

SPIRITUALISM DEFINED.

[The following Definition of Spiritualism and its Practical Bearings has been in substance endorsed by many of its prominent advocates, and adopted by large bodies of Spiritualists in convention. It is put forth in the present form, in order to meet the want of a brief yet comprehensive statement of the meaning and scope of this great modern movement, which may be put into the hands of inquirers, and serve to correct prevalent misapprehensions on the subject.]

I. — *Meaning of the Term.*

THE term SPIRITUALISM, in modern usage, often means no more than the alleged fact of spirit-intercourse; or, to express it in full, — *that human spirits have a conscious individual existence after the death of their physical bodies, and can and do, under suitable conditions, manifest themselves and communicate with persons in the body.* Those who believe this to be a fact are termed Spiritualists, whatever else they may believe or disbelieve.

But the term is also applicable to a System of Philosophy or Religion recognizing this as a cardinal fact. When thus applied, it may be defined as follows: — Spiritualism embraces *all truth relating to the spiritual nature of man, its constitution, capabilities, duties, welfare, and destiny; also, all that is or may be known relative to the spirit-world and its inhabitants, to God the Father of Spirits, to spiritual influences of whatever kind, and to all the occult forces of the universe, which are spiritual in their nature.*

This broad department of truth, however, is but imperfectly understood as yet by even the most capacious minds of earth. Hence wide differences of opinion exist among Spiritualists on various questions of philosophy and religious duty. No system yet put forth receives general acceptance. Men can see alike on such questions only as they arrive at like states of mental and spiritual growth.

REMARKS.—As thus defined, Spiritualism is no narrow superstition, but an all-comprehensive System of Truth. It includes all true Philosophy, all true Theology, all true Religion, and lies at the basis of all true Science. It should not be identified (as it often is) with the individual opinions of its adherents or prominent advocates, who are liable to mistakes; nor even with the teachings of disembodied spirits, for these appear to differ as widely in their theories as do spirits in the body. None of them should be received as *authoritative* teachers, since each can present, at best, only his own views of truth, and these are necessarily limited by his capacities and stand-point of observation. Every individual soul must determine for itself what is truth and what is duty,—in doing which, it should of course seek all available aids, both from external teaching and internal inspiration.—A belief in modern Spiritualism does not require (as some have supposed) a disbelief in the Bible as rightly interpreted, nor a rejection of Christianity in its best significance; but it throws a flood of light over these and all other ancient religious records and systems, leaving every person free to form his own estimate of their value.

II.—*Its Practical Aim.*

Though Spiritualism cannot now be defined in all its details, yet its grand practical aim may be stated as follows:—*the quickening and growth of the spiritual or divine nature in man*, to the end that the animal and selfish nature may be subordinated, and all evil or disorderly affections overcome; in other words, that the “works of the flesh” may give place in each individual to the “fruits of the spirit;” as a consequence of which, mankind will become an angelic Brotherhood, and the “kingdom of heaven come on earth.”

REMARKS.—It follows that no theory or practice which tends to abrogate moral distinctions, or to give supremacy to *animal* desires, by whomsoever countenanced, can with any propriety be considered a part of Spiritualism. And no person can be entitled to the name of Spiritualist, in its full meaning, who does not adopt and practice sentiments which are *spiritual* (that is, refining, purifying and elevating) in their tendency. Conscientious Spiritualists, however, cannot be strictly bound nor rightly judged by the often superficial and arbitrary rules of *popular* morality. It behooves them to penetrate beneath the surface in respect to all questions, and to be governed by a higher law than popular opinion. They must be expected to obey the voice of God, speaking in their own highest intuitions, rather than that of man, where the two come in conflict.—The quickening and growth of the spiritual and subordination of the animal in man,

all penetrating minds will perceive, is practically the same thing that is inculcated by the Church in her mystical doctrines of "regeneration," "sanctification," etc. The *result* sought for, though the *mode* of its accomplishment may be variously understood, is plainly indispensable to a perfect human character and a harmonious human society. Thus the ultimate aim of Spiritualism is identical with that of real Christianity — namely, the redemption of man from the dominion of evil.

III. — *Its Relation to Specific Reforms.*

Since man's spiritual growth and welfare, in this life and the future, is believed to depend in some measure on his physical health, his habits and surroundings, as well as on his beliefs and motives of action, all departments of Human Improvement and Practical Reform come legitimately within the scope of a broad Spiritualism. Hence earnest and philanthropic Spiritualists cannot fail to take a deep interest in the promotion of objects like the following, though they may differ in regard to methods of action:

1. Physiological Reform in general, whether as relates to injurious habits of food, drink, dress, etc., or to erroneous systems of medication — to the end that every human body may be made a fit temple for the indwelling spirit, and a healthful instrument for its use.
2. Educational Reform — that body, mind and spirit may be unfolded and cultivated symmetrically, and by the use of the most enlightened methods.
3. Parentage Reform — that every child may be secured its right to a healthful organism, and an introduction to life under favorable circumstances.
4. The Emancipation of Woman from all civil and social oppressions — that she may freely choose her own occupations, and become best fitted to be the mother of noble offspring.
5. The equal Enlightenment and consequent ultimate Liberty of all human beings, and the Abrogation of all Oppression, civil inequality, domestic tyranny, and mental or spiritual despotism — because freedom is the birth-right of all, and the instinctive demand of every growing spirit.

6. Theological and Ecclesiastical Reform — since deliverance from error and from external authority are requisite to the best spiritual advancement.

7. Social Reform and ultimate Reorganization — because the present selfish and antagonistic relations and institutions of society are unsuited to a higher spiritual condition.

Lastly, in any and every effort, calculated, in their individual judgments, to improve the condition of mankind.

REMARKS. — Few individuals may be qualified to labor in more than one department of so broad a field ; and it is natural that any one should consider that portion of the work to which he feels strongest attractions the most important. The broad-minded and catholic-hearted Reformer, however, will rejoice in all well-meant work, and recognize as brethren all honest and unselfish laborers.

IV. — *Its Bearing on Organizations.*

While Spiritualists have no general organization, or authoritative creed, and cannot consistently combine for the purpose of controlling each others' opinions, or setting bounds to inquiry ; yet they may properly associate for such objects as the following : — the promulgation of what they deem important truth — the promotion of fraternal intercourse — and the affording of mutual encouragement and aid in a true life.

REMARK. — Such associations (which will of course assume some organic form, the more simple and natural the better) may subserve all the useful ends of which church-organizations are capable, and have none of the objectionable features which have commonly belonged to the latter.

A WORD TO THE READER. — You may have been repelled by what you deem the errors and follies of modern Spiritualists — and perhaps with good reason. But please consider whether your objections lie against *real* Spiritualism and its legitimate aims as herein defined, or only against its counterfeits and perversions. If the latter, you have but to give the world a truer definition, by presenting a more correct philosophy, and exhibiting a more spiritual life.

A. E. N.

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