

that future observers will direct their attention to this question, to the end that a series of facts may be collated which shall assist in determining the direction and extent, as well as the exact limitations, of subjective mental power. When that is accomplished, the first great step will have been taken in bringing psychology within the domain of the exact sciences.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE PHYSICAL PHENOMENA OF SPIRITISM.

The Intelligence manifested. — It is a Human Intelligence. — Inherent Probabilities. — Conditions requisite. — The Best Conditions. — A Living Organism necessary — The Laws of Telepathy and Suggestion prevail. — Slate-Writing. — A Wonderful Slate-Writing Séance. — Telepathic and Psycho-Physical Power displayed in Perfection. — Demonstration of its Mundane Origin. — An Unexpected Phenomenon. — Summary of Results. — Syllogism. — General Conclusions. — Spiritistic Phenomena do not constitute Valid Evidence of a Life beyond the Grave. — An Argument for Immortality.

THE physical phenomena of spiritism are in more senses than one the most interesting of all the manifestations of subjective power. They require, however, but a brief treatment at our hands, for the reason that the primary object of this book is to deal with the mental powers and attributes of mankind in their relations to psychic phenomena. No attempt, therefore, will be made to prove that the alleged physical phenomena of so-called spiritism are veridical or otherwise. It would be a work of supererogation to attempt to add force or volume to the already overwhelming array of testimony going to show the wonderful physical power often displayed in connection with psychic phenomena. For our purposes it is not a matter of vital importance whether things can be made to levitate without physical contact or not. It will be assumed, therefore, that all statements made by respectable witnesses in regard to the occurrence of physical phenomena are true. We do

this partly because we believe them to be true, having seen enough to *know* the reality of the leading physical phenomena, and partly because our purpose is to deal with the mental aspects of psychic phenomena, and the laws which pertain to their development. We shall leave to those who are sceptical, or who think they are sceptical rather than ignorant, the task of investigating, after the ponderous and elaborate methods of the scientists, phenomena which can be verified beyond the possible shadow of a doubt, by the exercise of a little common-sense. And we will here undertake to guarantee that if any scientific gentleman will, in good faith, follow the suggestions offered in former chapters of this book regarding the proper method of dealing with so-called mediums, and will divest himself, for the time being, of all fear of professional mediums and all prejudice against them, he will not only see enough to convince him of the truth of all that is alleged regarding physical phenomena, but he will also see that the elaborate test conditions often insisted upon by scientific investigators are superfluous, not to say absurd. These remarks are, of course, applicable to the better class of mediums, that is, those who are recognized by the great body of spiritists as possessing a high order of mediumistic power. Their moral characteristics need not count as a factor, for it is to the interest of a medium to produce genuine phenomena when he can, and he will always do so if the conditions are favorable. Mediums are always anxious to exhibit their phenomena, when genuine, under test conditions, and will do so in a way that shall satisfy the most sceptical. A further qualification of the foregoing remarks should be made in regard to "materializing" mediums. The writer has never seen anything genuine in the line of materializations. There is here more room for fraud, and more fraud is perpetrated by materializing mediums than by any other, because materialization is a rare and difficult phase of mediumship. Yet there is every reason to believe, and we shall undertake to show further on, that the production of genuine apparitions, resembling

the persons they profess to represent, is a possibility within the range of psychic power.

The remarks which follow will therefore be addressed, not to those who are not yet convinced of the reality of physical phenomena, but to those who are aware of their reality, but attribute them to extramundane causes.

There is one pregnant fact connected with these manifestations which all will admit, and that is that there is an intelligence which directs and controls them. This intelligence is that of disembodied spirits, or it is not. If it is not, it must be that of embodied spirits. These propositions, if not self-evident, will at least be admitted to be true by those who believe that it proceeds from disembodied spirits of human beings. The intelligence is a human intelligence, — that is, it is characterized by human imperfections and limitations; and, as all human beings must be classified as either living or dead, we must look to one class or the other for the source of the phenomena.

The first question in order is, What are the inherent probabilities? Conceding the power to exist, it would seem to be more inherently probable that it is possessed by a soul connected with a living organism, than it is that it is possessed by a soul that has been entirely severed from all connection with the material world. Spiritists themselves unwittingly concede the truth of this proposition when they assert, as does Allan Kardec, on the authority, as he says, of "the spirit of Saint Louis," that "the spirits who produce these effects are always inferior spirits, who are not entirely disengaged from material influence."¹ Besides, the very fact that the intervention of a "medium" is necessary for the production of physical phenomena demonstrates the proposition that the elements of physical organism are essential. It requires, therefore, two things to produce the phenomena; namely, a soul and a body. In a living man the two are united and working in harmony. Is it not probable that such an organism is capable of producing all the effects attributed to the temporary union of a dead

¹ Book on Mediums, p. 87.

man's soul and a living man's body? If not, why not? Why should a dead man's spirit in abnormal union with a living man's body possess more power than a living man's spirit in normal union with his own body? Is it because the former possesses more knowledge than the latter? No, for we have seen that it is only "inferior spirits" who are capable of producing physical manifestations. Superior knowledge confers no advantage; for, as Kardec informs us, the superior spirits have no power in that direction. We have, therefore, the authority of the spiritists themselves for formulating the proposition that the more completely the spirit of a man is "disengaged from material influence," the less power he possesses to produce physical phenomena. This being true, it follows that the converse of the proposition is true, namely, that the more completely the spirit of a man is united to material elements, the greater is his power to produce such phenomena. The conclusion is irresistible that the spirit of a man in normal union with his own body possesses the power in perfection.

If, therefore, we can find in abstract reasoning no warrant for the assumption that the phenomena are produced by disembodied spirits, we must look elsewhere for evidence of their extramundane origin. The first inquiry naturally suggesting itself is, What internal evidence is contained in the character of the manifestations which would enable one to form a correct judgment regarding their probable source? We have already seen that reasoning from their physical character leads us to the conclusion that the physical power displayed must have a physical basis, and that that basis is probably the physical organism of the medium. Now, if its intellectual character leads us in the same direction, the evidence is still stronger in favor of its purely human origin. We presume that no one will dispute the proposition that the communications received through the physical phenomena are governed by the same laws as those received by means of the other methods which have been discussed. Indeed, the fact is almost self-evident. They have the same origin, and must be governed by the same laws. The

remarks, therefore, which have been made concerning the character of the communications obtained by other than physical means apply with full force to those obtained through physical demonstrations. The laws of telepathy and suggestion play their subtle rôle in the one case the same as in the other. If possible, there is less evidence of extramundane origin in the physical manifestations than there is in the intellectual. Indeed, this might be pre-supposed, from the gross character of the former, even though the latter had a purely spiritual source. If, therefore, we find no valid evidence of extramundane origin in the higher manifestations, it is a waste of time to seek for evidence of spirit intercourse in the tipping of kitchen tables, the levitation of parlor sofas, or the convulsions of whole sets of chamber furniture.

The foregoing remarks apply to all forms and grades of physical phenomena, of which there are many. Some of them possess the most intense interest, not only on account of the wonderful psycho-physical power displayed, but because of their intellectual phases. Slate-writing, for instance, when performed by a first-class medium, gifted with a high order of telepathic power, accompanied by other necessary intellectual qualifications, is one of the most interesting of all phases of psychic power. An instance which occurred within the writer's own experience will be here related, for the reason that it fully illustrates the essential qualifications and characteristics of a first-class medium, shows both the physical and mental powers with which he is endowed, and clearly defines the limitations which hedge him about, and which point, with unerring exactitude, to the source of the phenomena.

A few years ago, a conversation which the writer had with a celebrated Union general led to an agreement to visit a prominent slate-writing medium, then sojourning in the city of Washington. Among other things, it was agreed that the general should be the sitter, and that he should be guided entirely by my suggestions relative to the course which he should pursue before and during the séance.

My object, which he fully understood and appreciated, was, first, to convince him of the genuineness of the physical phenomena, — that is, that the slate-writing was performed without corporeal contact of the medium with the pencil, and without the shadow of a possibility of the employment of legerdemain; and, secondly, to demonstrate the utter impossibility of the phenomena being attributable to disembodied spirits.

It must be premised that the medium was in the habit of causing his sitters to write six short letters to as many different spirits. These epistles are written on separate pieces of paper about three inches square, and are addressed to the spirits by name and signed by the writer, precisely as an ordinary letter would be addressed and signed. Each letter is then rolled into a wad as small as possible, and retained in the hand of the sitter until he is requested to deposit them in a pile on the table. When this is done, the medium reaches his hand across the table and touches the wads with the tips of his fingers, the sitter meanwhile watching the proceeding closely, to prevent the possibility of fraud. After the medium has touched each bit of paper the sitter resumes possession of them and retains them for future reference. It may be here remarked that a sitter has the privilege of bringing his own slates with him, and retaining possession of them until the writing is finished. They need not leave his custody for an instant. He may place the bit of pencil between them himself, and then securely lock or tie them together, and hold them as tightly as he chooses on the top of the table, in the broad light of day, while the writing is going on.

The plan suggested to the general on this occasion, and which he carried out to the letter, was as follows:—

1. To write three letters to as many spirits of his dead acquaintances, each one couched in general terms, — such as, "Dear B., can you communicate with me to-day? If so, tell me your condition in the spirit-land." This could be answered by very general remarks, and would require no specific answer involving any knowledge of the sitter's affairs or anything else.

2. To write two similar letters to two persons known to the sitter, but unknown to the medium, to be still living in the flesh.

3. To write one letter to a deceased person, asking a specific question, the correct answer to which neither the sitter nor the medium could possibly know.

4. To place the medium at his ease, by leading him to believe that he had to deal with a sympathetic believer in the doctrine of spiritism, who had perfect faith in the medium's powers.

5. To prescribe no test conditions whatever, but let the medium have his own way in everything.

6. Under no circumstances to let the medium know the name or antecedents of the sitter.

These suggestions were carried out to the letter. The general was unknown to the medium, and was introduced by the writer under a fictitious name. The medium occupied a suite of rooms consisting of a large double parlor separated by folding-doors. The front parlor was used as a reception-room, and the back parlor as a séance-room. The latter was lighted by one large window, in front of which stood an old-fashioned square dining-table. The medium seated himself on one side of this table, and the sitter occupied a chair on the opposite side. Several slates were lying on the table, two of which the medium washed clean and then gave them into the custody of the sitter, who carefully examined them, and kept them in his possession until the séance was over, resting his arms upon them while he wrote the prescribed letters. He was particularly cautious about writing the letters, carefully guarding them so that it was impossible for the medium to see the writing with his natural eyes, and never lifted his elbows from the two slates in his custody. When the letters were all finished and rolled into wads, they were placed upon the table directly between the medium and the sitter, the latter never allowing his eyes to wander from them for an instant. The medium then touched each wad with his finger-tips, when they were again taken possession of by the sitter.

It should be stated that the séance, thus far, was not witnessed by myself; but the circumstances were afterwards detailed by the general, whose perfect trustworthiness is beyond question. At this juncture — that is, while the wads were still lying on the table — a most remarkable incident happened. The medium suddenly arose, opened the folding-doors, and invited me in to take part in the séance. After resuming his seat, he remarked to me: "There is a spirit here who refuses to communicate until you are allowed to be present. He says his name is G — (mentioning a common Christian name). Have you any deceased friend by that name?" I answered, No, not remembering, for the moment, any one bearing that name. The medium then handed me a pencil, and said: "Touch one of those wads with the pencil; then open it, and you will find that it is a letter addressed to G——."

I touched one of the six wads, at random of course, and upon opening it found, to my surprise, that it was a letter addressed by the sitter to his deceased brother G——. The brother was also a very dear friend of mine; but his exalted position in life precluded me from ever addressing him by his Christian name, and I had not been consciously thinking of him during the séance. Then the medium again addressed me, as follows:—

"Fold the letter again, place it with the others, and mix them all together. Then take the pencil and touch another wad; and the one you touch you will find to be a letter addressed to M——."

This was done, and the wad touched proved to be a letter addressed to the party named by the medium. A third time this feat was performed with the same result. To say that we were surprised is but feebly to express our emotions. The first success might be attributable to coincidence, supposing the medium to be in possession of the name. The chances were one to six, and it is within easy range of coincidence that I should have hit upon the right letter. In the second trial the chances were also one to six, *per se*; but the chances that I should succeed twice in succession

were largely against me; and the fact that I succeeded three times in succession in pointing out the right letter removes the matter far outside the domain of coincidence. When we take into account the telepathic power displayed by the medium, and that other power, whatever it may have been, which transformed me for the moment into an automaton, the incident will be seen to possess an extraordinary interest and importance. I should here remark that that was the first and only experience of my own in the domain of subjective automatism, and that I did not experience any sensation which could lead me to suppose that I was not in a perfectly normal condition, mentally and physically.

The most remarkable part of the performance, however, is yet to be related. The sitter meantime did not lose his presence of mind, but carefully guarded the pair of slates in his custody, never lifting his arms from them as they lay upon the table before him. Nor did he for an instant lose sight of the wads of paper which he placed upon the table. The medium touched them with his finger-tips alone, as before related; and after I had pointed out the three letters, they were taken into the custody of the sitter. This done, the medium said to the sitter: "Open the slates, and you will find a communication from G——." This was done, and the promised communication was found, addressed to the sitter by name and signed by G——, the name of the sitter's brother. In fact, it was a pertinent answer to the letter written by the sitter to his brother, addressed as the sitter had signed his name, and signed as the sitter's brother had been addressed.

The medium then became considerably agitated, and moved with convulsive rapidity. He seized two other slates, washed them, submitted them for inspection, and placed them upon the centre of the table before us, with a bit of black pencil between them. He then invited us to place our hands upon the slate with him. This we did, whereupon the writing began. We could distinctly hear the pencil move with a gentle, but rapid, scratching sound. In a few minutes three raps were heard, appar-

ently made by the pencil between the slates. This was said to be the signal announcing the completion of the message. The slates were then separated, and several messages were found inside.

Two more slates were then seized by the medium, washed, submitted for inspection, and placed upon the table as before. Our hands were again placed upon the slates, and the writing again began. After it had progressed for a few moments, the medium announced that the spirits wanted to write in colors. He thereupon arose, walked to the mantelpiece, and produced a box of colored crayons, all in small bits, about the size of the piece of black slate-pencil with which the writing had been done. We were about to open the slates, to allow the insertion of the crayons, when the medium said that it was unnecessary, as "the colors could be got from the outside just as well." The box of crayons was accordingly placed beside the slate, and the writing was resumed. After a short interval the signal was given that the messages were finished. The general thereupon very carefully separated the slates, to see if there were any colored crayons concealed therein. Only the bit of black slate pencil was there, but four or five different colors had been used in writing the messages.

The results of this séance may be summed up as follows:

The contents of every letter written by the sitter were evidently known to the intelligence which wrote the replies, for every letter received an appropriate answer, save one, which will be noted further on. The answer to each letter was addressed to the name signed to the corresponding letter, and each answer was signed with the name of the person to whom the corresponding letter was addressed.

Six letters were written by the sitter, as before stated. Three of them were written to deceased friends of the sitter, and were couched in such general terms that the replies did not require any specific knowledge on the part of the intelligence which wrote the replies.

Two of the letters were written to living persons, and they were also couched in general terms, requiring no

specific knowledge to enable an appropriate reply to be framed.

Each of these five letters received a reply which assumed that its writer was a denizen of the spirit-land. There was no difference in their replies so far as that was concerned.

The sixth letter was addressed to a deceased relative, and was as follows, omitting names:—

DEAR A. B.,— Whom did you desire to have appointed administrator of your estate?
(Signed) C. D.

To this letter the only reply was from the medium's "control," who reported as follows:—

"A. B. is here, but cannot communicate to-day."

The conclusions which are inevitable may be summed as follows:—

1. The slate-writing was done without physical contact with the pencil, either by the medium or any one else. It all occurred in broad daylight. The slates were not handled by the medium, except to wash them and to place his hands upon them (in all cases but one) while the writing was going on. The slates were not for an instant out of sight of the sitter during the whole séance, nor were they out of his custody during that time, after they were washed by the medium. They were then carefully inspected by the sitter, the pencil was placed between them by the sitter, they were tied together by the sitter, and opened by him after the writing was finished. In short, there was no chance for fraud or legerdemain, and there was none.

2. The power which moved the pencil, being clearly not physical, must have been occult. This occult power was either that of disembodied spirits, or that of the medium. Did it proceed from disembodied spirits? Let us see. The replies to the five letters emanated from the same source; that is to say, if the replies to any of them were from disembodied spirits, they were all from disembodied spirits. They were clearly not all from disembodied spirits, for two of the letters were addressed to

living persons, and the replies were of the same character as the others. The logical conclusion is inevitable that none of the replies were from disembodied spirits. To put it in the simple form of a syllogism, we have the following:—

The replies to the five letters were all from the same source.

Two of them were not from disembodied spirits.

Therefore, none of them were from disembodied spirits.

Again:

The power to produce the slate-writing emanated either from disembodied spirits or from the medium.

It did not emanate from disembodied spirits.

Therefore, it emanated from the medium.

Having now logically traced the phenomenon to the door of the medium, let us see what further evidence there is in support of that conclusion. And first let us inquire, Is there anything inherently improbable in the theory that he was the source of the intelligence which guided, and the power which moved, the pencil? Was there any intellectual feat performed which rendered it impossible that he should have been its author? The power to read the contents of the six letters was obviously within the domain of telepathy. He was, therefore, just as well equipped for the performance of that feat as a disembodied spirit could be. Suggestion also plays its subtle *rôle* in this class of phenomena, as in all others, and relieves the medium of all imputation of dishonesty or insincerity in attributing it to the wrong source. The probability that the power to move the pencil without physical contact resides in the medium, is as great, at least, as the probability that it resides in disembodied spirits. All these questions have, however, been fully discussed, and are mentioned here merely to complete the chain of reasoning.

There was nothing apparent in the answers to the five letters mentioned which would indicate that they emanated from any source other than the medium. They contained no information possessed exclusively by disembodied

spirits, although they all purported to emanate from them. The five letters were not, however, framed for the purpose of testing the knowledge possessed by spirits, but merely to show that the replies did not emanate from that source.

The sixth letter, however, *was* framed for the express purpose of testing the knowledge possessed by the intelligence which moved the pencil. The question, "Whom did you desire to have appointed administrator of your estate?" was asked because the sitter did not know the correct answer, and he knew that the medium could not know. The knowledge was possessed by the deceased person exclusively; and it is reasonable to suppose that if he was present, as the medium declared that he was, he would have given the desired information. The intelligence which wrote the replies was in full possession of the contents of all the letters, all the names addressed, and all the signatures, including those of the sixth letter. The answers to five of them were pertinent and intelligent, no specific knowledge being required. But when the sixth was reached, the spirit "could not communicate to-day." Why? Simply because the specific knowledge required to answer the question was not in the possession of any one present, and it could not, therefore, be obtained telepathically, as the knowledge of the contents of the other letters was obtained.

This is the rock upon which all so-called spirit intercourse splits. Everything goes along swimmingly as long as the medium knows what to reply, or can obtain information by means of his telepathic or clairvoyant powers. But the moment he is confronted by a question requiring knowledge not obtainable in that way, he fails dismally.

The circumstances of this séance have been detailed for the reason that it was a typical séance. It displayed all the essential characteristics of modern spirit intercourse, so-called. The medium displayed all the essential powers and attributes of good mediumship. The physical phenomena were produced to perfection, and under the most perfect test-conditions. The telepathic powers displayed were of

the most extraordinary character, and the conditions under which they were produced were also such as to preclude the possibility of fraud or legerdemain. The results were also perfect in their character, showing, as they did, both the powers of the medium and his limitations. The dual character of the human mind was also clearly manifested, and the perfect amenability of the subjective entity to control by the power of suggestion was demonstrated.

It would be interesting to pursue the subject of physical manifestations further, and to examine all their multiform characteristics; but that would be foreign to the purposes of this book. The examination of the mental characteristics of the intelligence which controls the different manifestations is our only purpose, and we have shown that the same laws prevail in all. It is believed that enough has been said to enable the conscientious investigator, who wishes to test the correctness of our hypothesis, to apply its fundamental propositions to all psychic phenomena. It is also believed that whoever so applies those propositions will arrive at the same conclusions to which I have come; namely, that there is no valid evidence, in any of the phenomena of so-called spiritism, that the spirits of the dead have any part in their production. On the contrary, as it seems to me, the evidence all points in the opposite direction. I refer, of course, solely to those phenomena which are produced through so-called spirit mediums. If there is any communication to be had with the denizens of the other shore, it is certainly not through them. I have reluctantly arrived at this conclusion. It would be pleasant to believe otherwise, but I have sought in vain for evidence which would warrant me in doing so.

In abandoning all hope of obtaining valid evidence of the ability of disembodied spirits to hold intercourse with the living through the intervention of spirit mediums, I do not for a moment yield my hope, or my convictions, of a life beyond the grave. On the contrary, the very powers which are evoked in the production of the phenomena constitute one of the strongest links in the chain of evidence

going to show that man possesses within himself an entity which does not depend for its existence upon the continued life of the body. We see that this entity possesses powers which far transcend those of our physical frame; that the mental powers of the subjective mind or entity are exercised independently of our objective senses; that they grow stronger as the body grows weaker, and are strongest in the hour of death. Have we not a logical right to infer that when it is entirely freed from physical trammels, it will have reached a condition of independent existence? What that existence is, it is not for objective man to know. It is possible that if spirits could communicate as familiarly with the living as we commune with one another, they would have no language which could bring to our comprehension their true condition. It would be like teaching an infant the principles of the differential calculus. How can the caterpillar, crawling upon the ground, hold intelligent communion with the airy butterfly, or the butterfly reveal to the caterpillar the mysteries of her winged life?

The fact remains that mankind has ever hoped, and will ever hope, for a continued existence of some kind; and all the old arguments in its favor, and all the promises of the Master, still hold good. Moreover, every new development in psychic science adds strength to the arguments, and fresh proofs of his wisdom.