

DARK CIRCLES AND CABINETS.

BY MRS. HARDINGE-BRITTEN.

As you are aware, I have been solicited to add to my former paper in answer to your circular by citing other cases in which materialisations of the human form, or parts of the human form, by spirits have occurred without the equivocal conditions of darkness or the isolation of the medium.

Before attempting to comply with this request, I must be understood as making no allusion to individual cases of fraud, or passing any opinion whatever on the recent alleged "exposure."

It seems to be the custom when a case of fraud is said to occur in one circle, for multitudes of correspondents to come forward and bear witness to the perfect integrity of the medium as proved in *other* circles. Besides this curious mode of throwing the onus of the "exposure" on the sitters rather than "the medium," I notice elaborate theories put forth to prove that whenever a "form" is caught it *MUST NEEDS* be the medium; hence that no exposure ever has been made, or can be made, of frauds. I have yet to learn what theories can account for the dummies that are often observed to be left behind in the cabinets, or the production of masses of paraphernalia, which, wonderful to relate, never seem to *melt back* into the medium's body, and which, if not composed of the same imponderable "aura" as the dissolving form, must have involved a considerable amount of time—some very mundane ingenuity, and anything but Spiritualistic preparation. If the processes of "transfiguration," "absorption," "emanation," "transfer," etc., etc., etc., were all spontaneous and effected by spirits alone, the subject would involve a philosophy quite as marvellous and worthy of study as the formation of a single atom of matter, or the motion of a single inanimate body; but alas! though *the too solid flesh* of the materialised ones do so readily *melt back* into the medium, the *too solid* drapery in which they were attired will not so melt. Some of my Dutch, German, and Russian correspondents assure me that the materialised spirits who melted back into the medium's bodies whom they caught tricking, left behind them very substantial wigs, masks, phosphorus, and other articles of personal adornment. Why they did not *melt away* deponent sayeth not; but as some of the wicked "spirit grabbers" in America tell the same story, and even show the fine millinery and dressmaking manufactured out of the "much-abused medium's emanations," let those who are unphilosophical enough to wish for further light on such vexed subjects still ponder on the question, Can we not have the materialisation of a human organism by spirits without the pernicious and equivocal conditions of total darkness and isolation? I regret that I should be appealed to, to furnish testimony on so important a point, as nearly all my experiences have occurred in foreign countries and the most satisfactory not being of the most recent date, renders the possibility of verifying my statements a task of exceeding difficulty. I hope I

shall be pardoned therefore when I refer to the experiences of others nearer home, from whom more direct evidence can, in some cases at least, be procured.

I am informed by some of my Newcastle friends, whose evidence is simply unquestionable, that spirit-forms have been seen to issue from a cabinet previously searched and known to be empty, when the medium (Miss Wood) was sitting *outside* the cabinet, in full view of the whole circle, and in a room sufficiently light to see all that transpired. What has been, can occur again. *Verbum sap.*

Some time in the summer of 1877 or 1878 I dined at the house of Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, then residing on Camden Hill. After an early dinner, our party—amongst whom were our honoured host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Howitt, Mr. Durham, the sculptor; Mr. D. D. Home, my own venerable mother, and about half-a-dozen other visitors, whose names I forget—adjourned to the drawing-room to hold a séance. It was a fine, bright summer evening. Our dinner ended about seven o'clock, and from that till nine, when the séance closed, the room was as light as noontide. During that time, besides many other manifestations not kindred to the subject of materialisation, the spirits manipulated two pairs of curtains, one of pink silk, the other of lace, which shaded the one large bow window, in front of which the company sat round a table, from which the spirits themselves drew the cloth away.

With these curtains the spirits formed a beautiful tent, the apex of which was gathered into graceful knots above our heads, the sides being drawn tightly all around the backs of our chairs, and held there by at least twenty pairs of hands, large and small, fair and brown, all of which were visible to the whole of the company for more than an hour—about the time occupied in their work. These hands at times stroked our cheeks, patted our heads, and touched us so forcibly that we were enabled to determine they were dense, firm, substantial; some warm and some cold, but all busy, seemingly human, solid to the touch, and moving with an intelligence, which, *if not human*, was so very like it that few human beings could have excelled their work. And all the time Mr. Home sat like the rest of us, a quiet and amused spectator of the scene in the full light of day, his whole form, even to his feet, which were not beneath the table, in view of all present.

In the winter of the year 1875 or 1876 I called on Dr. Slade in New York, accompanied by two ladies slightly known to him. We called on a Saturday, the day when he held no séances, as our only object was to invite him to a party, and we wished to find him disengaged. He was not prepared for our coming, and we did not intend to stay above five minutes. It was about five o'clock and dark, so the gas lamps were lighted. After our matter of business was discussed, Mr. Slade asked if we would not like a little sitting. I thought not, as we were in a hurry; but he urged us to do so, as he said, half-jestingly, to me, "Perhaps the spirits will have something to say to me; I wish they would."

Thus our séance—as it will be seen—was a totally unprepared one. The room into which we passed was dark. Mr. Slade lighted it with two gas burners, and he produced a piece of black glazed calico, with a hole cut in the middle of about a foot square, which he proposed to hang up at one end of the room, to see, as he said, if we could get any materialisation. The room was so unprepared that we could find no string on which to hang our screen, and I improvised one with some pieces of ribband tied together. On this, fastened to pieces of furniture, we hung the black muslin, with the square hole directly behind the table. We then all four sat at the table, the black muslin being behind Mr. Slade, he sitting next to me.

Whilst he and I were talking indifferently on other subjects, one of my friends said, in an awe-struck whisper, "Look there!" Following the direction of her finger, I turned my head and perceived behind me, but quite far away from Mr. Slade, a column of white mist, shapeless, and with the particles moving like smoke, but very white and luminous. Directly I turned my head this misty mass moved swiftly behind my chair, and disappeared at the black screen. The muslin was so thin that we could see the wall through it, and see, also, something like circling smoke moving behind it. Before I could have counted a hundred, there appeared at the square opening, directly behind Mr. Slade's head, the face of my dear friend, Dr. Alcinda Wilhelm—a lady with whom I had once been very intimate—who had subsequently become Mr. Slade's wife, and who is now one of his principal controlling spirits. This dear and well-known face could not be mistaken. She wore her hair in the peculiar curls that I so well remembered, though they were not then in fashion, and on her head was a bridal wreath, about which she and I had had some conversation before her marriage. My two friends recognised Alcinda Wilhelm as clearly as I did; but Mr. Slade, who seemed very nervous, did not turn his head to look at her until she had gradually melted into the indistinct white mist before described.

On several other occasions, when Mr. Slade was not sitting for séances, hands, visible to myself and others, have come and pulled our dresses; but the instant Mr. Slade observed them, he became so nervous that they vanished. In the presence of Mrs. E. J. French, of New York, a medium mentioned by the late Benjamin Coleman in his *American Reminiscences* as a most remarkable drawing and physical medium, I have seen frequently *shadowy* forms of well remembered spirit-friends, plainly visible to all present. Mrs. French never sat for manifestations except in well-lighted rooms. Mr. Chas. Partridge, of New York, formerly the editor and proprietor of the *Spiritual Telegraph*, can bear witness to having seen at circles where I and many others have been sitting, hands, arms, and feet, which were solid to the touch, exhibited in brightly lighted apartments. I may here add, that dark circles for the first fifteen years of my experience were so exceptional that I scarcely ever attended them, and though the exhibition of hands and their touch was so common that I did not deem it worth while to keep any record of such manifesta-

tions, they always came *in the light*, and never in such a manner as permitted the smallest loophole for the charge of deception or fraud. At the circles of Mr. and Mrs. Maynard, of Buffalo, two well-known and highly-respected citizens, in the presence of a Canadian medium—a lady whose name I forget—I sat in three circles with the family of Mr. Maynard, some friends, and my mother, and on each occasion, in full gas light, a hand, with a ring on the little finger, came visibly to all present on the table, and drew pictures in coloured crayons in an incredibly short time—never more than from 100 to 200 seconds by our counting. These pictures the hand pushed to the party who was to own them—one of them is now in my possession. At the house of Mr. Bullens, of Chicopee, Massachusetts, the materialised form of “Black Hawk,” an Indian spirit, stood in the garden on a bright summer’s day, about the year 1862, in the paved pathway, and became visible to myself, my mother, Miss Jenny Lord (the medium), and both Mr. and Mrs. Bullens. He remained for about the time we might count thirty, then slowly melted out; he was some twenty paces from us, and when we went to the spot where he had disappeared, we found a rough likeness of his well-known face chipped in the paving-stones where he seemed to have stood. The last time I was at Chicopee—some years ago—that stone remained with the well-defined profile of the spirit.

Those friends who happen to possess a copy of my work, entitled, “Modern American Spiritualism,” may turn to page 449, and they will there read a well-attested account of spirits appearing bodily in the light, in a series of manifestations occurring at San Francisco, California, about thirty years ago. The spirits were visible to a circle of from six to ten persons. They came performing extraordinary feats of strength and marvel, and the witnesses were amongst the most respectable and respected inhabitants of the city. Amongst the spiritual visitants was a Mr. King, a man who in earth-life had been very popular, the editor of a paper, and a highly respected magistrate. His impartiality in convicting “the roughs” of the time occasioned his assassination, and the cruel circumstances attending the foul deed impelled the best citizens of California to band themselves together in the celebrated “Vigilance Committee.” The Mr. King whose murder thus became an historical feature in the archives of California, was a well-known and highly-esteemed friend of all the parties who beheld him—a dense, seemingly human, living, moving being, in the scene described in my “History of American Spiritualism.” This spirit, and the others therein mentioned, appeared to all the witnesses alike. Some of these are still living. One of the most prominent and best known—Almarin B. Paul, Esq., still resides at San Francisco, where his word with every respectable citizen of the place is “as good as his bond.”

In the Rev. J. M. Peebles’s sketches of foreign travels, entitled “Around the World,” is an account of New Zealand Spiritualism, and the direct materialisations witnessed *in the light*, in circles with the Maories. About three years ago, I was invited to accompany an

American friend and his wife to one of these circles. It was held in a "whare," or native carved house. It was in the evening, but the summer sunlight beamed in near the entrance, where, in civilised countries, a door should have been. Besides this, there was a fire burning in the centre of the building, on the customary hearthstone, and the ruddy glare of the embers lit up every portion of the walls, and the dusky faces, fourteen in number, seated on the earth around the fire-place. We three, the "Pakehas" (white people), sat on a turf-bench placed for us near the open entrance, enabling us to command the entire scene. The object of the gathering was to invoke the spirit of "Te-Uri," a celebrated chief, with whom the people wished to advise on a difficult political crisis. About half-an-hour after we had assembled, and, after I had, to beguile the tedium of silent waiting, counted the fourteen Maories again and again, and noted every item of their features and costume, a strange rushing sound, as of water boiling and steaming, filled the air. The room became clouded as with a thick steam, and when it cleared away through the hole in the roof, a pale woman, pressing an infant in her arms, was seen sitting close by the fire, on a stone raised above the group of Maories, who all sat on the ground. I saw her, and all present saw her. They spoke with her, though in a language I could not understand—none moved, and some buried their faces as if in mortal terror, in their garments. I heard her answer, in a high pitched voice, words addressed to her, and several times she raised a thin white arm and hand, and pointed upwards. In, I should think, some four minutes from the time I first saw her, the rushing sound came again, the place became again filled as if with steam, and when it cleared off, the woman and her infant were gone.

I can testify on oath, and so could the Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Bland, who accompanied me, that no living creature of mortal mould entered in or out through the only entrance to the "whare," at which we sat, and the smoke-opening in the roof was a round hole, not a foot in diameter. The one Maori who spoke English, at whose invitation we came, told us the chief they invoked could not appear within the "whare," but was outside, "up aloft," where the "wahine" (woman) pointed; that she was the spirit of his wife, who had fallen with her infant into a boiling spring and perished years ago—that she had brought his, the chief's, message, and given them the advice they sought.

I have often been assured these visitations or—to use the civilised term—"materialisations," were common in New Zealand. In the book I am now preparing for the press, the history of Modern Spiritualism all over the world, in the American section, I give the history of the manifestations occurring in Sullivan, Maine, U.S., from the year 1800 to 1806, during which time the spirit of Mrs. Nellie Butler came palpably into various houses, streets, gardens, and rooms—preached, sang, talked, and, on one occasion, walked in a procession of forty people from one place to another. I visited Sullivan myself, and I have procured from some of its oldest inhabitants,

some printed copies, and some verbal affidavits, of over sixty respectable persons, who saw, talked with, and heard, Mrs. Nellie Butler's spirit.

Through some of our best mediums, as well as by spirit influence, through my own lips we have often been exhorted not to sit in the dark, and the assurance has been given that a steadfast circle, amongst the members of which medium power existed, sitting together under good conditions for given periods of time, in subdued light, would and could obtain all that ever has or could be given, without cabinets, machinery, or any other equivocal or doubtful means. Very wide, rapid, and continuous journeyings over the world have left me no opportunity of testing this promise, but judging from the excellent manifestations I have seen in past times, and the marked deterioration of the power during the last ten years, since darkness has been the universal custom of physical mediumistic circles; when fantastic theories and untenable philosophies have almost blotted out the plain, obvious facts revealed by immortal spirits, and vituperation, recrimination, personal abuse, and personal invective, fill our journals, until the lookers on may well say, "See how these Spiritualists hate one another!" Since, I say, these pitiable abuses on our once glorious cause have superseded the kindness, unity of feeling, and general goodwill towards each other, which once marked our re-unions—I have almost forgotten this promise, at any rate, I have ceased to look for its fulfilment in this generation, unless, indeed, we begin *de novo*, and determine that we will put aside our dissensions, and all the vain theories in which they originate, and commence to investigate afresh, resolved to have first in our own lives, and then in Spiritualism, the truth, the whole truth, *and nothing but the truth*.

THE GREAT KINGSBURY PUZZLE.

BOOK III.—CHAPTER I.

TRAGEDIES are human dramas in which the extremes of bitterness are not always with the victim and his vulgar destroyer. Disgrace smites the sensitive and the innocent more than the guilty. The high crimes and misdemeanours of Miss Henriette Artus in this life have not been very grievous. In the old happy days at Rome we heard her accuse herself of being too fond of glitter, of show, of great people. I do not know whether she was very serious in those days in her self-accusations. But these pretty fripperies and fopperies in the morbid state of mind induced by past events have now acquired immense significance. She accuses herself of having slaughtered her father. Did he not ruin himself, kill himself, in his labour to provide her with palaces, diamonds, silks? And now she has struck down her brother, and made him execrated in every household in every country in the known world. But for her he would be still rich and prosperous, and Sir Rupert would be still alive.