characteristic difference, which is explained in the course of the present work.

himself to be ruled by bad passions, and places all his delight in the satisfaction of his gross animal appetites, brings himself nearer to the impure spirits, by giving preponderance to his animal nature.

“Incarnated spirits inhabit the different globes of the universe.

“Spirits who are not incarnated, who are errant, do not occupy any fixed and circumscribed region; they are everywhere, in space, and around us, seeing us, and mixing with us incessantly; they constitute an invisible population, constantly moving and busy about us, on every side.

“Spirits exert an incessant action upon the moral world, and even upon the physical world; they act both upon matter and upon thought, and constitute one of the powers of nature, the efficient cause of many classes of phenomena hitherto unexplained or misinterpreted, and of which only the spiritist theory can give a rational explanation.

“Spirits are incessantly in relation with men. The good spirits try to lead us into the right road, sustain us under the trials of life, and aid us to bear them with courage and resignation; the bad ones tempt us to evil: it is a pleasure for them to see us fall, and to make us like themselves.

“The communications of spirits with men are either occult or ostensible. Their occult communications are made through the good or bad influence they exert on us without our being aware of it; it is our duty to distinguish, by the exercise of our judgement, between the good and the bad inspirations that are thus brought to bear upon us. Their ostensible communications take place by means of writing, of speech, or of other physical manifestations, and usually through the intermediary of the mediums who serve as their instruments.

“Spirits manifest themselves spontaneously, or in response to evocation. All spirits may be evoked: those who have animated the most obscure of mortals, as well as those of the most illustrious personages, and whatever the epoch at which they lived; those of our relatives, our friends, or our enemies; and we may obtain from them, by written or by verbal communications, counsels, information in regard to their situation beyond the grave, their thoughts in regard to us, and whatever revelations they are permitted to make to us³.

Spirits are attracted by their sympathy with the moral quality of the parties by whom they are evoked. Spirits of superior elevation take pleasure in meetings of a serious character, animated by the love of goodness and the sincere desire of instruction and improvement.

Their presence repels the spirits of inferior degree who find, on the contrary, free access and freedom of action among persons of frivolous disposition, or brought together by mere curiosity, and wherever evil instincts are to be met with. So far from obtaining from spirits, under such circumstances, either good advice or useful information, nothing is to be expected from them but trifling, lies, ill-natured

3. Vide, in connection with the statements of this paragraph, the qualifying explanations and practical counsels of *The Mediums' Book*. (TRANS)

tricks, or humbugging; for they often borrow the most venerated names, in order the better to impose upon those with whom they are in communication.

“It is easy to distinguish between good and bad spirits. The language of spirits of superior elevation is constantly dignified, noble, characterised by the highest morality, free from every trace of earthly passion; their counsels breathe the purest wisdom, and always have our improvement and the good of mankind for their aim. The communications of spirits of lower degree, on the contrary, are full of discrepancies, and their language is often commonplace, and even coarse. If they sometimes say things that are good and true, they more often make false and absurd statements, prompted by ignorance or malice. They play upon the credulity of those who interrogate them, amusing themselves by flattering their vanity, and fooling them with false hopes. In a word, instructive communications worthy of the name are only to be obtained in centres of a serious character, whose members are united, by an intimate communion of thought and desire, in the pursuit of truth and goodness.

“The moral teaching of the higher spirits may be summed up, like that of Christ, in the gospel maxim, ‘Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you;’ that is to say, do good to all, and wrong no one. This principle of action furnishes mankind with a rule of conduct of universal application, from the smallest matters to the greatest.

They teach us that selfishness, pride, sensuality, are passions which bring us back towards the animal nature, by attaching us to matter; that he who, in this lower life, detaches himself from matter through contempt of worldly trifles, and through love of the neighbour, brings himself back towards the spiritual nature; that we should all make ourselves useful, according to the means which God has placed in our hands for our trial; that the strong and the powerful owe aid and protection to the weak; and that he who misuses strength and power to oppress his fellow-creature violates the law of God. They teach us that in the spirit-world nothing can be hidden, and that the hypocrite will there be unmasked, and all his wickedness unveiled; that the presence, unavoidable and perpetual, of those whom we have wronged in the earthly life is one of the punishments that await us in the spirit-world; and that the lower or higher state of spirits gives rise in that other life to sufferings or to enjoyments unknown to us upon the earth.

“But they also teach us that there are no unpardonable sins, none that cannot be effaced by expiation. Man finds the means of accomplishing this in the different existences which permit him to advance progressively, and according to his desire and his efforts, towards the perfection that constitutes his ultimate aim.

Such is the sum of spiritist doctrine, as contained in the teachings given by spirits of high degree. Let us now consider the objections that are urged against it.

VII

Many persons regard the opposition of the learned world as constituting, if not a

proof, at least a very strong presumption of the falsity of Spiritism. We are not of those who affect indifference in regard to the judgment of scientific men; on the contrary, we hold them in great esteem, and should think it an honour to be of their number, but we cannot consider their opinion as being, under all circumstances, necessarily and absolutely conclusive.

When the votaries of science go beyond the bare observation of facts, when they attempt to appraise and to explain those facts, they enter upon the field of conjecture; each advances a system of his own, which he does his utmost to bring into favour, and defends with might and main. Do we not see every day the most divergent systems brought forward and rejected, one after the other; now cried down as absurd errors, and now cried up as incontestable truths? Facts are the sole criterion of reality, the sole argument that admits of no reply: in the absence of facts, the wise man suspends his judgment.

In regard to all matters that have already been fully examined, the verdict of the learned is justly held to be authoritative, because their knowledge of them is fuller and more enlightened than that of ordinary men; but in regard to new facts or principles, to matters imperfectly known, their opinion can only be hypothetical, because they are no more exempt from prejudice than other people. It may even be said that scientific men are more apt to be prejudiced than the rest of the world, because each of them is naturally inclined to look at everything from the special point of view that has been adopted by him; the mathematician admitting no other order of proof than that of an algebraic demonstration, the chemist referring everything to the action of the elements, etc. When a man has made for himself a specialty, he usually devotes his whole mind to it; beyond the scope of this specialty he often reasons falsely, because, owing to the weakness of human reason, he insists on treating every subject in the same way; and therefore, while we should willingly and confidently consult a chemist in regard to a question of analysis, a physicist in regard to electricity, a mechanic in regard to a motive power, we must be allowed, without in any way derogating from the respect due to their special knowledge, to attach no more weight to their unfavourable opinion of Spiritism than we should do to the judgment of an architect on a question relating to the theory of music.

The positive sciences are based on the properties of matter, which may be experimented upon and manipulated at pleasure; but spiritist phenomena are an effect of the action of intelligences who have wills of their own, and who constantly show us that they are not subjected to ours. The observation of facts, therefore, cannot be carried on in the latter case in the same way as in the former one, for they proceed from another source, and require special conditions; and, consequently, to insist upon submitting them to the same methods of investigation is to insist on assuming the existence of analogies that do not exist. Science, properly so called, is therefore incompetent, as such, to decide the question of the truth of Spiritism; it has nothing to do with it; and its verdict in regard to it, whether favourable or otherwise, is of no weight. Spiritist belief is the result of a personal conviction that scientific men may hold as individuals, and independent of their quality as

scientists; but to submit the question to the decision of physical science would be much the same thing as to set a company of physicists and astronomers to decide the question of immortality. Spiritism deals exclusively with the existence of the soul, and its state after death; and it is supremely unreasonable to assume that a man must be a great psychologist simply because he is a great mathematician or a great anatomist. The anatomist, when dissecting a human body, looks for the soul, and, as he does not find it under his scalpel as he finds a nerve or see it evaporate as does a gas, he concludes that it does not exist, because he reasons from an exclusively material point of view; but it by no means follows that he is right, and that the opinion of the rest of the world is wrong. We see, therefore, that the task of deciding as to the truth or falsity of Spiritism does not fall within the scope of physical science. When spiritist beliefs shall have become generalised, when they shall have been accepted by the masses (and, if we may judge by the rapidity with which they are being propagated, that time can hardly be very distant), it will be with those beliefs as with all new ideas that have encountered opposition; and scientific men will end by yielding to the force of evidence. They will be brought, individually, by the force of things, to admit ideas that they now reject; and, until then, it would be premature to turn them from their special studies in order to occupy them with a matter which is foreign alike to their habits of thought and to their spheres of investigation. Meanwhile, those who, without a careful preparatory study of the matter, pronounce a negative verdict in regard to it, and throw ridicule upon all who are not of their way of thinking, forget that such has been done in regard to nearly all the great discoveries that honour the human race. They risk seeing their names added to the list of illustrious proscribers of new ideas, and classed with those of the members of the learned assembly which, in 1752, received Franklin's paper on lightning-rods with peals of laughter, and voted it to be unworthy of mention among the communications addressed to it; or with that other one which caused France to miss the advantage of taking the lead in the application of steam to shipping, by declaring Fulton's plans to be impracticable: and yet these subjects lay within their competence. If those two assemblies, which numbered the most eminent scientists of the world among their members, had only contempt and sarcasm for ideas which they did not understand, but which were destined to revolutionise, a few years later, science, industry, and daily life, how can we hope that a question foreign to their labours should meet with any greater degree of favour at their hands?

The erroneous judgments of learned men in regard to certain discoveries, though regrettable for the honour of their memory, do not invalidate the title to our esteem acquired by them in regard to other matters. But is common-sense only to be found associated with an official diploma, and are there only fools and simpletons outside the walls of scientific institutions?

Let our opponents condescend to glance over the ranks of the partisans of Spiritism, and see whether they contain only persons of inferior understanding, or whether, on the contrary, considering the immense number of men of worth

by whom it has been embraced, it can be regarded as belonging to the category of old wives fables; whether, in fact, the character and scientific knowledge of its adherents do not rather deserve that it should be said: "When such men affirm a matter, there must at least be something in it?"

We repeat that, if the facts we are about to consider had been limited to the mechanical movement of inert bodies, physical science would have been competent to seek out the physical cause of the phenomena; but the manifestations in question being professedly beyond the action of laws or forces yet known to men, they are necessarily beyond the competence of human science. When the facts to be observed are novel, and do not fall within the scope of any known science, the scientist, in order to study them, should throw his science temporarily aside, remembering that a new study cannot be fruitfully prosecuted under the influence of preconceived ideas.

He who believes his reason to be infallible is very near to error. Even those whose ideas are of the falsest profess to base them on reason; and it is in the name of reason that they reject whatever seems to them to be impossible. They who formerly rejected the admirable discoveries that are the glory of the human mind did so in the name of reason; for what men call reason is often only pride disguised, and whoever regards himself as infallible virtually claims to be God's equal. We therefore address ourselves to those who are reasonable enough to suspend their judgment in regard to what they have not yet seen, and who, judging of the future by the past, do not believe that man has reached his apogee, or that nature has turned over for him the last leaf of her book.

VIII

Let us add that the study of such a theory as that of Spiritism, which introduces us at once to an order of ideas so novel and so grand, can only be fruitfully pursued by persons of a serious turn of mind, persevering, free from prejudice, and animated by a firm and sincere determination to arrive at the truth. We could not give this qualification to those who decide, in regard to such a subject, *à priori*, lightly, and without thorough examination; who bring to the work of study neither the method, the regularity, nor the sustained attention necessary to success: still less could we give it to those who, not to lose their reputation for wit and sharpness, seek to turn into ridicule matters of the most serious import, or that are judged to be such by persons whose knowledge, character, and convictions should command respect.

Let those who consider the facts in question as unworthy of their attention abstain from studying them; no one would attempt to interfere with their belief; but let them, on their part, respect the belief of those who are of a contrary opinion.

The characteristics of serious study are the method and the perseverance with which it is carried on. Is it strange that sensible answers are not always obtained from spirits in reply to questions which, however serious in themselves, are propounded at random, and in the midst of a host of others, unconnected, frivolous, or foolish?

Besides, a question is often complex, and the answer to it, in order to be clear, needs to be preceded, or completed, by various considerations. Whoever would acquire any science must make it the object of methodical study, must begin at the beginning, and follow out the sequence and development of the ideas involved in it. If one who is ignorant of the most elementary facts of a science should ask a question in regard to it of the most learned of its professors, could the professor, however excellent his goodwill, give him any satisfactory answer? For any isolated answer, give under such conditions, must necessarily be incomplete, and would, therefore, in many cases, appear unintelligible, or even absurd. It is exactly the same in regard to the relations which we establish with spirits. If we would learn in their school, we must go through a complete course of teaching with them; but, as among ourselves, we must select our teachers, and work on with steadiness and assiduity.

We have said that spirits of superior advancement are only attracted to centres in which there reigns a serious desire for light, and, above all, a perfect communion of thought and feeling in the pursuit of moral excellence. Frivolity and idle curiosity repel them, just as, among men, they repel all reasonable people; and the road is thus left open to the mob of foolish and lying spirits who are always about us, watching for opportunities of mocking us and amusing themselves at our expense. What becomes of any serious question in such a gathering? It will certainly be replied to, but by whom? It is just as though, in the midst of a convivial dinner-party, you should suddenly propound such questions as: "What is the soul? What is death?" or others equally out of harmony with the tone of the company. If we would obtain serious answers, we must ourselves be serious, and must place ourselves in the conditions required for obtaining them; it is only by so doing that we shall obtain any satisfactory and ennobling communications. We must, moreover, be laborious and persevering in our investigations, otherwise the higher spirits will cease to trouble themselves about us, as the professor ceases to occupy himself with the hopelessly idle members of his class.

IX

The movement of inert bodies is a fact already proved by experience; the point now to be ascertained is, whether there is, or is not, a manifestation of intelligence in this movement, and, if there is, what is the source of this intelligence? We are not speaking of the intelligence displayed in the movement of certain objects, nor of verbal communications, nor even of those which are written directly by the medium: these manifestations, of which the spirit-origin is evident for those who have thoroughly investigated the matter, are not, at first sight, sufficiently independent of the will of the medium to bring conviction to an observer new to the subject. We will therefore only speak, in this place, of writing obtained with the aid of an object of any kind provided with a pencil, such as a small basket, a planchette, etc., the fingers of the medium being placed upon the object in such a manner as to defy the most consummate skill to exercise the slightest influence on

the tracing of the letters. But let us suppose that, by some wonderful cleverness, the medium succeeds in deceiving the most keenly observant eye, how can we explain the nature of the communications, when they are altogether beyond the scope of the medium's knowledge and ideas? And it is, moreover, to be remarked, that we are speaking not of monosyllabic replies, but of many pages, dashed off, as frequently happens, with the most astonishing rapidity, sometimes spontaneously, and sometimes upon a given subject; of poems of elevated character, and irreproachable in point of style, produced by the hand of an utterly illiterate medium. And what adds to the strangeness of these facts is, that they are occurring all the world over, and that the number of mediums is constantly increasing. Are these facts real or not? To this query we have but one reply to make: "See and observe; opportunities of doing so will not be lacking; but, above all, observe often, for a long time, and according to the conditions required for so doing."

To the evidence adduced by us, what do our antagonists reply? 'You are,' say they, "the dupes of imposition or the sport of illusion." We have to remark, in the first place, that imposition is not likely to occur where no profit is to be made; charlatans are not apt to ply their trade gratis. If imposition be practised, it must be for the sake of a joke. But by what strange coincidence does there happen to be an understanding between the jokers, from one end of the earth to the other, to act in the same way, to produce the same effects, and to give, upon the same subjects, and in different languages, replies that are identical, if not in words, at least in meaning? How is it that grave, serious, honourable, and educated persons can lend themselves to such manoeuvres and for what purpose? How is it that the requisite patience and skill for carrying on such a piece of deception are found even in young children? For mediums, if they are not passive instruments, must possess a degree of skill, and an amount and variety of knowledge, incompatible with the age and social position of many of them.

"But," urge our opponents, "if there be no trickery, both parties may be the dupes of an illusion." It is only reasonable that the quality of witnesses should be regarded as an element in deciding the value of their evidence; and it may fairly be asked whether the spiritist theory, whose adherents are already to be counted by millions, recruits these only among the ignorant? The phenomena on which it is based are so extraordinary that we admit the reasonableness of doubt in regard to them; but what is not admissible is the pretension of certain sceptics to a monopoly of common sense, and the unceremonious way in which, regardless of the moral worth of their adversaries, they tax all who are not of their opinion with infatuation or stupidity. For the affirmation of enlightened persons who have, for a long time, seen, studied, and meditated any matter, is always, if not a proof, at least a presumption in its favour, since it has been able to fix the attention of men of mark, having no interest in propagating an error, nor time to waste upon worthless trifles.

X

Among the objections brought forward by our opponents are some which are

more specious, at least in appearance, because they are made by thoughtful minds.

One of these objections is prompted by the fact that the language of spirits does not always seem worthy of the elevation we attribute to beings beyond the pale of humanity. But, if the objector will take the trouble to look at the doctrinal summary we have given above, he will see that the spirits themselves inform us that they are not equals, either in knowledge or in moral qualities, that we are not to accept everything said by spirits as literal truth, and that we must judge for ourselves of the value of their statements. Assuredly, those who infer from this fact that we have to deal only with maleficent beings, whose sole occupation is to deceive us, have no acquaintance with the communications obtained in the centres habitually frequented by spirits of superior advancement, or they could not entertain such an opinion. It is regrettable that they should have chanced to see only the worst side of the spirit-world, for we will not suppose that their sympathies attract evil, gross, or lying spirits, rather than good ones. We will merely suggest that, in some cases, the inquirers may not be so thoroughly principled in goodness as to repel evil, and that, taking advantage of their curiosity in regard to them, imperfect spirits make use of the opening thus afforded to come about them, while those of a higher order withdraw from them.

To judge the question of spirits by these facts would be as little reasonable as to judge of the character of a people by the sayings and doings of a party of wild or disreputable fellows, with whom the educated and respectable classes of the population have nothing to do. Such persons are in the position of the traveller who, entering some great capital by one of its worst suburbs, should judge of all its inhabitants by the habits and language of this low quarter. In the world of spirits, as in our own, there are higher and lower classes of society. Let inquirers make a study of what goes on among spirits of high degree, and they will be convinced that the celestial city is not peopled solely by the ignorant and vicious. But," it will be asked, "do spirits of high degree come among us?" To which question we reply, "Do not remain in the suburbs; see, observe, and judge; the facts are within reach of all but those alluded to by Jesus, as having eyes, but seeing not, and ears, but hearing not..."

A variety of the same objection consists in attributing all spirit communications, and all the physical manifestations by which they are accompanied, to the intervention of some diabolical power—some new Proteus that assumes every form in order the more effectually to deceive us. Without pausing to analyse a supposition that we regard as not susceptible of serious examination, and that is, moreover, refuted by what we have already said, we have only to remark that, if such were the case, it would have to be admitted either that the devil is sometimes very wise, very reasonable, and, above all, very moral, or else that there are good devils as well as bad ones.

But, in fact, is it possible to believe that God would permit only the Spirit of Evil to manifest himself, and this in order to ruin us, without giving us also the counsels of good spirits as a counter-poise? To suppose that He cannot do this is to limit

His power; to suppose that He can do it, but abstains from doing it, is incompatible with the belief in His goodness. Both suppositions are equally blasphemous. It must be observed that, to admit the communication of evil spirits is to recognise the existence of spirit manifestations; but, if they exist, it can only be with the permission of God, and how then can we, without impiety, believe that He would permit them to occur only for a bad purpose, to the exclusion of a good one? Such a supposition is contrary alike to the simplest dictates of religion and of common sense.

XI

One strange feature of the matter, urge other objectors, is the fact that only the spirits of well-known personages manifest themselves, and it is asked why these should be the only ones who do so? This query is suggested by an error due, like many others, to superficial observation. Among the spirits who present themselves spontaneously, the greater number are unknown to us, and, therefore, call themselves by names that we know, and that serve to characterise them. With regard to those whom we evoke, unless in the case of relatives or friends, we naturally address ourselves to spirits whom we know of, rather than to those who are unknown to us; and as the names of illustrious persons are those which strike us most forcibly, they are, for that reason, those which are most remarked.

It is also considered as strange that the spirits of eminent men should respond familiarly to our call, and should sometimes interest themselves in things that appear trifling in comparison with those which they accomplished during their life. But there is in this nothing surprising for those who know that the power and consideration which a man may have possessed in this lower life give him no supremacy in the spirit-world. Spirits confirm the gospel statement that “the last shall be first, and the first shall be last,” as regards the rank of each of us when we return among them. Thus he who has been first in the earthly life may be one of the last in that other world; he before whom all bowed their heads during the present life may then find himself beneath the humblest artisan, for, on quitting the earthly life, he leaves all his grandeur behind him; and the most powerful monarch may be lower than the lowest of his subjects.

XII

A fact ascertained by observation, and confirmed by the spirits themselves, is the borrowing of well-known and venerated names by spirits of inferior degree. How, then, can we be sure that those who say they were, for example, Socrates Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Fénélon Napoleon, Washington, etc., were really the men they claim to have been? This doubt exists among many fervent adherents of spiritist doctrine. They admit the reality of the intervention and manifestation of spirits, but they ask themselves what certainty we can have of their identity? This certainty it is, in fact, very difficult to obtain; but though it cannot be settled as authentically as by the attestation of a civil register, it may, at least, be established

presumptively, according to certain indications.

When the spirit who manifests himself is that of some one personally known to us, of a relative or friend, for instance, and especially if of one who has been dead but a short time, it is generally found that his language is perfectly in keeping with what we know of his character; thus furnishing a strong presumption of his identity, which is placed almost beyond reach of doubt when the spirit speaks of private affairs, and refers to family matters known only to the party to whom he addresses himself. A son could hardly be mistaken as to the language of his father and mother, nor parents as to that of their child, Most striking incidents often occur in evocations of this intimate kind—things of a nature to convince the most incredulous. The most Sceptical are often astounded by the unexpected revelations thus made to them.

Another very characteristic circumstance often helps to establish a spirit's identity. We have already said that the handwriting of the medium generally changes with the spirit evoked, the same writing being reproduced exactly every time the same spirit presents himself; and it often happens that, in the case of persons recently deceased this writing bears a striking resemblance to that of the person during life, the signatures, especially, being sometimes perfectly exact. We are, nevertheless, very far from adducing this fact as a rule, or as being of constant recurrence; we merely mention it as a point worthy of notice.

It is only when spirits have arrived at a certain degree of purification that they are entirely freed from all corporeal influences; and as long as they are not completely dematerialised (to employ their own expression), they retain most of the ideas, tendencies, and even the hobbies, they had while on earth, all of which furnish additional means of identification; but these are especially to be found in the vast number of small details that are only perceived through sustained and attentive observation. Spirits who have been authors are seen to discuss their own works or views, approving or blaming them; others allude to various circumstances connected with their life or death; and from all these indications we obtain what may, at least, be regarded as moral presumptions in favour of their identity, the only ones that can be looked for under the circumstances of the case.

If, then, the identity of the spirit evoked may be established, to a certain extent and in certain cases, there is no reason why that identity may not exist in others; and although we may not *THE SPIRITS' BOOK* have the same means of identification in regard to persons whose death is of more distant date, we always have that of language and character, for the spirit of a good and enlightened man will assuredly not express himself like that of a depraved or ignorant one. As for inferior spirits who assume honoured names, they soon betray themselves by the character of their language and statements. If some one, for instance, calling himself Fénélon gave utterance to remarks at variance with common sense or morality, his imposture would at once become evident; but if the thoughts expressed by him were always noble, consistent, and of an elevation worthy of Fénélon there would

be no reason to doubt his identity, for otherwise we should have to admit that a spirit whose communications inculcate only goodness would knowingly be guilty of falsehood. Experience shows us that spirits of the same degree, of the same character, and animated by the same sentiments, are united in groups and families; but the number of spirits is incalculable, and we are so far from knowing them all, that the names of the immense majority of them are necessarily unknown to us. A spirit of the same category as Fénélon may therefore come to us in his name, and may even be sent by him as his representative; in which case he would naturally announce himself as Fénélon, because he is his equivalent, and able to supply his place, and because we need a name in order to fix our ideas in regard to him. And, after all, what does it matter whether a spirit be really Fénélon or not, if all that he says is excellent, and such as Fénélon himself would be likely to say? For, in that case, he must be a spirit of superior advancement; and the name under which he presents himself is of no importance, being often only a means of fixing our ideas. This sort of substitution would not be acceptable in evocations of a more intimate character; but, in these, as just pointed out, we have other means of ascertaining the identity of the communicating spirit.

It is certain, however, that the assumption of false names by spirits may give rise to numerous mistakes may be a source of error and deception, and is, in fact, one of the most serious difficulties of practical spiritism; but we have never said that this field of investigation, any more than any other, is exempt from obstacles, nor that it can be fruitfully explored without serious and persevering effort. We cannot too often reiterate the warning that spiritism is a new field of study, and one that demands long and assiduous exploration. Being unable to produce at pleasure the facts on which Spiritism is based, we are obliged to wait for them to present themselves; and it often happens that, instead of occurring when we are looking for them, they occur when least expected. For the attentive and patient observer, materials for study are abundant, because he discovers in the facts thus presented thousands of characteristic peculiarities which are for him so many sources of light. It is the same in regard to every other branch of science; while the superficial observer sees in a flower only an elegant form, the botanist discovers in it a mine of interest for his thought.

XIII

The foregoing remarks lead us to say a few words in relation to another difficulty—viz., the divergence which exists in the statements made by spirits.

Spirits differing very widely from one another as regards their knowledge and morality, it is evident that the same question may receive from them very different answers, according to the rank at which they have arrived; exactly as would be the case if it were propounded alternately to a man of science, an ignoramus, and a mischievous wag. The important point, as previously remarked, is to know who is the spirit to whom we are addressing our question.

But, it will be argued, how is it that spirits who are admittedly of superior

degree are not all of the same opinion? We reply, in the first place, that there are, independently of the cause of diversity just pointed out, other causes that may exercise an influence on the nature of the replies, irrespectively of the quality of the spirits themselves. This is a point of the highest importance, and one that will be explained by our ulterior study of the subject, provided that this study be prosecuted with the aid of the sustained attention, the prolonged observation, the method and perseverance that are required in the pursuit of every other branch of human inquiry. Years of study are needed to make even a second-rate physician; three-quarters of a lifetime to make a man of learning: and people fancy that a few hours will suffice to acquire the science of the infinite! Let there be no mistake in regard to this matter. The subject of Spiritism is immense. It involves all other subjects, physical, metaphysical, and social; it is a new world that opens before us. Is it strange that time, and a good deal of time, should be required for becoming acquainted with it?

The contradictions alluded to, moreover, are not always as absolute as they may seem to be at first sight. Do we not see every day that men who are pursuing the same science give various definitions of the same thing; sometimes because they make use of different terms, sometimes because they consider it from different points of view, although the fundamental idea is the same in each case? Let any one count up, if he can, the different definitions that have been given of grammar! It must also be remembered that the form of the answer often depends on the form under which the question has been put; and that it would be childish to regard as a contradiction what is often only a difference of words. The higher spirits pay no heed to forms of expression; for them, the thought itself is everything.

Let us take, for example, the definition of soul. That word, having no fixed meaning, spirits like ourselves may differ in the meaning they give to it. One of them may say that it is "the principle of life;" another may call it "the animic spark;" a third may say that it is internal; a fourth, that it is external,, etc.; and each may be right from his own special point of view.

Some of them might even be supposed to hold materialistic views; and yet such is not the case. It is the same with regard to the word God. According to some, God is "the principle of all things;" according to others, "the creator of the universe," "the sovereign intelligence," "the Infinite," "the great Spirit," etc.; and nevertheless it is always "God." And so in regard to the classification of spirits. They form an uninterrupted succession from the lowest to the highest; all attempts at classification are therefore arbitrary, and they may be regarded as forming three, five, ten, or twenty classes, without involving error or contradiction. All human sciences offer the same variations of detail; every investigator has his own system; and systems change, but science remains the same. Whether we study botany according to the system of Linnaeus or of Jussieu, or of Tournefort, what we learn is none the less botany. Let us then cease to attribute more importance than they deserve to matters that are merely conventional, and let us devote ourselves only to what is really important and we shall often discover, on reflexion, a similitude of

meaning in statements that appeared to us, at first sight, to be contradictory.

XIV

We should pass over the objection of certain sceptics in relation to the faulty spelling of some spirits, were it not that this objection affords us an opportunity of calling attention to a point of great importance. Spirit-orthography, is must be confessed, is not always irreproachable; but he must be very short of arguments who would make this fact the object of serious criticism on the plea that, "since spirits know everything, they ought to be well up in spelling." We might retort by pointing to the numerous sins against orthography committed by more than one of the lights of science in our own world, and which in no wise invalidate their scientific authority; but a much more important point is involved in the fact alluded to.

For spirits, and especially for those of high degree, the idea is everything, the form is nothing.

Freed from matter, their language among themselves is as rapid as thought, for it is their thought itself that is communicated without intermediary; and it must therefore be very inconvenient for them to be obliged, in communicating with us, to make use of human speech, with its long and awkward forms, its insufficiencies and imperfections, as the vehicle of their ideas. They often allude to this inconvenience; and it is curious to see the means they employ to obviate the difficulty. It would be the same with us if we had to express ourselves in a language of which the words and locutions were longer, and the stock of expressions more scanty, than those we habitually employ. The same difficulty is felt by the man of genius, impatient of the slowness of his pen, which always lags behind his thought. It is therefore easy to understand that spirits attach but little importance to questions of spelling, especially in the transmission of serious and weighty teachings. Should we not rather wonder that they are able to express themselves equally in all tongues, and that they understand them all? It must not, however, be inferred from these remarks that they are unable to express themselves with conventional correctness; they do this when they judge it to be necessary; as, for instance, when they dictate verses, some of which, written, moreover, by illiterate mediums, are of a correctness and elegance that defy the severest criticism.

XV

There are persons who see danger in everything that is new to them, and who have therefore not failed to draw an unfavourable conclusion from the fact that some of those who have taken up the subject of Spiritism have lost their reason. But how can sensible people urge that fact as an objection? Does not the same thing often happen to weak heads when they give themselves up to any intellectual pursuit? Who shall say how many have gone mad over mathematics, medicine, music, philosophy, etc. But what does that prove? And are those studies to be proscribed on that account? Arms and legs, the instruments of physical activity, are often



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