The subject that I have chosen for my address this evening is so important a one that I felt my work in Dunedin would be but half accomplished did I not attempt to speak to you on what has changed the whole tone of my life, and which, in my opinion, has had more to do with the rapid advance of Freethought, notably in Melbourne and Sydney, in America, Europe and India, and elsewhere than anything else. "The emancipating influence of Spiritualism" is a great subject, and, were I to attempt to give the history of it, the whole of my address might be taken up with the names even of the scientific and learned men and women who, among the millions of believers, have given us their written testimony as to its influence; and I might quote page after page of illustrations of the reality of Spirit intercourse. But, as it is in the interests of Truth that I am speaking, I take the simplest and most effectual way of gaining your attention, and will state as clearly as I can the effect the belief has had on my own life. And here I would ask all who are inclined to scoff at the idea of spirit intercourse, and of the life beyond the grave, to read what some of its greatest exponents have to say about it. I can speak with authority in this respect, for I have never got over the surprise which greeted me on discovering that Spiritualism had a great literature of its own—the Spiritualism that I presumed to despise and ignore. Some five
years ago a gentleman in Sydney, a worshipper of Herbert Spencer, and a writer of great ability himself, addressed a letter to Mr. Bright in warm terms of appreciation of his lectures, but begging him to drop Spiritualism—the only flaw, as he said in his almost perfect teaching. Mr. Bright replied by asking him, as a sensible man, to read something about this subject before giving such a strong opinion about it, adding that on other topics a little knowledge is supposed to be necessary before giving any strong criticism. This gentleman was wise enough to take the advice given, read some 2000 pages of the best writers, including A. J. Davis and Hudson Tuttle, and without seeing any of the phenomena, became convinced of the truth of the philosophy, but is unfortunately so illiberal that he has now no word of condemnation strong enough for those who refuse to believe or inquire. But I cannot forget that there were not two more prejudiced opponents to Spiritualism than the Rev. J. Pillars and myself. We opposed it on different grounds. He, gifted with rare spiritual insight, realised the truth that this world and all it contains are portions of the great spiritual universe; he was convinced that death was not annihilation and that the next stage would be one of progression, the grand order of Evolution still going on; and asserted, moreover, that it might be possible for the spirit, as in Shakespeare's "Hamlet," to make itself visible if some great occasion required it, but scouted the idea as profane, vulgar, and ridiculous, that, for a spirit to communicate with some dear friend, it must needs seek the assistance of a medium who, like a celebrated one then visiting the colonies was reputed to consume a bottle of brandy a day. My objections had a different basis. I had begun life with a sort of perfunctory belief in a future existence, because the clergy said there was one, and that Jesus was declared to have opened the gates of Immortality for us; but I became a confirmed sceptic at an early age, recognised the fact that I must decide for myself alone, without help of clergyman or Bible, if there were a future life or not; that I must not take at second-hand that which my own reason could assure me of. And so, gradually, I became a mate-
rialist, for, without an infallible Bible, the intuitional theory was of no avail to me, seeing that if left to pure reason, there is just as much argument to be offered against a future life as for one; and so, when the late John Tyrman came first to Sydney and drew large audiences to hear the new Gospel, lectures were given in the Unitarian Church against Spiritualism, and there could not be found a more prejudiced opponent to it than myself. And now comes the most difficult part of my task. Moncure D. Conway, in his book entitled “Emerson at Home and Abroad,” speaks of the magical effect that one line of Emerson, casually met with in a newspaper, had upon his own life. It came to him in a moment, when, without any firm foothold for his faith, he was passing through one of those spiritual crises that all earnest souls must experience. Conway says these few words of Emerson came to him like cool water to the parched lips of a man dying of thirst, and, from that day forward, life bore a new aspect for him. He adds, disappointing enough, “I will not repeat that line to my readers, for it was my mental condition that gave to it its priceless value.” And so it is with all experiences of the inner-life; we repeat the words that gave us so much cheer, and lo! they fall as the very emptiest sound on ears unprepared for the message. So how shall I convey to you the magical effect that the first spirit message had upon myself?

Possibly my life had been so darkened by a great sorrow that the smallest glimmer of light from the other world was made visible by the great darkness that surrounded me, and that others full of life and happiness would fail to see; but, believe me, friends, my experience is as true as that the stars are shining all day long in the heavens, although we have to wait till the night to make their beauty visible. Many were the books and so-called spirit messages brought me by friends, month after month—all of which fell empty and meaningless on my ears, and were felt to be almost a cruel insolence in my condition of hopeless apathy, for had not the very best and purest life left only bitter memories of crushed hopes and apparently wasted energies, forcing out of me that bitterest question of all, “Is life worth
Hard work for children was the only consolation left.

One day a friend brought me a book entitled, the “Holy Truth,” by H. Junor Browne, of Melbourne, saying that he and his wife would like to read it with me. We read it aloud, and, for the first time, I felt assured that the writer was a truthful reporter of a real experience. This was the turning point of my thoughts, and I always feel thankful to Junor Browne for having written that simple record of his own spiritual experience. For some months afterwards I read with more interest any books that came in my way, and even tried the Planchette for some weeks with a friend without the slightest effect, beyond unintelligible scrawling. This went on for some time, and I had ceased to care to trouble about it when, one memorable Sunday night, a young lady who lived with me, and whom I had known from a child, sat down at some one’s request to try the Planchette for the first time. She had so strong an aversion to even the name of Spiritualism that we had not asked her before to join us. To our great surprise and her own, the pencil began to move in a marvellous manner. An irresistible desire took me to her side; we placed our hands on the Planchette together, and in a few minutes, in less time than it takes me to tell you, sheets of paper were covered with messages in the handwriting of a dear one passed away, with news from spirit-life of his surroundings there, of his vain attempts for months to influence my mind, and his joy at being able to make himself known at last. Like Emerson’s line to Moncure Conway, my first spirit message might have no meaning for any one but myself; but its effect on my life was as strong as ever was that vision to Saul on his way to Damascus, and changed my career as completely as that heavenly vision changed his. That message is now to me but the A B C of a great philosophy—the first step into a new and unexplored territory, where I am still only a learner. But I have never lost the sense of the wonderful change that came over my surroundings with that access of light. The world that had been so hard and cold became enchanted ground. Death was robbed of all its
horrors; the grave had lost its sting. And each lesson I learned gave me fuller glimpses of the great harmony of the universe. All was natural, simple, and beautiful. As the butterfly escapes from the chrysalis, so the spirit escapes from the earthly body. There is no violent change; each one gets his deserts—goes to his own place. If the lessons of this life have been well and faithfully learned, so the entrance into the other is, as a natural sequence, bright and joyful. The trials of this life are to be welcomed as a means of education; the rich and prosperous are not to be envied; and, looking back through the ages, do we not see that the prophets, the poets, the philosophers, the martyrs, all the great ones of the race have caught the same light and felt the same story? Read the life of Prince Siddartha in the "Light of Asia," or the short career of Jesus in the Gospels, freed from supernatural distortion; read the life of Socrates, and search for the best thoughts of our living and dead writers, and you will find that the law of love and progression that reigns in the higher spheres is the gist of all their teaching, is the inspiration of every great soul. Of course I have not arrived at my present knowledge of the spiritual phenomena without coming to some conclusion as to its origin.

The young friend, through whose mediumship I obtained my first spirit message, proved to be a wonderful medium, and it is through her, in my own drawing-room, and generally when we two were quite alone, that I have received my most convincing tests of the reality of spirit intercourse. She passed from one phase of mediumship to another, became a trance speaker, the first development of which gave me a new glimpse into that almost unexplored domain of psychology, and another lesson in the rather trite maxim that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." If I had seen a stranger pass into a deep unconscious sleep, and presently give an address of which she was quite incapable in her normal state, I should have thought there was some deception, and that I had been purposely deceived. But when a young girl, who is as one of your own children, is thus
influenced, when on awakening you find to your intense astonishment that she cannot tell you a single word that she has said, that no suggestion or hint can help her to bridge over the time since she became unconscious, and when is added the fact that she is incapable of deception, you are confronted with a psychological problem that must be solved scientifically sooner or later. That it will be explained and proved by Science to be a natural fact and not a supernatural one I am convinced.

It is not a whit more wonderful that you can receive a message from a friend passed on a little higher in this marvellous life of ours than that a message can be placed in your hands from a friend some 16,000 miles away, and which has left his hands but a few hours before, and that could be instantaneously sent under certain conditions. I believe that all the spiritual phenomena will be accounted for on purely natural, scientific principles, and that it will be found that they are produced by our invisible guardian friends, by the agency of that mysterious power called magnetic force. Each step in scientific knowledge opens the mind to the conviction that this Universe is indeed one vast, harmonious whole. Is there anything more wonderful in our early lessons in Science than to find that Sound, Heat, Light, Chemical Action are the result of vibrations of different ratio, or that Sound goes on beyond the limit of our finite ears, that Light transcends the mortal vision, so that it is now a matter of scientific knowledge that there are sounds in Nature that we cannot hear—sights that we cannot see? There is one peculiarity about this magnetic force to which I would draw special attention. It is the fact that this Science wholly ignores what other sciences recognise as force and power. Let me explain. There is no question connected with the electric agencies by which distant communication is secured that is more suggestive than the minuteness of the power by which it is sustained. When a city is invested by an army or fleet, as Alexandria was lately by the English, and cruel bombshells are sent into its midst, the terrible messengers of death and destruction go screaming across and crashing into the doomed houses and
among the inhabitants with appalling force. When you would blast a sunken rock that impedes navigation you get the idea again of force and power. But when by this mysterious magnetic force a message is sent 3000 miles beneath the ever-fretting sea, or from one end of a vast continent to another, ordinary force seems altogether ignored. The power employed bears more truthful comparison with the action of the brain when human thought is evolved. And I believe it will be found that this mysterious magnetic force, so quiet in its action as to be almost imperceptible, is the link that connects us with the invisible world, and that those gifted with a seventh or magnetic sense are the conductors of it—the media of communication. The idea of a seventh or magnetic sense has been broached lately by so great an authority as Sir William Thompson, of Glasgow, and there will in the future be a great contest on the nature of it and its relation to psychology, between unphilosophic scientific bigotry on the one hand, and the upholders of the scientific spiritual philosophy on the other. Many of my experiences can be accounted for only on the supposition of an intelligent operator at the other end of the spiritual telegraph. I will give you an illustration of this, especially as the simple incident I am about to relate has something more tangible about it than many of the ordinary tests, which are only useful to the person investigating. We had been told by a lecturer in Sydney that our spirit friends might become our messengers if we would but cultivate the power of which we had the clue. This was an interesting idea to me, as it gave back again the original meaning in the Greek of the word angel—angelos, a messenger,—and soon an opportunity presented itself for a trial. A friend, who had sat occasionally in our circle while on a visit to Sydney, making a third member, was leaving for New Zealand, and we asked our two spirit friends if it would be possible to give us tidings of our friend when he crossed the ocean. The answer was that they would try, but that it was a new work for them, and would be attended with some difficulty. For two or three weeks we had no tidings, but one evening we were told that at last they had found him. They described him as
sitting in a room with a sick man, but as there was no me-
dium present they could not hear the conversation. They
said that the sick man was in bed very ill, and our friend
sat beside him looking very sad, but that presently he began
to talk more cheerfully, took out of his pocket our two por-
traits and showed them to the invalid, who seemed much
interested. We copied this message verbatim and posted it
to our friend, anxious to know if there could be any truth
in it. Before our letter could reach New Zealand, about
five days after we posted it, we received a letter from our
friend, which had crossed ours, in which he told us, as a
simple piece of news, that he had made a new acquain-
tance—a sick gentleman, who had been confined to his bed for
more than a year, and who had sent a message for him to
call and see him. He was, he said, a Freethinker and a
Spiritualist, and was much interested in hearing of our
sittings. Our friend added that he was glad he had our
likenesses in his pocket, that he showed them to him, the
gentleman being especially anxious to see the medium. I
left for England immediately after this, and our sittings
could never be resumed on the old footing; but although
the medium and myself are separated we have both passed
into a higher phase of mediumship. She has become clair-
voyant and clairaudient, and it is an assured fact to me
that my life is guided by the ministrations of friends who
have passed to the higher life, and I know that my feet
have been led even to this platform.

I thought that I was a Radical and a Freethinker be-
fore I became a Spiritualist, but I find I was more conserv-
ative than radical, more of a dogmatist than a Freethinker.
I was a conservative, for I presumed to limit the capabili-
ties of man’s nature; I was a dogmatist, for I, with my
finite vision, thought I had complete knowledge of this
speck of earth of ours, with its wonderful life and its re-
lations to the illimitable Universe. I have also become a
more ardent secular worker, for this world has been trans-
formed for me into a Palace of Truth like that described by
Gilbert in his comedy of that name, in which society ap-
pears as it really is, and not as it assumes to be. And so,
with my extended vision, I find that a cause which is not considered respectable by people of fashion is generally one that deserves support, and I have discovered that the only really respectable thing in this world is the pursuit and advocacy of Truth. And, finally, I am not anxious to convert any one to Spiritualism, as no one's opinion can be forced. All I wish is that the future life and the possibilities of the Spirit shall not be dogmatised about. I do not venture to use the name of God and Religion, for the common idea of those abused names revolts and pains me. For to me the Universe is God, and I know that some supreme Power therein holds me to the law of Duty, and as Plato—

Groping in the darks of thought
Touched the great hand and knew it not,
so the groping heart of man in every age and clime—
warmed to sympathy, melted to mercy, nerved to justice—
has felt the touch of the great hand, although the lips have named it not or named it wrongly.

'Twas a faith that was held by the Northmen bold
In the ages long, long ago,
That the river of death, so dark and cold,
Was spanned by a radiant bow.
A rainbow bridge to the blest abode
Of the strong gods, free from ill,
Where the beautiful Urda fountain flowed
By the ash tree Igdrasill.

They held that when, in life's weary march,
They should come to that river wide,
They would set their feet on the shining arch
And would pass to the other side.
And they said that the gods and the heroes crossed
That bridge from the world of light,
To strengthen the soul, when its hope seemed lost,
In the conflict for the right.

Oh! beautiful faith of the grand old past,
So simple yet so sublime,
A light from that rainbow bridge is cast
Far down o'er the tide of time.
We raise our eyes and we see above
The souls in their homeward march,
They wave their hands and they smile in love
From the height of the rainbow arch.
The swelling tide of our grief we stay,
While our fond hearts warmly yearn,
And we ask if over that shining way
They shall nevermore return.
Oh! we oft forget that our lonely hours
Are known to the souls we love,
And they strew the path of our life with flowers
From that rainbow arch above.

We hear them call, and their voices sweet
Float down from that bridge of light
Where the gold, and crimson, and azure meet
And mingle their glories bright.
We hear them call, and the soul replies
From the depths of the life below,
And we strive on the wings of faith to rise
To the height of that radiant bow.

Oh, fair and bright does that archway stand
Through the silent lapse of years,
Fashioned and reared by no human hand
From the sunshine of love and tears.
Sweet spirits, our footsteps are nearing fast
The light of the shining shore;
We shall cross that rainbow bridge at last
And greet you in joy once more.

According to the *Christian Leader* of March 20th, 1884, "Professor Tait says that the great advance of the future in natural theology is to be found in the corridor now opened up between Science and Religion, not through the material world but through the immaterial. He believes that the reconciliation of conflicting schemes of religious and scientific truth will be found by investigating what he calls the unseen Universe. That avenue has been walled up; there has been placed over it, in the name of both Science and Religion, 'No thoroughfare this way.' In the twentieth century that wall will be thrown down from turret to foundation-stone, and scientific and religious thought will be reconciled by an appeal to the realities of the unseen world." As another has truly remarked, "The wonders of one age become the common-place facts of the next."

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