

POETRY DICTATED BY VOICES.

BY ROBERT C. COCKERILL.

ON reading Sister Sanghamitta's strange experiences with mental voices, I am impelled to record some strange experiences of my own, so strange that few who hear them will believe them. The history of the voice or voices I hear is as follows:

On or about the 11th day of March 1895, I was in my bedroom undressing. It was Monday, and I had been discussing the preacher of the previous day and his sermon. I was in those days an Agnostic and a keen evolutionist, which latter I still am. But my views on religion underwent a considerable change as the result of the strange experiences I am about to record.

I was seated on the bed, when suddenly I felt myself seized by an invisible Power, and my mouth uttered the words aloud, "I am the Lord your God." Immediately afterwards I heard a voice apparently in the room. (though I could see no one,) which said, "Write in your note-book—." Considerably startled I leapt off the bed, got my note-book and pencil, and wrote from dictation:

"I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"Before Abraham was, I am.

"Thou shalt not have (or love) other gods besides me."

After writing this, I became unconscious, and did not recover until the following day.

The voice remained with me, and proceeded to give me instruction concerning the Christian religion. For three months I held numerous mental discussions with this mysterious voice, these usually taking the shape of curtain lectures. For three nights the voice called itself the "Devil," and I had horrible waking nightmares. But as a rule it was "God" or "Jesus," and I was addressed, "my son."

But after about three months, the voice suddenly called itself

"Allah," and proceeded to discuss the Koran and Islam with me. During those days I was tempted to become a Mohammedan. But it passed.

A few months later the voice was saying, "I am Brahma, I am Vishnu, I am Siva," and we were discussing Hinduism and Buddhism. And then other religions were discussed, the voice or spirit always taking the name of the deity of the religion discussed.

And finally the voice gave me a creed. "There is one God who has many names, and many prophets"; for all the founders of religions are prophets of the one God.

After this, I did not hear the voice so often, but it still comes to me at times with a warning or advice.

About four years ago it suggested I should write a poem containing my views. I am not a poet, but the voice dictated the first three or four verses, and the poem was written. It was published in *The Open Court* of August 1906, and was commended by all.

Under these circumstances I am quite unable to accept your explanation, although it is the usual one. It appears to me quite inadequate to explain all the phenomena. I doubt even if the brain is abnormal, as Sister Sanghamitta suggests. It is not uncommon in history, and particularly in the history of religion. Abraham, Samuel, and all the Jewish prophets were subject to similar illusions. Jesus and Paul also heard voices from heaven. The call of Moses was probably due to a similar illusion. I call it "illusion" because it *appears* to be a real voice having an external origin, although its source can be proved to be mental by observation and experience. But I reject the term "hallucination," because medical men associate that term with disease.

Another famous person who had a similar experience was Socrates with his demon or spirit. Mahomet also had similar experiences. In later history we have Joan of Arc, Luther, George Fox, and many others. Allusions to it also occur in the sacred books of the Hindus, and in those of other religions. It is absurd to assume, as some medical men do, that all these deservedly famous persons were mentally unsound. On the contrary, this ridiculous assumption proves that medical psychology is itself on a false foundation.

I may remark that your theories concerning the origin of the idea of the devil appear to me to be also faulty for the same reason. I do not care to enter into a lengthy discussion of the subject, but my experience tends to make me believe that the idea of the devil was derived in the same way. A voice that makes evil suggestions,

as some of these voices do, is naturally looked upon as belonging to an evil being. But it is true that the theory that the devil was a rebellious angel, or fallen spirit may have been derived from the Persians.

In conclusion I may state my opinion that the explanation of these voices finally accepted will much depend upon the person's general theories concerning the universe. Those who regard the events of the universe as the result of chance, may believe that prophets are lunatics, and the illusion of the spirit, and of spirit voices, due entirely to disease. But those who can see design in the universe, and law in the psychical world as well as in the physical, will perceive that these voices do not result from chance—that they are part of God's method of educating mankind—that God is real, although the voice of God is an illusion,—and that even insanity itself is not without its lesson for those who have the intelligence to understand it.

EDITORIAL COMMENT.

We have received several communications concerning voices such as those heard by Sister Sanghamitta, recorded in her letter which appeared in *The Open Court*, August, 1908. Most of these communications claim that explanations such as the one then offered in an editorial comment are absolutely untenable and that the voices have an objective significance. In spite of some differences in attitude the writers agree in grammar, usually speaking of "this remarkable phenomena." We regret that our space is too limited to give them a hearing. Suffice it to say that they scorn the so-called scientific explanation.

The case is different with Mr. Cockerill's letter. It is both interesting and instructive, and if our readers will kindly look up the poem to which he refers and which appeared in *The Open Court* in August, 1906, they will see that the voices produced something superior to the average spirit communications.

We have only to add that we see nothing miraculous in such manifestations. Man's thought, especially poetical, artistic, and inventive conceptions, may very easily take such a turn of objectivation. The subconscious ideas which stir the inmost soul can easily assume the appearance of voices heard, which, though internal, will sound as if they came from the outside or from above. If our readers will compare our review of Dr. Morton Prince's book *The Dis-*

sociation of Personality in the *January Monist*, they will find a remarkable instance in the case reported there.

The objectivation of poetic thoughts may be abnormal but it need not be pathological. In fact we may assume that the prophetic visions of poetical inspirations of former ages naturally and normally manifested themselves in this way.

P. C.