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More Spiritual Investigation

I shall have this matter of spiritualism “down to a spot,” yet, if I do not go crazy in the meantime. I stumbled upon a private fireside seance a night or two ago, where two old gentlemen and a middle-aged gentleman and his wife were communicating (as they firmly believed) with the ghosts of the departed. They have met for this purpose every week for years. They do not “investigate”—they have long since become strong believers, and further investigations are not needed by them. I knew some of these parties well enough to know that whatever deviltry was exhibited would be honest, at least, and that if there were any humbugging done they themselves would be as badly humbugged as any spectator. We kept the investigations going for three hours, and it was rare fun.

They set a little table, in the middle of the floor, and set up a dial on it which bore the letters of the alphabet instead of the figures of a clock-face. An index like the minute hand of a clock was so arranged that the tipping of the table would cause it to move around the dial and point to any desired letter, and thus spell words. The lady and two gentlemen sat at the table and rested their hands gently upon it, no other portion of their persons touching it. And the spirits, and some other mysterious agency, came and tilted the table back and forth, sometimes lifting two of its legs three or four inches from the floor and causing the minute hand to travel entirely around the dial. These persons did not move the table themselves; because when no one’s hands rested upon it but the lady’s it tilted just the same, and although she could have borne down her side of the table, by an effort, it was impossible for her to *lift* up *her* side with her hands simply resting top of it. And then the hands of these persons lay perfectly impassable—not rose or fell, and not a tendon grew tense or relaxed as the table tilted—whereas, when they removed their hands and I tilted the table with mine, it required such exertion that muscles and tendons rose and fell and stretched and relaxed with every movement. I do not know who tilted that table, but it was not the medium at any rate. It tired my arms to death merely to spell out four long words on the dial, but the lady and the ghosts spelled out long conversations without the least fatigue.

The first ghost that announced his presence spelled this on the dial: “My name is Thomas Tilson; I was a preacher. I have been dead many years. I know this man Mark Twain well!”

I involuntarily exclaimed: “The very devil you do?” That old dead parson took me by surprise when he spelled my name, and I felt the cold chills creep over me. Then the ghost and I continued the conversation:

“Did you know me on earth?”

“No. But I read what you write, every day, almost. I like your writings.

“Thank you. But how do you read it?—do they take the *Territorial Enterprise* in h___ or rather, in heaven, I beg your pardon?”

“No. I read it through my affinity.”

“Who is your affinity?”

“Mac Crellish of the *Alta*!”

This excited some laughter, of course—and I will remark here that both ghosts and mediums indulge in jokes, conundrums, doggerel rhymes, and laughter—when the ghost says a good thing he wags the minute hand gaily to and fro to signify laughter.

“Did Mac Crellish ever know you?”

“No. He didn’t know me, and doesn’t suspect that he is my affinity—but he is, nevertheless. I impress him and influence him every day. If he starts to do what I think he ought not to do, I change his mind.”

This ghost then proceeded to go into certain revelations in connection which need not be printed.

William Thompson’s ghost came up. Said he knew me; loved me like a brother; never knew me on earth, though. Said he had been a school teacher in Mott Street, New York; was an assistant teacher when he was only fifteen years old, and appeared to take a good deal of pride in the fact. Said he was with me constantly.

“Well,” I said, “you get into some mighty bad company sometimes, Bill, if you travel with me.” He said it couldn’t hurt him.

One of the irrepressible Smiths took the stand, now. He told his name, and said, “I am here!”

“Staunch and true!” said I.

“Colors blue! and liberty forever!” quoth the poetical Smith.

The medium said, “Mr. Smith, Mr. Twain here has been abusing the Smith family - can’t you give him a brush?”

And Smith spelled out, “If I only had a brush!” and wagged the minute hand in a furious burst of laughter. Smith thought that was a gorgeous joke. And it might be so regarded in perdition, where Smith lives, but will not excite much admiration here.

Then Smith asked, “Why don’t you have some whiskey here?” He was informed that the decanter had just been emptied, Mr. Smith said: “I’ll go and fetch some.” In about a minute he came back and said: “Don’t get impatient—just sit where you are and wait till you see me coming with that whiskey!” and then shook a boisterous laugh on the dial and cleared out. And I suppose this old Smarty from h___ is going around in the other world yet, bragging about this cheap joke.

A Mr. Wentworth, a very intelligent person for a dead man, came and spelled out a “lecture” of two foolscap pages, on the subject of “Space,” but I haven’t got space to print it here. It was very beautifully written; the style was smooth, and flowing, the language was well chosen, and the metaphors and similes were apt and very poetical. The only fault I could find about the late Mr. Wentworth’s lecture on “Space” was, that there was nothing in it about space. The essayist seemed to be only trying to reconcile people to the loss of friends, by showing that the lost friends were unquestionably in luck in being lost, and therefore should not be grieved for—and the essayist did the thing gracefully and well but devil a word did he say about “Space.”

Very well; the *Bulletin* may abuse spiritualism as much as it pleases, but whenever I can get a chance to take a dead and damned Smith by the hand and pass a joke or swap a lie with him, I am going to do it. I am not afraid of such pleasant corpses as these ever running me crazy. I find them better company than a good many live people.

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