

The spiritualists of Sydney have another star lecturer on hand. This time a lady—Mrs. Hardinge-Britten, who professes, like Walker, to give her discourses by the aid of spirits, but who puts Walker completely in the shade; and, unlike that remarkable individual, does not lecture with her eyes shut. Still she claims to be inspired by spirits. Mrs. Britten is not unknown to fame. Some of her writings are to be seen in the Sydney School of Arts. She is a woman whose classic brow has been furrowed by some fifty or sixty winters, and she seems good for another half a century at least, to judge by her present appearance, which is remarkably masculine and commanding. I should imagine her to be able to eclipse the veritable Mrs. Caudle herself at certain lecturing, with or without the aid of spirits, ardent or otherwise. Mrs. Britten stands about 5 feet 10 in her Hessians, and is the reverse of slender. Her manner in delivering her exhortations is intensely tragic, and frequently bombastic. She would, I should judge, play "Lady Macbeth" in a style that would do credit to a Siddons or a Ristori, for she is unquestionably a fine actress. I happened to be present at one of her discourses—"inspirational lectures," she calls them—and was partly amused, partly pained at the way in which she played upon the feelings of the weaker portion of her audience. It was a death-bed scene she pictured—the death of a little child; and she called up all the resources of her histrionic art to such purpose that several of her hearers were moved to tears. Theological and psychological subjects are her forte, but she seems to be an all round lecturer, prepared to tackle any subject her audiences may require of her—literary, historical, scientific, or religious—but although she professes to give her discourses by the aid of "ministering angels" or spirits of the departed, she, unlike Walker, point blank refuses to tell who they were when in the flesh. One person ventured to ask her who she was controlled by, and she looked as fierce as a Gorgon as she answered, with a great show of bombast, "We decline to tell you. (She always speaks in the first person plural.) We might answer you that we are controlled by the spirit of John Smith (here there was titter all through the theatre, and one or two said, 'hear hear'), and how much wiser would you be? We decline to answer you." Then, with air of defiance, "If we are within the law, arraign us." There is nothing in this lady's appearance when delivering her lectures to support the idea that there is anything either supernatural or preternatural about her, and her audiences are required to take her on trust. Walker did go through the form of spasmodically shutting his eyes before he commenced, and keeping them closed to the finish, but he claimed to be in a trance. Mrs. Britten does not make this claim—she is simply she says "inspired by spirits." Inspired by fiddlesticks. It is wonderful how easily some people are imposed upon. I have heard it suggested that if Mrs. Britten could deliver these lectures normally she would do so, and be equally successful. This is a mistake. People prefer being cheated to being instructed, and if Mrs. Britten's and Walker's lectures were stripped of the veil of mystery and superstition that they are surrounded with, they would fail to draw enough to pay the bill-sticker.