

A THOUGHT-READER'S THOUGHTS.

CHAPTER I.

“THOUGHT-READER, read thyself,” is a cry that has gone out to me in many lands; for most people who interest themselves at all in the matter think it a duty I owe the public to lay bare my own thoughts as fully and as candidly as I have frequently laid bare the thoughts of others.

From time to time I have endeavoured to fall in with the wishes so expressed; and my views upon what is called “Thought-reading” have gone forth to the world in almost all, if not all, written languages; but, in spite of this, I to-day find—especially amongst my own countrymen—a very general desire to know something more of the subject.

In order, therefore, to supply this “something more,” I have in the present work considerably enlarged upon my previous communications,¹

¹ By kind permission of the proprietor of the *Nineteenth Century* I include in this work parts of an article of mine which appeared in that magazine for December, 1886.

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and, in addition, have included my impressions of some of the notable personages with whom I have been brought in contact, and the places and countries I have visited.

These events are not chronologically arranged, nor are they recorded with the regularity and precision of a diary ; the whole thing, in fact, is simply my thoughts casually noted in leisure moments.

Whilst a mere child my perceptive faculties were remarkably keen ; and the power to arrive at other people's thoughts was, I presume, with me at an early age. But it was only about seven years or so ago that I began to practically test the matter.

My first
 "subject."

My first important experiment was performed with the Very Rev. Dr. Bickersteth, the Dean of Lichfield.

I was on a visit to the Dean, and one morning, after breakfast, the subject of conversation having turned upon "willing" and "mesmerism," he asked me if I thought it possible for a person to read the thoughts of another.

I replied that I believed such a thing, under certain conditions, would be possible ; in fact, that I was almost certain I could do so myself.

This reply naturally called for a test ; and the Dean undertook to think of some object in the Deanery of which I could know absolutely nothing.

My attempt to arrive at the Dean's thoughts

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were, as compared with my after-efforts, somewhat crude, but the experiment was perfectly successful.

I remember that I took my host by the hand—I was from the first impressed with the necessity of establishing a physical communication between the subject and the operator—and led him from the breakfast-room ; not quickly, as I invariably do now, but slowly and lingeringly.

We entered the study, and I immediately felt that I was in the correct locality. A moment more, and I placed my hand upon an object which, according to the impressions I then received, I believed to be my subject's selection.

I was quite right : the object was a bust of Lady Augusta Stanley.

This experiment, I need hardly say, emboldened me to make further attempts ; and I speedily arrived at a much higher pitch of perfection.

But let it be clearly understood that I cannot to-day find an object thought of with any greater certainty than I did on my, as it were, opening occasion. To-day's execution is, of course, speedier, but my improvement is in going beyond simple tests of this character ; for it is astonishing how, when the faculty is once with one, the power to thought-read develops by practice, until the most intricate form of experiment can be encompassed. This I have abundantly proved in almost every coun-

The process of development.

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try under the sun, and with all sorts and conditions of men.

At first my exhibitions puzzled even myself, and I could not readily account for them ; for, when young, one is so apt to imagine one's self supernaturally endowed ; and experiments such as I performed were certainly calculated to develop a tendency of this kind. But whilst carrying out the demonstrations, I set myself the task of arriving at a practical explanation of them ; and eventually I convinced myself that, instead of there being anything of an occult character about my experiments, they were one and all accountable on a purely natural basis.

Later on I intend unburdening my thoughts as to the true explanation of the process ; but I purpose first giving instances of the practice of thought-reading and the curious features they in some cases present.

What the
 mystics
 thought.

I shall never forget how the idle many and, not infrequently, the learned few imbued with abnormal fancies, sought to invest what I did with an aspect of supernaturalism. Some even went so far as to say that I did not myself understand what I performed. Others, thorough-going Spiritualists, waxed wroth because I would not acknowledge the influence of "spirit-power" in connection with my work.

"You are a medium," would say the Spiritualists, "a medium, without knowing it."

"Oh, no!" would answer the Psychical Research folk, "he is a conductor of 'brain-

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waves' ;" and then would follow some learned chatter upon Telepathy.

"Brother!" said a white-turbanned dark-skinned follower of Madame Blavatsky, placing his hand reverently upon my shoulder, "you possess an 'astral-body;' work for the cause of Theosophy, and the heart of Koot Hoomi will be glad."

I fear my answers in many instances were not of the character that turneth away wrath; but then what is to be done with people who are superior alike to argument and common sense, and who measure everything by the standard of improbability?

I cannot too emphatically disavow any belief in what is called Spiritualism. My investigations, in fact, speedily convinced me of the futility of the true believer's aspirations, the vulgarity and absurdity of the "manifestations" exhibited, and the invariable rascality of the performing "mediums."

Verily, it is enough to make one rub one's eyes in bewildering wonderment, on coming across in the daily newspapers, side by side with the most matter-of-fact announcements, the advertisements of a society devoted to the study of ghost-lore, asking for information about "spooks" and their doings; as Mr. Punch has it:

"Wanted ghosts of every variety
 Fitted to mix in learned society."

To old fashioned believers in ghosts, this hue

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and cry in the daily press after manifesting "spirits" by those who profess to be their best friends can scarcely, I should think, be pleasant reading, whilst common-sense folk can only regret that the society in question is not as solicitous over the living as it is over the shades of the dead.

It is distressing to think how many mouths of the hungry present the money annually expended by these enthusiasts in their quest of the departed would have filled.

Just as no county family can claim to be quite the thing without the possession of a family ghost, a personal acquaintance with a "spirit" is, I suppose, a thing to be proud of, and the closer the intimacy the greater the pride.

This may be the case in a general way, but so far as I am myself concerned acquaintance with "visitors from the other world" has, in every instance, been the reverse of satisfactory; and I certainly take no pride from the association.

A noted
medium.

As far back as August, 1880, I made the acquaintance of a "spirit." It was at 2, Vernon Place, Bloomsbury; and one Bastian was the "medium" who produced it. "It," I may say, was a he, that is, a male spirit; for there are, it should be known, sexes amongst the spooks as amongst mortals.

Mr. Bastian was great amongst the believers, and, to speak technically, was a singularly "powerful medium for physical manifestations."

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At the sitting in question, the proceedings opened with a dark séance, at which the shade of a German "manifested." He was a stock spirit, and knew the ropes pretty well ; but, unfortunately, he had but an imperfect knowledge of his mother tongue, and was unable to sustain an intelligible conversation with those who happened to know German ; otherwise he gave complete satisfaction.

The dark séance was followed by what, by way of distinction, is called a "light séance," at which, however, darkness and not light predominates.

This portion of the sitting was for "materialization," the "medium" having, it was alleged, the power to produce "spirits" from the vasty deep—or wherever they are supposed to come from.

The "medium" went into an adjoining room, which was separated from the séance chamber by a black curtain hung over the doorway. There he fell into a trance whilst the broken-winded musical box in our room wheezed out some dirge-like notes.

All this time we poor sitters had to clasp each others hands ; not one of us daring to move for fear of breaking the circle ; and, as is well known, the "spirits" can't or won't appear unless the magnetic chain of hands is kept intact, which shows a highly commendable sense of discretion on the part of the "spirits."

It was a truly mournful half-hour, that waiting

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A
 "spirit"
 appears.

for the "spooks;" and the fact that one could not do anything to shut out the sound of that infernal machine made one's position doubly unbearable; and it was a positive relief when, so to speak, the curtain rang up and the ghost walked.

Out he stepped, in the dim light, a modest, retiring sort of a spirit, attired—alas! how the mighty have fallen—in faultless evening dress.

He hesitated a good deal in front of the curtain, as if the company was strange to him and he was waiting to be introduced.

Seeing his embarrassment, a lady—a true believer—sitting by my side, came to his rescue, and asked if anybody recognized him.

No one answered.

A long pause, and then the lady said to me, in a whisper, "I'm sure the spirit knows you."

At this the "spirit" beamed—at least so it seemed in the semi-darkness.

The room was hushed, and one could hear one's heart beat, when suddenly there came upon the uncomfortable stillness,—

"I'm your brother!"

It was the "spook" who had found voice.

This startling announcement took all but true believers by surprise (your thorough-going Spiritualist is not surprised at anything that happens in a séance room), and every one was asking himself to whom did the message refer.

"It is to you the dear spirit speaks," softly said the lady, squeezing my hand in that

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spiritual manner peculiar to both light and dark séances.

“To me?”

“Yes! can't you see the spirit is nodding to you?” and, sure enough, there was the spirit making a most friendly bow.

This, I must confess, was a surprise to me, for, as a matter of fact, I had never lost a brother; but the “spirit” seemed so certain about it that I thought it would be impolite to contradict him, especially as he had come such a long way to make the statement. So I remained silent.

But this did not seem to suit the lady, who urged me to speak to the “spirit.”

Whilst anxious to do the polite thing towards one who had evinced such a brotherly interest in me, I couldn't for the life of me think of anything suitable to say. But there was the lady nudging me on and the “spirit” smiling encouragement, so I had to say something and I said it.

“Which brother are you?” I asked, feeling that the “spirit” wouldn't lie; but that on finding he had made a mistake, would own up and turn his affections to some one else.

Nothing of the kind.

“I'm your brother Willie,” he replied as glibly and as confidently as if he had known me all his life.

“Willie?” I echoed incredulously, hoping the tone of voice would turn him from the broad

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path of lying and deception ; for I never had a brother Willie.

But so great apparently was his infatuation for me that he refused to take the hint and unblushingly reiterated his untruthful assertion.

The
 "spirit"
 lied.

Needless to say I was shocked and grieved at such spiritual depravity, and I was immediately reminded of a great scientist's words about its being nobler to live a crossing-sweeper than die a prince and have one's spirit appear at a séance at so much per hour.

In that moment all my faith in the superiority of "spirits" died ; and I came to the conclusion that a high-class "spook" was not a better liar than an ordinary mortal, and not a whit more ingenious.

What was the use of being a ghost at all, I thought, if it couldn't manage things better than that? It was a sorry return for the five shillings I had paid, besides it wasn't fair to the others amongst whom there might be some who yearned for the companionship of ghostly brothers.

Then there flashed across my mind the idea that perhaps after all it wasn't a good specimen of the genus "spook" or—happy notion—wasn't a "spook" at all, but merely a mortal masquerading as one.

This determined me to test the matter, and as will be seen, great things came of it.

I may mention that I had not come altogether unprepared for the matter in hand, I had,