

QUESTIONS AND IMPROMPTU ANSWERS.

By MISS HARDINGE.

Question.—Is faith necessary in order to acquire knowledge?

Answer.—Faith is knowledge: the soul's knowledge of that which the intellect, the reason, the judgment—that is to say, the external or human sense whose cumulative powers are intellect, reason, sense and judgment, have not reached—that, I say, is the soul's knowledge, which the external mind has not attained to. Our souls are wiser than we know of; the attributes of our spirits are mightier far, than their exhibition through the mere external mask of the body. Hence, when the soul intuitively appreciates any knowledge, or forms any conception of truth which it has not acquired through any of the external or ordinary channels of information common to man and called knowledge, that is faith. Is faith then necessary to knowledge? To what kind of knowledge? All knowledge that the mind can acquire through the avenues of the senses, may be gathered first from observation or instruction, or from any of the ordinary modes of obtaining information, and then applied to the intellect according to its capacity to receive knowledge. That is the ordinary process by which intellect is educated, by which we arrive at what we call knowledge. Now be pleased to rehearse each one in his own mind that which you say you know. You understand by the words "you know" all that you have learned from infancy, all that you have observed in the daily habits of life, all that you believe, and which you have passed judgment upon, through the senses. Is this all that you know? You know the sun will rise to-morrow—you have faith in it—not alone, because astronomy lays down for you a certain amount of fixed abstract scientific knowledge; for we know that the exact sciences carry us up to a certain point, and then, like Babbage's calculating machine, they fail. Where are our exact sciences? Exact! According to our comprehension of the word, at some point or other they fail. Hence all that the knowledge acquired by the senses can inform you of is but a belief, or a hope, or a trust which you vaguely call knowledge. But there is something more within your soul. That spirit which communes with the Great Spirit, that consciousness which bears witness of the attributes of the common Father and Author of creation, that spiritual recognition of eternity and infinity which the soul alone possesses, assures us of permanence, eternal permanence—assures us of that which we do not know, and that is faith. Even so of our recognition of the

soul's immortality. Neither logic, nor reason, nor gospel creed, nor revelation put it into the heart of man to believe it—God himself wrote it there. When He made the soul He formed within it a witness, speechless, incomprehensible by aid of sensuous perception; but yet a faith that trusts in the soul's own nature, a recognition of its deathless character, a perception of its alliance with an Eternal Author which originated the idea of God, and has handed down the belief in immortality from one generation to another, and will carry us forward to its perfect realization in eternity. That is faith. Even so in those forms of spiritual manifestation, anciently called miracle, and at present modern Spiritualism.

I prefer to illustrate my position upon these points, because here, far more than any mere amount of knowledge that we can apply by sensuous perception to the mind, does the line of demarcation between faith and intellectual understanding arise. You require faith, it was said of old, for the performance of miracles. It was affirmed so by One in whom you all trust, by One whom the light of the growing ages has revealed in a broader and yet more divine view with every advancing step that we take in science; for we perceive not alone that He was true in morals, but we now recognise the deep philosophy of those hidden parables by which He communicated the eternal wisdom of God to those who could not comprehend Him. Amongst these communings, we find the constant demand for faith from those upon whom He would have exercised His divine and beneficent power. Wherefore did He ask that which could not be rendered to Him? for a condition of mind is not influenced by will—our will, as we term it, is but an outgrowth of our minds, not the master of our minds. That which we vaguely call will, is a result and not a cause, and yet Jesus demanded faith. Could He, the greatest of philosophers, the truest of teachers, have asked for that which was not possible to be given? No, but He required to know the conditions existing in His subjects ere He could perform the operations of His beneficent will. When the spirit whom He addressed recognised that the cure was with the Master, it was the knowledge that the cure was there—it was the adaptation of the subject to the operator—it was the recognition that he who was to be benefited was already in *rapport* with his benefactor; and where the spirits thus harmonized, and the magnetisms formed a complete chain of unison, the cure was inevitable. Even so to-day. Understand more analytically that mind is a substance—that it is the substance of the soul—the exhibition of the spirit's perception—and you will not peevishly demand faith, but you will question if it be there. If it be, assure yourself that it is the reaching out of one invisible soul to another—it

is already the perception between the magnet and the loadstone,—it is already the recognition between the needle and the magnet; I should say—it is the perception that there is a scientific adaptation of magnetisms, an absolute relation of spirits: and this is not knowledge, as you term it—you may call it indeed the knowledge of the soul, but faith is the highest and grandest description of knowledge. It is the perception to which human intellect alone can never attain, which scholasticisms can never teach; not all the power of optics, not all the aid of human instruments, can ever enable you to perceive your own soul. But by faith you respect it, you know it, you feel it, you acknowledge it, although you cannot see it. Not all the powers of scholasticism can teach you of a God so faithfully as God has already taught the poorest savage that has never drunk at the fountain of human knowledge. He feels his God about him; he beholds in the grand machinery of creation the writing of his God. He cannot tell you why—no human scientific knowledge put this perception within him, and nothing can improve upon it. I might repeat then that faith is the soul's knowledge; learning, scholasticisms, whatever cultivates the intellect, is the man's and the senses' knowledge.

Question.—What is the nature of the process of the separation of the spirit from the body upon the death of the latter? What time does the process occupy? At what moment is it completed? And what is the first experience of the spirit on finding itself free from the body and in the spirit-world?

Answer.—What, then, is the philosophy of death? We realize that everything in creation is bound together by an invisible, attractive, and repulsive spiritual part—a something which we may well call the soul of things. That something is the life of all things, but it is not the spirit. We do not believe that these fair blossoms think or will, or possess anything of intelligence, but they live, and the mystic life that has arisen with this sap from the root, and even now pulsates in every portion of this delicate organism, is fast passing out from it; and that mysterious life is the soul of this blossom, but it lacks the spirit. We find that as organisms improve, and in the gradual ascent of Nature through her vast laboratory, from the rude and heterogeneous form of the mineral world, up to the grand and orderly structure of living animated beings, that there is as much improvement in the elements of matter, as much in the beauty and usefulness of form, as there is at last in the manifestations of spirit. When this becomes associated with matter, we call forms living creatures. We recognize that just so long as the will, intelligence, and power that guide the organism remain

with the form, it continues a living creature. But remember, that the spirit alone and its departure from the body are not the only evidence of death. These blossoms shall die, the walls around you shall crumble and perish, the garments you wear shall wax old and decay, the mountains shall melt away, and the heavens shall shrivel together like a scroll, and this is their death—it is the passing out of the mysterious invisible principle that constitutes them an organism.

Now, in the process of human life, there is not a single moment but in which the atoms that constitute our body are dying. Some portions are perpetually being aggregated. These are new living atoms; some are strong, they maintain their integrity, and these we may call the manhood and vigour of the atoms, whilst others are dying, passing away. The death, therefore, of material forms, is not like the death of man, the death where the intelligence and the will depart. During our lifetime our bodies die many times. During our lifetime our spirits depart many times. Each night, in dreamless sleep, when the body is in perfect harmony, when the entire of the voluntary system of nerves is at rest, and nothing but the involuntary forces are still plying their ordinary and ceaseless round of motion, the spirit departs from the body—it goes to its natural home, to spirit-life. This, you will say, is analogous to death, not so. The life that lives in these flowers, the life that constitutes the strength of this substance, the life that sustains these walls, is still within the atoms; and that magnetic life is a silver cord, that binds the spirit even in its departure to distant spheres—it is a chain that binds body and spirit together—it is the golden bowl of life which is not yet broken. Though the spirit, therefore, may be far away, so long as the magnetic life remains—trance, somnambulism, catalepsy, all the various forms of seeming death, amounting to total unconsciousness, and suspension even of the apparent functions of life—this is not death, unless the magnetic life depart also. The philosophy of sleep is the temporary absence of the spirit from the body; that of death is the total absence both of spirit and life.

You ask what is the process of separation. It is very various, and depends entirely on the characteristics of the organism. Some, as in extreme old age, part so gradually that the spiritual body—that the life waning,—passing away like the life of the flower that perishes on the stalk,—is scarcely perceived. The spirit passes with the life; and we call this temporary unconsciousness to surrounding objects, childishness, or a return to the circle of the first starting-point of the soul's existence. In such a case as this, it is but the passage of the soul from one chamber to another—the natural and inevitable transition of the spirit,

gradually through the gates of death. So much of the spiritual body has already ebbed away from the atoms, that the mere action of death is but a spasm, the snapping of a cord; it is but the deepening of a sleep, and the final passage of the spiritual body is like the evaporation of a thin air—a mere jet of gas passing through the brain—the last gate of life, the golden gate, through which when once the last flame of life—not spirit-life—has passed, the silver cord is not loosed, it is broken for ever, and never returns. How can I describe to you the passage of this life-flame, in all the infinite varieties of catastrophes through which the soul goes free? In the young and the strong, in the man full of life and vigour, the spiritual body departs, it is true, with the spirit, but very often only in part. Extreme tenacity of the magnetic life attaching itself to the atoms departs so slowly, so very slowly, that—start not! murmur not!—many and many a living form is enclosed within the sepulchre of death, but not until the conscious spirit has been so far removed from the body, and carried with it so much of the magnetism, that that which remains is unable to sustain the spirit. There is no consciousness, although I do allege—and the observation of clairvoyants and that of spirit-mediums again and again repeated will corroborate my statement—that thousands and thousands of forms are laid away in the grave ere yet the silver cord has been snapped. In other cases, the departure of the spirit is so violent and so sudden that the entire of the life-principle is expelled at once. The process of the expulsion varies therefore in time, but neither in degree nor in mode. It all passes from the extremities. The departing spirit, warned by some mysterious monition from without, or violently driven forth by accident, gathers about it, by attraction, all the various particles of the magnetic life, and these depart first from the extremities. They gradually cluster about the great life-centres,—the heart, the spine, and the brain; from the brain last of all, for as this is the great galvanic battery, the mighty locomotive that generates the constant flow of life through the system, so this is the last point where the departing life rallies. Could you perceive, therefore, the ebullition of the last bubble of the life-principle, you would see it like a fine gaseous aerial form drawn out through the brain, and gradually resolving itself into the shape of humanity, and clothing itself about the spirit.

This is the ordinary process of death; and in this passage, let me remark, that the last thought, be it what it may,—the last conscious thought of the soul always represents itself in the external form of the newly-born spirit. Hence it is that in those innumerable manifestations of the apparition of a departing soul, it is so constantly seen in the dress, or the last customary

appearance of its life. Thus it is that the soul so constantly appears to those who have beheld it at the moment of passing, even as in its mortal form, with all the surroundings of life, because such was the last conscious thought of the soul; and of its transition then, or of the moment of its awakening in spiritual life,—oh, what can we tell you? To some the passage is formed in what is called by spirits a sleep of death. There are some that sleep, some that wake not for days, or even for a longer period than this. There are others again who depart from this life, as it were, stepping, as I have said, from one chamber into another, and instantly behold themselves in all the surroundings of the spirit-world, which is enclosed within this natural world. It is a mighty change—a change as from darkness into sunlight—a change as from a prison into the broad free atmosphere of a glorious world. But all these changes are made in exact accordance with the state of the spirit, and with the state of the form from which the soul departs. In every condition, consciousness does not immediately ensue. There are at present in the world of spirits thousands, nay, millions of souls, whose passage has been so gradual, whose earthly affections have been so strongly centred upon this world, whose knowledge of aught but the world has been so limited, whose aspirations have been so narrowed by the earth, that they know not but that they are still upon the earth; for as there is a soul of things, as I have said—as there is a spiritual part in everything that is born into matter—and as, when the atoms drop off, the spiritual part remains, that is the furniture, that is the scenery, the surroundings, the habitations, the streets, dwellings, clothing of a spiritual sphere, corresponding to this world;—think of it, then! there are thousands and millions, walking your city streets, living in your midst, inhabiting a spirit-world, who scarcely recognize the difference between the natural and the spiritual worlds. We say this to bid you aspire, to ask you to elevate your thoughts above the grovelling attractions of earth; for you go to your own place—that place you make.

The philosophy of death is the Mount of Transfiguration. Whatsoever your spirit really is, what it has lived, what it has drawn to itself and poured out its magnetism upon, is now its world. Here you behold the physical sun lighting your earth; you recognize all your surroundings as physical. In the world of spirits they are of a purely spiritual character, and instead of shining, blazing or darkening upon you from without, they all proceed from within. Hence, if your mind is dark and your soul is grovelling, and there is no light within, it is thus that you are in the thick darkness that is seen and felt. It is because there is no light within, that unhappy spirits tell us they are alone

when they are in the midst of multitudes, that they are in darkness when the sun of creation is shining most gloriously upon them. Thus it is that in the darkest night, in the midst of the dungeon, in the cellars and in the gutters of physical life, there is glorious spiritual sunlight, for the angel brings his light within, for the shining and the lustrous soul reflects about him his own beauty, and creates his own scenery and his own landscapes. All this is almost inconceivable to you. But the philosophy of death is to transmute all the laws of matter into those of spirit, to cast off all the experiences of a physical world, and to liberate pure spirit with its magnetic body into the broad and glorious vistas of eternity, where every living creature goes to his place.

I would yet pause more on the nature of the first experience of the spirit, on finding itself free from the body and in the spiritual world; but I should have to dwell upon the experience of every individual in the race, for each differs from the other. Oh that it were my privilege to tell you of the wondrous modes, of instruction by which great hearts and mighty souls are taught, who have lived in darkness. Let me take one. Let me remember, some 400 years ago—surely it must be that—when in this same blooming month of April, the bells of many and many a great city throughout the whole land of Europe tolled, because the great-hearted thunderer of the Reformation was dead. The man, the brave, bold, stout-hearted monk, who had stood alone with his mighty breast, and with his bold brain, and his strong right hand, carried the battle axe of the Lord into the camps of superstition—he was gone! The world said he was dead, and they mourned him as such; they lamented for him, and they said the sword of the Lord and of Gideon was broken. 400 years ago, what knew he of our God? What did he realize of our spirit-world? How much did he recognize of the soul's destiny in progress, in work, in daily life, in practical experience? How much did this great and glorious enthusiast know of the realities of the spiritual existence, which is a continuity of this? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Yet, good, and true, and brave, could it be, in the order of creation, that this great soul and this glorious servant should be punished for the sin of ignorance, and for the fact that he lived 400 years before his time? They say—spirits who know him—that he sat at the feet of his God, as he demanded to sit; that he heard the eternal chorus of the saints in rest, as he hoped to hear it; that he beheld the white-robed legions of redeemed souls stretching away through the plains of infinity, away, away, away, into endless horizons of the heaven that he had taught of. They say that the glorious sound of an eternal hymn, unvarying, unchanging in phrase and prayer, "For ever, for ever,

for ever!" sounded in his spirit ears, and his heart was glad, and his great soul was bowed down in worship, and he stood amidst the noble army of martyrs, and the shining rolls of saints, where he belonged, in that heaven that he had taught of—in the heaven that he had sighed for; and that on, on for ever sounded the hymn; moveless and eternal, still they stood around. He knew not time. Ages to him or seconds it might be—he knew not time, nor movement, nor change; and there the great-hearted Reformer stood, sometimes in marvel how many ages had rolled over the praying worshipping saints. Sometimes he deemed it was but a moment; and then came the thoughts of earth. Then came the memories of love, of wife and children and friends—where, where were they? Nought to him now. Then came the memory of enemies, the enemies for whom the brave, great soul had prayed, the enemies whom he had forgiven, the enemies whom he had bravely fought, but whom in dying he had blessed and stood by their death-bed, and bid them be of good cheer. Where were they now? And, as he thought, pictures, fearful pictures of interminable realms, dark, dark, never-ending, deeper, deeper, lower, lower yet, while endless oceans of blazing fire, and while leaping flames and awful tossing billows of liquid destruction were borne up beneath his eyes, full, full of tossing arms, of agonized faces and of the wild, wild shrieks of never-ending woe, were sent up to his home of rest for "Pity! pity! pity!" to be answered by the chant of the saints, "For ever and for ever." "It could not be! It shall not be!" was the outspoken thought of the great heart. Down, down, down to them, down to those who suffered, down to those who needed help, he plunged. Lost, lost from heaven—it was nought to him, so long as one living creature needed his outstretched hand, heaven was lost to him—the heaven of his imagination. But even as he beheld the floating stars shining above his head and the gracious moon that long ago he had gazed upon in the earthly firmament, sailing in majestic stillness above him; even as he recognized the green fields and the tall forests, the castle, the tower, the slumbering city bathed in moonlight, and the sleeping multitudes of earth watched by the calm eyes of angels on their silver thrones—even as he beheld these, figured in the glittering sky, one hundred years had passed and he had been all these long, long years learning to comprehend that heaven and hell were within him.

Such, friends, are some of the impressions that we receive in spirit-land, such, some of the experiences, that we learn in spirit-life. Pause with me, and ascend with that great risen soul, now searching for the God of Creation and not for the God of Theology—now-looking for the future of a human working

world, and not for the imaginary Deity, fashioning creatures only for worship. Follow him through the long shining roads of stars, when he asks for his God's immensity, when he asks for the origin of the Infinite;—follow him through the long roads glittering with stars, set with suns;—follow him through double and treble suns and parti-coloured worlds, shining and gleaming, glittering, wheeling and turning in their magnificent pageant of eternity, and on for ever, until he hears the chorus of ten thousand millions rejoicing systems, shouting "End there is none! End there is none!" Follow him back again to earth, where he seeks to know God's laws, where he strives to comprehend his Creator's wisdom; follow east, west, north, south, watching how beautifully, how wonderfully every creature is adapted to its place, how beneficently the wise Creator has cared for the shining butterfly, and for the crawling caterpillar, and clothed the beast of the Arctic regions, and of the south, each with the warm or scanty covering appropriate to its nature;—follow him through the forest and behold how the various creatures, each one fed on leaf and blade of grass, and flower and air, and dew drop and supplied by the tender hand of the Infinite Father;—follow him through the growing worlds, through the wondrous birth of new systems, through the creation of satellites, through the formation of rings, through the bursting of the mighty catastrophic action of meteor, comet, planet, satellite, sun and star into fresh worlds;—follow him through the infinitely large to the infinitely little, and another hundred years have gone, and still the great master learns. And now he would know how to worship God, how to serve Him, now he asks permission, but to understand how to please Him, and back, back, back again to earth he wanders amidst the cities, and now by the side of the preacher, is whispering to him of a working God, of a loving God, of a Father, an eternal One, Who cares for every creature, Who has fashioned all in wisdom, placing them where they should be, and Who is calling them up through sorrow and tribulation to higher and higher states, and disciplining them through adversity. Follow him, as he stands by the side of the poor, the miserable, of the broken heart and the bruised back beneath the human lash, teaching them to raise their streaming eyes and trembling hands to Him who never fails them;—follow him to the couch of the rich, the great, the powerful; behold them stretched in pain, and hear his spirit whisper, ministering to them tenderly, and warning them that they are partaking of the common lot of suffering shared by all humanity; follow him, thus ministering in spirit-influence, thus pouring into the mind of sage and theologian, philosopher, inventor, every great and holy thought, every new and bright idea that spirit-land can give.

Another hundred years have passed, and now the spirit-tap has come, and, building their telegraphic bridge between the spirit-world and earth, on which are pressing crowds of shining feet, the hosts of God are pouring now on earth; and foremost in their ranks are these great-hearted students, who in bygone days have passed from earth in darkness, but learned again and yet again by the bright experience, by the strange but real teachings of spirit-land, foot by foot with you, progressing as your world progresses, no faster, yet no slower, keeping pace with you, never in advance nor yet beyond their age.

Such are some of the experiences of bygone days, and such will yours and every one of yours be when you pass the golden gate, when the fine and vaporous form of the magnetic life is all drawn out, when all is still and the last heart-throb is done; perhaps wondering strangely where they are; perhaps with your illuminated soul, prepared for the transfiguration, to drop the mask of earth, and stand as spirit, with all your thoughts, hopes, and purposes revealed; perhaps you may be one of those missionaries who will come to earth again to teach the world, as my brave pilgrim whom I told you has come; but whatsoever be your lot or fate, it will be that for which you are best adapted, for which you strive, for which you study, for which you fit yourself with every moment's life and experience. Oh, labour! awake, awake, ye sons of God; put on the armour of eternal light here, nor fear death's transfiguration; search God's ways, nor wait till the portals of the grave shall open to you and disclose the blazing mysteries of God, too great for your dazzled eyes to behold, and to compel you, like my pilgrim, to traverse centuries ere you find the real and true. But in this great philosophy of death there is one parting word that I would give you. Oh, trust Him! He is the God of the living, and not of the dead. With Him there is no death; with Him the promise that He made is not in vain, and there shall be no more death. Whatever be the form or mode of change, whatever be the disruption in the physical system, whether in violence or in natural decay, whether you drop like o'er ripe fruit, or violently rush off through the gates of life, expelled by the hand of murder, you are in the hand of Him the ever-living God; the change is for the better, the schoolhouse of instruction is far wider, the experiences of the hereafter are progressive. Trust to Him, and you shall go out no more in the darkness of the grave, no more in the shadow of the dreaded tomb, but through the arch of a risen life, piloted by the liberty-angel of eternity, to find yourself upon the mountain of transfiguration, a glorious risen spirit.
