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THE WORLD OF SPIRITS.

(From the Metropolitan.)

We have heard a great deal in this country about spiritual rappings and manifestations, tables moving and disclosing the secrets of the unseen world, and it appears that the art by which these extraordinary results are obtained, is now producing quite a sensation on the other side of the Atlantic. Whether, as the distinguished Faraday has said, the tabular movement is the effect of an involuntary muscular power, or as others contend, of an electrical or magnetic influence, we shall not stop to discuss, especially as neither of these hypotheses explains the most mysterious part of the operation, which is the answering of mediums to various questions propounded to them. Science has evidently failed so far to account for these strange developments, and we may therefore reasonably suppose them to be produced, to a certain extent, by preternatural agents, and may be governed in practice by this supposition. Although the principles laid down by the Catholic Church for the guidance of her children under such circumstances, are plain, satisfactory, and generally known, it may not perhaps be uninteresting or uninteresting to the readers of the *Metropolitan*, to peruse the following article translated from the *Civiltà Cattolica*, an Italian periodical which appears semi-monthly at Rome, and is considered the ablest journal in Europe, as a defender of Catholic truth against the infidelity of the present age. The article is deserving of attention, not only for the lucid exposition of the principles by which Catholics should be governed in reference to the mysterious operations of spiritualism, but also for the argument which is derived from the rapping delusion, in vindication of the Church from the aspersions of her enemies.

That besides this world which we see and feel, there is another, spiritual and invisible, which sometimes enters into communication with this, is an undisputed opinion, as ancient as time. We can scarcely name a people of the past, whether barbarous or civilized, among whom this idea did not subsist, more or less distinct, but in substance always the same. In regenerating the world Christianity purified this idea from all the falsehood and wickedness which imposture or malice had added to it, and reduced it to something clear and precise by including in it many of his dogmas. It defined what salutary hopes might or ought to be entertained from the protection of the good angels, or what evils could or should be feared from a mysterious commerce with the bad; fortified the faithful against the influence of evil spirits by prayers and exorcisms, or sacred and sacramental objects; and acknowledged and professed that privileged souls had sometimes, though rarely, been favored with communications from the angels of light. This point therefore is so well settled among Catholics that there is nothing mysterious, we may say, even in that world which is called the world of mysteries: but we mean among simple Catholics who have not been instructed in the fanatical theories of modern progress; such as the devout old woman, the pious child, the simple rustic. For these the catechism, holy water, the blessing of the house, with the legends of St. Anthony persecuted by the demons in his cave, or of his namesake of Padua to whom the angel brought the news of his father's death, while he was preaching, are a true theology, for the belief of which nothing else is required than the simplicity of faith.

But the unhappy tendency of modern times to obliterate ancient traditions, wrought its effect upon this theory of the invisible world, whether of good or of bad spirits, and thanks to the gross materialism of the past century, it may be said that among the cultivated and enlightened classes the work was completed with greater ease than had perhaps been expected. When men with wondrous audacity rejected the idea of a spirit in the body, whose immaterial acts neither nature could falsify nor consciousness deny, how could they believe in a good angel that protects and a bad one that tempts? Who saw him? Who heard him? Who touched him? The most discreet and sensible thought that they were condescending enough if they only doubted on this point, casting the whole subject into that profound gulf of scepticism, into which we drown all truths which either incommodate us, or do not convince us by the evidence of the eye or the hand. This infidelity or doubt arose from the fewness of the cases, in which a preternatural intervention of an invisible being could be maintained against the cavils of a severe and too delicate a criticism. The extraordinary facts that occurred were frequently but the tiresome apings of white and black magic; at one time the hysteric fits of an imaginative and nervous woman; at another the ravings of some cunning devotee; why not say too, the secret arts of some charlatan or juggler, who playing on the credulity of the simple made them see fire-flies through a lantern? Amidst this confusion

of folly, of false devotion and of malice, it was very easy to lose sight of the few cases, in which the Church properly so called, or the worthiest of her prelates, had acknowledged the true and real action of a spirit. Hence among those who prided themselves in their knowledge, it passed for an undoubted conclusion, that the spirit we have in our body was enough, without the necessity of admitting others wandering in the open air or squatting amidst half-ruined palaces or in dark caverns.

This discovery which freed us from so many terrors, was of course a new evidence superadded to the many our age already possessed of its progress in civilization and freedom from prejudice. In fact, the age grew strangely proud and laughed heartily at old men, who allowed themselves to be terrified by invisible beings that existed nowhere out of their own frightened imaginations. In sacred biography all that related to devils that maltreated the saints, or to angels who came to console and comfort them, was expunged, if not from books, at least from the memory of the belief of those strong minds, who did not think them worthy of notice: and the new biographers were obliged to be very cautious, if they wished not to be branded with the writers of the dark ages. As to the rites of the Church regarding benedictions, scapulars, holy water, exorcisms and the like, the age could not cancel them from the Ritual, much less abolish one of the four minor orders; but it avenged itself by sneers, numbering these practices among the relics of superstitious times, of which the world, as it grows more enlightened and polished, will rid itself in one way or another. Even preachers were obliged to pay tribute to the enlightenment of the age: If they spoke to the promiscuous crowd of the tempting and seducing devil, of the strengthening and defending angel, they dared not do so frequently to an instructed audience, if they would not run the risk of seeing their hearers turn up their nose in disdain. Scarcely had theologians the courage to speak of them openly in the schools; when they did speak on this subject, it was not so much to show in what manner spirits can have intercourse with men, which is certain and taught by St. Thomas in his Sum, as to demonstrate by Scripture and tradition, that there are good and evil spirits that work either for good or evil in men, according to their various conditions. In fine, some thought, if they did not say so, that the stories of devils, obsessions, and exorcisms should be set aside with other old rubbish, as a remnant of the middle ages; nor did they fail to see in this a degeneracy of the Church, who, though she did not err in contending against devils, when every one believed that they existed, does not show much wisdom in continuing this hostility against them, when the learned and enlightened are assumed to believe in them. Yet notwithstanding this change of opinions the Church has not changed a hair's breadth in her belief and practice, waiting until Providence would conquer the pride of some of her erring children.

It seems to us that this time is now come, and we will not let the opportunity escape of making a solemn reparation for the insults that have been hurled against the Church of God. Let it not be supposed that in doing this we shall turn the heads of any of our readers, or disturb the placid dreams even of the most timid child. So far as it depends upon us, things will remain just as they are. From our throwing some light on the already known communications of our world with the world of spirits, it cannot follow that a ghost will come to-night to blow out the candle while you are reading, or shake off the counterpane while you are asleep. By no means; we are only discussing a speculative truth, which neither takes from, nor adds to, what spirits can do or are doing among us; but the discussion is of the utmost importance, as well on account of the dangers which would attend the rejection of the truth, as of the necessity of justly apprehending the belief of the Catholic Church, and estimating the pride of our age which boasts of being free from prejudice because it is ignorant. Even the moving tables are not altogether foreign to our subject, and more closely perhaps does animal magnetism approach it in some of its most astonishing applications. And why should we not make our readers feel the force of some means of being undeceived, which Providence furnishes us as proper to these days?

Do you know whence has been derived now-a-days the certainty of this work of these spirits and their mysterious commerce with our world? It has come from the most progressive, the most independent country in the world; a country that is the most enthusiastic on the subject of religious liberty—the United States of America. Yes—the intercourse of man with evil spirits, which has been admitted by the Christian world from the first ages; which has been the object of so much provident caution, and we may say, of so much rigor on the part of the Church;—which a modern philosophising age has ridiculed as

the dream of old grey-beards, or the imposture of charlatans, returns to us from America as a new and foreign manufacture, entirely fabricated to our exquisite taste, to be hunted after with curious avidity as a thing of the very latest fashion. How could the lie be more peremptorily given to the incredulous materialism of the age, or a more perfect triumph (we will use no other word) to the liturgy and prescriptions of the Church?

In that country whose civilization is not, like that of the old world, due exclusively to Christianity, intercourse with spirits was for some years, if not frequent, at least not rare; and the art of effecting it for oneself and the profession of communicating it to others, was called spiritualism. But scarcely five years had elapsed when this spiritualism began to spread and to assume a systematic form; and now it counts its followers by myriads; it has its own journals and associations; in fine, all that can constitute a religious community. And the occasion of this great increase was altogether casual, without any expectation or thought from any one. In a village of New York, called Hydesville, there resided in 1848, a Methodist family of the name of Fox, composed of father, mother, and two marriageable daughters. In the house they occupied were frequently heard raps at the door, on the wall, in the furniture, sometimes also a slight clapping in the air. One evening as the young women were about to retire, one of them by chance cracked her finger joints, and immediately the same sound was heard at her side, without her knowing from whom or how it came. They were not frightened, but they spoke out with firmness: "Whoever you are, strike while we count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,...." No sooner said than done. The mother, to make sure of the mystery, asked the age of her daughters, and in two replies had as many raps as corresponded with their respective ages. If they were of a certain age, it is good to think that the revelation took place in secret; but we do not think that ladies would like to see this sort of play becoming too common. From this time the mother and daughters became mediums, the name which is given in America to persons who have the faculty of communicating with the spirits and placing others in communication with them. Mrs. Fox and her daughters endeavored to give a little method and order to this mysterious commerce, and after a short time they were enabled to obtain replies sufficiently full. The most frequent operation is that of rapping or knocking, which is heard on the furniture or walls, or in the air, and like a sound one might make by striking anything with his knuckle. Hence it was easy to make conventional sounds, and it was determined that three raps should be affirmative; one, negative; two, expressive of doubt. If a name, or a date, or any other species of request, were to be answered, which either could not or at least not easily be answered by a dry affirmative or negative, it was agreed that the interrogator should pronounce or write a series of names, dates or things of the same kind. When the true object is named or written the rap is heard, which advises that it is the true one. Applying this method to the alphabet, words and entire phrases can be obtained. The interrogator names, writes or marks in an alphabet already written, the successive letters, A, B, C, D, &c., and for every letter that must enter into the words of the answers, is heard the usual rap, and that is marked and so on one after another, until we have entire words or phrases. Mrs. Fox having put herself in communication with the spirits, could feel the soul of a little pedler, who had been assassinated in his 31st year, by name Charles Ryan. The mediums were soon made perfect and were able to write with the hand guided by the spirit (writing mediums) and speak whilst the spirit moved the tongue (speaking mediums): things noways different from the pythons and pythonesses of the ancients. Thus commenced in America what are called 'spiritual manifestations.'

These things having been trumpeted abroad, it is easy to imagine how much the public curiosity was excited; especially when we consider that among non-Catholics the matter is more wonderful than among us, who cannot see in it anything else than the work of the devil. If on one side we are sure of the facts, on the other we are strictly prohibited from meddling in such matters voluntarily, and are provided with abundant means against suffering from them involuntarily. But non-Catholics, deprived of both these advantages, throw themselves blindly into the operation, inasmuch as besides the stimulus of curiosity and the expectation of some benefit, they feel their hearts impelled to it, since those spirits announce themselves as the souls of the dead, and make it easy for every one to converse or to think he converses with the spirit of his mother, father, sister or friend. Hence we cannot be surprised, that Mrs. Fox's residence should have been crowded like a market-house from all quarters; that she should have travelled

through various states and stopped from time to time in populous cities, and consequently amassed a considerable fortune. However as she was not able to do all the work alone, many were initiated for the same duty, and first of all her daughters. Others learned it of themselves: others again were led to it, as it were, by chance; so that the number of mediums is now beyond all calculation. We read that in the city of Cincinnati alone there are 800; in New York, 1,400; and in the whole Union about 50,000. Even in the supposition that these numbers are somewhat exaggerated, though attested by credible witnesses, and that there are false mediums and impostors, who cannot however be many, since it is so easy to be a real one; there must be in the United States more wizards and witches than the inquisitors found in the whole world for two centuries. Nor should this application of the terms wizards and witches seem rude or insulting when applied to the American mediums, though for the most part they are acknowledged gentlemen and very frequently elegant and accomplished ladies; for with the exception of some rare cases, in which Providence favored the saints with heavenly communications, we know of no other usual commerce with the invisible world, than that which is held with devils. Hence, if they wish us to believe in their assertion that they hold converse with the spirits of their departed friends (which we are not certainly bound to believe) the case is a very clear one; for either these spirits belong to the number of the elect or to that of the reprobate. Now as the operation is not distinguished by any special marks of divine favor, there remains only the evidence of an illicit commerce with the devils; and the professors of this art amongst us, however genteel their appearance, are never called by any other names than those of wizards, magicians, necromancers, &c.

But is it worthy of a respectable periodical to touch upon these subjects, the names of which are scarcely to be found in our modern dictionaries?—What! Speak to us of such things in the middle of the nineteenth century! Slowly, if you please, for goodness' sake. You must not forget, courteous reader, how and why we have embarked on this muddy stream. These things are actually happening.—They come to us from the freest and most progressive country in the world, and precisely for this do we speak of the matter, which is dark enough indeed, yet not to be despised. With a bundle of journals, pamphlets and books under our eyes and speaking of mediums that multiply by thousands, how can you ridicule the Catholic Church, which believed for nineteen centuries and still believes that men are the dupes of Satan, although an 'enlightened philosophy' qualifies the belief as superstitious.

You may say that the Church could have good reasons for admitting the possibility and the fact of secret relations with demons, but might perhaps be deceived in prohibiting them so severely, and in treating with so much rigor the profession of those art which she calls malicious. What evil can there be, for instance, in conversing a little with the soul of a departed friend, or questioning an invisible spirit about what may be useful or convenient to the questioners? Is it not a pleasure to satisfy so eager a curiosity, as that of speaking with mysterious and invisible beings? The Catechism will suffice to answer this question; inasmuch as the first commandment teaches that worship is to be given only to God, and thereby implicitly forbids all service of, or dependence on beings, not ordained by God to receive it, and especially all trust in the devil, the enemy of God and men and emphatically the spirit of lies. It is an insult to God to seek the truth by any other means than those ordained by Him. It is the height of folly to seek it from the father of lies, who was called by our Saviour 'the murderer from the beginning.' But these arguments belong to the Catechism and we do not wish that any should take occasion from them to say that we have changed an article of a journal into a sermon.

RELIGIOUS PARTIES—THE CATHOLICS. MR. BROWN.

(From the North American.)

The readers of this journal are well aware that we have never displayed a feeling of bigotry or sectarian hostility towards the Catholics, or any other denomination. We have never taken upon ourselves to decide what religion should be encouraged, and what "put down." As an individual, we hold very decided views on those points which distinguish Protestants from Catholics, but as a politician, we have always contended that a man's religious opinions are not to be enquired into,—that the State has no right, under a representative system such as ours, to take cognizance of a man's religion, either for patronage or proscription. In resisting the attempts of Mr. Brown and his followers to organize a political party on a