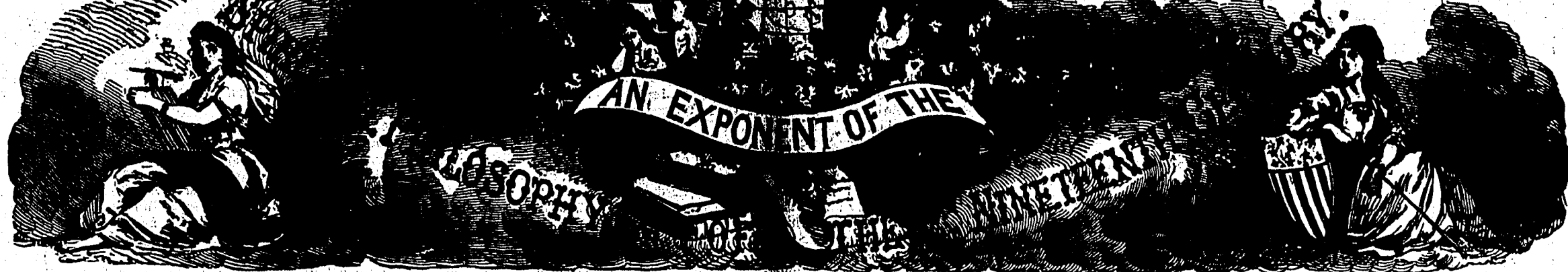


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The Spiritual Postum.

Is there a Future Life, and What Is It?

A Lecture delivered Sunday Evening, Feb. 20th, 1887, before the Brooklyn Spiritual Union.
BY WILLIAM COIT.

(Reported for the Banner of Light.)

"If a man die, shall he live again?" This question was asked a very long time ago. It evidently came up from the depths of an agonized heart. It has been repeated from the depths of millions of agonized hearts since the time it was first uttered by the prophet Job. The question implies a painful doubt whether an affirmative answer can be given.

The prophets of the Old Testament Scriptures professed to reveal the existence of Jehovah, or God, out of the incomprehensible depths of eternity, but they did not with any definite distinctness, or any positiveness of assurance, profess to unfold any hope of immortality or continued life to man. But on the contrary, their writings are filled with many sad and mournful reflections upon this subject. I cannot forbear to quote a few passages, taken from several different books of the Old Testament.

"They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise."—Isaiah.
"They shall be as though they had not been."—Obadiah.

"As the cloud is consumed and vanishes away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more."—Job.

"For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know nothing; neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten."—Ecclesiastes ix: 5-10.

I am sure I shall not weary your patience if I quote the following most touching refrain from Job:

"For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again; and that the tender branches thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground, yet through the scent of water it will bud and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fall from the sea, and the food drieth up, so man lieth down and riseth not; till the heavens be no more, he shall not awake, nor be raised out of his sleep."

A vast period of time has intervened between the days of the prophets and our day. A flood of light streams upon us, which it was not given them to see, and yet even we are constrained to acknowledge that life is a mystery; that the world in which we live is a mystery; that the firmament above us, studded with shining globes, is a mystery. But yet we know that we live; we know that the earth upon which we stand exists; and we know that there is a universe of existence everywhere surrounding us.

Intelligent man has not been indifferent to the conditions of his life or the place of his abode. He has ever been an industrious explorer, bent upon enlarging the sphere of his knowledge, and making an accurate analysis and inventory of the wealth which he finds in his possession as a part of his inheritance. He has mapped out the starry heavens, he has searched the earth from the centre to the circumference, and has carefully noted down its age, qualities and conditions, but the great ocean, which lies beyond the vision of the natural eye, he has been slow to comprehend and reluctant to enter upon. The records of history show that generation after generation of living men has marched with great pomp and splendor upon the stage of human activities, and after a short career has passed off again—an innumerable host, an endless panorama.

History has survived; but those who made the history have disappeared. Whether have they gone? Having died do they still live again?

Even now the number is not a few of those who are in as great perplexity as was the prophet Job in relation to the reality of a future life, and who are unable to behold with unclouded vision any resurrection from death and the grave. But yet it is undeniably true that the larger multitude of to-day are not seriously troubled with doubt as to the fact of continued and immortal existence.

The Spiritualist has had abundant evidence on this point, and the Christian has ever been satisfied that life and immortality were brought to light by Jesus of Nazareth. He believes that God, incarnated as the Son of Man, came into the world, was crucified upon the cross; that he died, and remained three days in the sepulchre; that he burst through the shackles of the grave and appeared again; among men, and that he ascended to the Father in the heavens.

ens, thus proving to all mankind that he was the conqueror of death, and was able to bestow life everlasting upon those who should believe in him; and the whole Christian world is to-day celebrating the fact of a risen Saviour, and rejoicing and singing hosannas to him, as being a certain pledge of immortality. It is a glorious and inspiring thought. It fills men with hope and courage and joy unspeakable.

We can all join heartily in the halleluiahs, however variant may be our views in relation to the significance of many of the dogmas of the Christian Church which are based upon this event of the resurrection.

I shall therefore assume that all who hear me to-day, whether Christians or Spiritualists, are fully possessed of an active and living faith in immortality, and do not need a recapitulation of the evidences in support of this faith.

It will rather be my object, for the brief moments during which I shall claim your attention, to speak in the first place of the general nature and locality of this future life, and secondly, of the state and condition of those who have passed into that life, and who are continually passing into it from the natural life of the world.

It is not given to all to have personal experience and observation of the marvelous things which are supposed to be unfolded in the spheres beyond us. Largely in all the matters of material life we have to depend upon the testimony, information and wisdom of those whose opportunities for knowledge have been greater than our own. And especially in this most interesting matter of life beyond the grave, must we depend upon the testimony of those whose privilege it has been to have had their spiritual sight opened so that they could behold and describe the realities which pertain to the great hereafter.

And what do these gifted witnesses tell us of this after-life, and of the world in which that life is developed?

They teach us that there is connected with our natural world, and apparently growing out of it, a spiritual world; that still above the spiritual world there arises a series of heavens, zones or spiritual belts, one above the other, all enrolling our natural earth.

Our imagination pictures to us these vast realms as ethereal, vague and shadowy, whereas they are actually solid, and as our earth in the solar system.

Our imagination also pictures the spiritual as something unreal and ghostly, whereas our spirit teachers are emphatic and positive in their affirmation of the substantiality of their world. They declare it in fact to be far more real, substantial and tangible than our own.

The nature which surrounds us, and with which our senses come in contact, and which seems to us so fixed and rigid, is to them a perishable and dissolving substance, the spiritual alone possessing the quality of permanence and indestructibility.

Life in that world is represented to be an expression of all the instincts, affections, inclinations, passions, virtues and vices known to our earthly humanity; a life of ceaseless activity and use, involving occupations, employments, pleasures and sufferings far beyond any conceptions which we can form under the limitations imposed upon us by the conditions of materiality.

The eminent Swedish seer gives this lesson from his experience:

"I have been with the angels in their habitations. They are exactly like our houses upon earth, but more beautiful. They contain chambers, drawing-rooms and bedrooms in great numbers. They have courts, and are compassed by gardens, flower-beds and fields. When the angels live in societies the habitations are contiguous, and arranged in the form of a city, with courts, streets and squares, exactly like the cities on our earth."

It has also been granted me to walk through them and to look about on all sides. I have seen palaces in heaven so magnificent as to surpass all description. Some were more splendid than others. The inside was in keeping with the outside. The apartments were ornamented with such decorations that no language is adequate to the description of them."

The same seer also beheld in this great spiritual world other scenes, not so beautiful. He says:

"I have been permitted to look into the hells and see what kind of places they are. Some appear like holes in pecks; others like caverns of wild beasts in woods; and others like vaulted caverns and hidden chambers, such as are seen in mines. In some halls there appear rude cottages which in some places form lanes and streets. Within the houses infernal spirits engage in perpetual brawls, in blows and butchery, while the streets are infested with robbers. The hells abound in foul smells, cadaverous, stercoraceous, noxious and putrid, in which evil spirits dwell, as do some animals, in rank odors. Whilst there I heard miserable lamentations; they were in a state of despair, saying they believed their torments would be forever. It was granted me to comfort them."

I will now give the testimony of a spirit actually dwelling in the spirit-world and uttered through a medium. He says:

"I have been homes in the higher heavens, embowered in flowers and surrounded by velvet lawns, I have seen winding promenades, walks garnished with flowering stones, fountains clear as crystal, and bowers of love where artists gather to display their pencilled creations, poets to repeat their rhythmic lines of wisdom, and musicians to ravish the soul with sweet melodies of heaven. And then, to the contrary, I have seen in the lower spheres of darkness, clusters, groups and files of moral degradation, in the streets of which undeveloped spirits were engaged in disputations, quarrels, enmities and pitiful ravings. They delighted to annoy and torture each other—delighted to live in a measure their earthly lives over again, and to influence gamblers in their dens, inebriates in their whiskey-bottles, and debauchees in their haunts of crime."

The late Judge Edmonds, whom I well knew, and who was known to many now

here, had the most extraordinary visions of the realities of spiritual life, which he published to the world in two large volumes, in the year 1838. The following harrowing scene was revealed to his spiritual eye:

"It was a vast country that was before me. I saw an immense distance. It was peopled by great numbers. Some parts were darker than others, and some of an ink-like blackness. There was a great variety of shade to the atmosphere, from a light gray to black. I had seen the same variety in the happy spheres, only there it was a variety of light, here it was a variety of darkness."

I approached one of these black spots, and there in a miserable hovel was a human being. He was ghastly, thin, haggard—almost a skeleton. He knew no means of escape from that dark habitation, where he was all alone. The most violent human passions were raging in him, and he was ever walking back and forth like a chained tiger, chained in his cage."

There was a little light, that habitation of his, but it was an awful one. It was the red, flame-like light of his own eyes. They were open and staring like burning coals, with a black spot in the centre, and were constantly straining to see something—the darkness was so horrible to him. He had no companion but his own hatred and the memory of the evil past. In the agony of despair, he cried out, 'Oh! for annihilation!'"

I could present to you volumes of testimony of similar import, given not only by a great number of seers whose spiritual sight has been opened, so that they have beheld the unutterable things of the unseen world, but also by a still greater number of spirits who have spoken directly from that world through living mediums.

The great Teacher of the Christian religion in a few words recognized the reality of the spiritual world and the conditions of the good and the evil therein. He assured his disciples that there were many mansions for them in his Father's house, but the place of the wicked was where there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

There are many, however, who are distrustful of such visions. They do not impeach the honesty of the Revelator. His sanity is more seriously doubted than his sincerity. The action of the human mind is often entirely incomprehensible. The imagination is a wonderful creator. When abnormal conditions are disturbed, a host of phantasies pour out of the human mind. These phantasies, nevertheless, are believed to be realities by those who experience them.

How much relation, if any, such experiences have to a spiritual life independent of the material life, and to what extent, if any, they may be indicative of spiritual conditions, is often a question difficult of solution.

But there is now, and ever has been, a class of persons showing no other signs of mental aberration, who have declared and believed that they could hold veritable intercourse with disembodied spirits, could learn from them their life and condition; and who, in fact, could, from the opening of their spiritual sight, themselves behold the spiritual spheres above the natural, and the life therein existing.

It is to this class of persons that we are indebted for all the knowledge, or supposed knowledge, we have of God, of a spiritual life and its conditions, and of a Divine Government and Providence, except so far as such knowledge is to be inferred from the facts of a material existence.

The Christian is inclined to scoff at all such revelations of spirit communications as delusions and impostures, otherwise than such as are recorded in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. The Mohammedan looks exclusively to the Koran as the true source of supernatural knowledge. The Oriental nations, in like manner, have recourse alone to their own sacred books for information and instruction in relation to a future life.

And yet it is nevertheless true that all religions which depend upon revelation of the future as a basis stand essentially on the same ground. They all look to revelations coming through human organizations as authority for their faith and belief, and it is immaterial whether we give to those through whom they come the name of prophets, seers, or mediums.

It is not my design to enter this large field of subsidiary evidence; I will only relate one fully authenticated fact in the life of Swedenborg—it is found in his Biography written by William White, and is thus stated:

The Prince of Prussia was brother to the Queen of Sweden, and shortly after his death, Swedenborg being at Court, the Queen perceived him said, "Have you seen my brother?" He answered, "No." Whereupon she replied, "If you should see him, remember me to him."

In saying this she did but jest. Eight days afterward Swedenborg came again to Court, but so early that the Queen had not left her apartment, called the White Room, where she was conversing with her Maids of Honor, and other ladies of the Court. Swedenborg did not wait for the Queen's coming out, but entered directly into her apartment and whispered in her ear, "The Queen, struck with astonishment, was taken ill and did not recover for some time. Afterwards she wrote to herself, she said

to those about her, "There is only God and my brother who can know what he has just told me." She owned that he had spoken of her last correspondence with the Prince, the subject of which was known to themselves alone.

If the testimony of the Queen is true, it is plain that Swedenborg must have conversed with her deceased brother long after his body had been consigned to the Royal Tomb.

Even one instance of intercourse between the living and the dead, thoroughly established, opens the door to the most important conclusion—it renders it possible, nay, more, it renders it probable that the many volumes which Swedenborg and others have published, containing information in relation to the spiritual world and its inhabitants, are founded upon actual verities, and are not the products of disordered mental conditions, as has been often alleged and believed.

Under all the concurring testimony, therefore, which we have upon this subject, we are not only warranted in the belief, but forced to the conclusion, that the spiritual world has gathered within its borders an innumerable host, representing every grade and shade of moral condition; from the highest angelic purity down to that degree of wickedness and depravity and surging passion where "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

If these accounts are true, it is plain that the spiritual world has its dark as well as its bright side; has its hells as well as its heavens; has its deserts and bogs and stagnant pools as well as its gardens of supernatural beauty. In modern times the word "hell" has become altogether unpopular. It has a disagreeable sound and a still more disagreeable signification. Although we associate it with heat of greater or less intensity, it nevertheless makes us shiver with cold. It is not a polite word, and there is a persistent determination to banish its use from good society. Our friend, Robert G. Ingersoll, does not like it at all. In fact he abhors it. It excites in him almost a dangerous frenzy of passion. But still the old word remains to disturb our peace of mind. Like the ghost of the murdered Banquo, it will not down at our bidding. What is, and what we wish to be are not always coincident. Facts are indeed stubborn things; they must have their way, however much they interfere with our wishes, tastes or sentiments.

But if we cannot altogether get rid of this very objectionable word, we can better define it than our fathers did; we can perhaps modify it, and at all events we can easily bring ourselves to the conclusion that it has more significance for our neighbors than for ourselves.

Assuming, then, as a matter of fact that evil still exists in both the natural and spiritual worlds, as well as the results that inevitably flow from it, the old vexed question remains to be solved, whether this is a temporary disability or whether it inheres as an eternal condition of future life.

There are three prominent theories upon this subject before the world:

First, the theory or teaching of the Christian Church. Second, that of Emanuel Swedenborg. Third, that of Spiritualism. The teaching of the Church is that this life is strictly and literally a life of probation, and that the after-life is a life of rewards and punishments. The cornerstone of the theology of the Church is quaintly expressed in the couplet, "In Adam's fall we sinned all." Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, and by so doing involved all of his posterity in the consequences of his disobedience.

Constructively they all became transgressors and subject to the penalty of Divine Law. That penalty is everlasting punishment, and the penalty must be enforced. The existence of God's moral government, it is said, depends upon it. A dismal outlook for humanity indeed!

But stern and rigid as were the framers of the old system of alleged divine government, they were not quite willing to leave either God or man to rest under a cloud of such portentous darkness. The race was not to be left in so hopeless a condition. They beneficently proceeded to formulate a way of escape—a scheme of redemption. God being unwilling that man should so perish, out of the infinitude of His love and mercy sent his only begotten Son into the world to suffer the agonizing death of the cross. This He could accept as a vindication of the violated law. Christ being crucified, man could be spared. It did not matter that the innocent suffered instead of the guilty—suffering had been inflicted and the honor of the law maintained.

It would thus appear that under this system man came into a state of natural depravity by the sinfulness of one man—the man Adam—and that he is taken out of that state by the righteousness of another man—the divine man Christ Jesus. In all this matter man himself has been but a passive instrument. He has been lost and he has been saved through agencies outside of himself, and over which he has had no control.

If the venerable theologians of the medieval ages had set themselves to work to produce the most complete parody of divine government, divine love and divine mercy, they could not have had a greater success.

The practical conclusion which the Church has deduced and taught from the dogmas which I have described, is that all who accept the salvation so provided for them become heirs with Christ in a joyful and glorious immortality; and that the fate of all others is an eternity in the prison-house of despair, where the smoke of their torment forever ascends.

It is but just to say that this most extraordinary plan of divine government has but little foundation in the teachings of the New Testament.

ment. Its only basis is a most literal interpretation of certain passages which were but figures of speech, such as were then and are now common in the East, and were never intended to convey the meaning which has been ascribed to them.

This system of theology promulgated by our fathers, who were more zealous than wise, has for the last half century been rapidly giving way. It has been made subject to many and important modifications, and the time is perhaps not far distant when it will give place altogether to a theology more in harmony with the actual teachings of the Divine Master. Even at this day I find that many of my Orthodox friends are as anxious to abolish the hells as Robert G. Ingersoll himself. In fact, they are as earnest in the matter as if they had a personal interest in such a consummation.

It is not, however, to be doubted that the Scriptures of the New Testament, by literal interpretation, distinctly teach that the righteous and the wicked alike exist in the future life, that an impassable gulf separates them, and that their respective conditions are final and everlasting. So much for the Christian view.

Another view of divine government and the state of man after death is presented by Emanuel Swedenborg. Of all those who have ever professed to be intermediaries between the natural and spiritual worlds, Swedenborg is the most remarkable.

After pursuing his investigation in every department of material science, until nature seemingly had no further secrets to yield up to him, suddenly his spiritual sight was opened and he was introduced into the spiritual world, and held intercourse with angels and spirits as directly and distinctly as he did with men in the natural body.

This intercourse continued uninterruptedly to the time of his death, a period of over thirty years. During this while he was an industrious student of the laws of divine Providence and a constant gatherer, from personal experience and observation, of facts in relation to the spiritual world and the varied conditions of spiritual life.

Any one who desires to possess a complete revelation of the mysteries of this unseen world, as given by him, and the state of its inhabitants, can do so by reading his large work on "Heaven and Hell."

Swedenborg teaches that all, on the death of the body, without reference to differences in moral or intellectual qualities, enter into a state in the spiritual world which he denominates the intermediate state. It is intermediate because it is between the heavens and the hells. He represents this intermediate state to be very similar to life in the world, and that the good and evil are there associated and mixed together in like manner as they are in natural life. He discovers, however, that this association is not of long continuance. In the process of time, those who are in a similar quality of good are attracted to each other and organize in societies, and in like manner those who are in a similar quality of evil congregate by attraction in communities by themselves.

Under the operation of this law of like attracting like, he finds innumerable heavens arising out of the world of spirits or intermediate state on the one hand, and innumerable hells on the other hand; the heavens forming themselves above the intermediate state and the hells below it. These heavens and hells become the ultimate abodes of all who enter the world of spirits. Every one, whatever may be his quality, whether of good or evil, finds in some of these societies his appropriate place and associates. Whilst the highest heavens and the lowest hells are infinitely distant, the lowest heavens and the mildest of the hells are in near neighborhood.

It is a comforting reflection that in this very diverse distribution of the inhabitants of the spirit-realms, according to our eminent seer, no one is under compulsion; no one is compelled to be where he does not desire to be. Whether the spirit enters the highest heavens or the lowest hells, is a matter of his own choice. He goes where his ruling love leads him, and being where he is, under and by virtue of this law of ruling love, he is virtually in his own heaven, and the hell of unendurable torment to him would be to find himself in somebody else's heaven.

It is true that Swedenborg describes some of the hells as being very miserable, very wicked and very infernal; but, nevertheless, where everybody is suited perhaps there is not much to be said, and we are not, consequently, so much shocked as we otherwise should be when told that these conditions, when once established, are unchangeable.

There is obviously a marked difference, certainly in principle, between the hell of Swedenborg and the hell of John Calvin. If a man makes his own hell, and voluntarily takes up his abode in it, it is liberty; if God makes a hell, and puts a man into it to be punished forever, it is unendurable tyranny. The Old Theology, which has taught the doctrine of everlasting punishment and made God the author of it, has thrown upon Divine Providence a cloud of impenetrable darkness. Those who have believed the teaching, while they have ostensibly worshiped God, have in their hearts held Him in abhorrence.

The theory or teaching of Swedenborg of the varied and permanent condition of life, both here and hereafter, is supported by many analogies in nature. The orchard has a great number of trees, but each tree bears a different fruit; and on the same tree the fruit is not always alike. A thousand apples may hang upon the branches of a single tree, and some will be full and fair, and grateful to the taste, and others will be sour, withered and worthless.

London Truth.

Light for Thinkers (Chattanooga, Tenn.) in its issue of May 14th, announces the withdrawal of its former publisher, Mr. A. C. Ladd, and that the editor, Mr. C. W. Yates, assumes, in addition to his previous responsibility, that of the publication, which for a time will be fortnightly instead of weekly as hitherto. It is regretted that neither much of his time, nor his energy, is available for the *Light*, and that the *Light* publisher, therefore, is somewhat weakened.

Truth will win the victory in the end;
But, meantime, the lies told here poison
A Marchant's men will fight to win.

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