

SPIRITUAL TRACTS, No: 2.

BISHOP HOPKINS

ON SPIRITUALISM.

REPLY OF JUDGE EDMONDS.

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A REPLY BY JUDGE EDMONDS.

The Right Reverend Mr. HOPKINS, the Episcopal Bishop of Vermont, has lately been delivering a course of lectures before the "Young Men's Christian Association," of St. Louis, two of which he devoted to the subject of Modern Spiritualism, and to myself as connected with it.

He admitted the facts of the manifestations, conceding that they were not a delusion or a deception, but he avowed his own belief that the whole thing resulted from the direct agency of the Devil himself. He confessed he had never witnessed any of the manifestations, yet he claimed that he could fairly discuss the subject, etc.

This is the purport of his lectures, as I gather it from the report of them in the *St. Louis Republican* of the 12th and 15th of November, 1856.

As he has thus held me up to the world, denounced by a high dignitary of the Church as acting under the instigation of the Devil, I trust I may be pardoned for saying a few words in defense of myself, especially as I will do so by confining myself to a brief attempt to show what Spiritualism is, and what it teaches.

1. It enables us to know the thoughts and purposes, the secret intentions and character of those who are living around us. Over and over again has this been demonstrated, yet I will venture to say the Bishop never heard of it; for if he had, he surely would be as ready as any one to see that, in this feature of Spiritualism, there is a better protection against, and prevention of, hypocrisy and false pretenses than all the preaching in the world has afforded.

2. It enables us to feel and to know that our most secret thoughts are known to the intelligence of the Spirit-world, whatever the character of that intelligence, whether for good or evil. It has been for years and centuries preached to us, that the Supreme Intelligence knows our every thought. Yet how few have actually realized it—how few have acted as if they believed it, let the sins and perversions of mankind say. But now it comes so demonstrated that no man can doubt it. It is a fact as certain as that the sun shines at noon-day. And I would ask, what greater prevention to vice can there be, than the thorough conviction that the deepest secrets of our hearts are all known to the Intelligence which is ever around and near us, and can be disclosed to the world?

3. It demonstrates the immortality of the soul by direct appeals to the senses. Hitherto the appeal has been to abstract reasoning to prove that; and what ill success has attended that effort, no man knows better than the Right Reverend gentleman himself. He has been a lawyer in his day, and he is aware, from his knowledge of the world, thus and otherwise acquired, that the greater portion of the educated classes among us have not yielded to the reasoning, and have been, to say the least, skeptical as to an existence after this life. But now the proof comes with a force like that which establishes the facts that the grass grows and the water runs, and leaves no room for cavil in the sane mind. In the book from which the Bishop quoted so freely*—though I am not advised that he quoted from that part—some twenty instances were given of conversions from an unbelief as to the future. Those were a few only of the cases which are within my own knowledge. They are numbered by hundreds and thousands within the knowledge of Spiritualists all over the land, and they show how powerful—how all-controlling is the argument in favor of man's immortality, which spiritual intercourse

* From my published volumes on "Spiritualism."

furnishes—how much more convincing than all the preaching to which the subjects of such conversions have listened for years and years.

4. It demonstrates that the Spirits of our departed friends can and do commune with us who are left behind. The substance of the Bishop's position on this topic is a denial of the fact, for he speaks of the "folly and unreasonableness of supposing that the Spirits of our departed friends are suffered to remain on earth, and to mingle in the affairs of men," and of the "unhappiness it would be to them to remain among strifes and sorrows which they could not alleviate."

The same course was once taken by this same Prelate in regard to the manifestations themselves, and it was "folly and unreasonableness" to suppose they were anything but delusion or deception. But he, and many others of his calling, have been compelled to yield to the force of overwhelming testimony, and admit their reality. So it would be with him on this point, if instead of persisting in the ignorance of the subject (of which he boasts, for conscience-sake,) he would investigate for himself, or take the testimony of those who have investigated. He would then learn that the identity of our departed friends is too clearly made out to be doubted by a rational mind. He would see, too, how enduring is the love they bear to us still—that the cold grave does not quench its ardor, and that their care and sympathy for us is not removed at such an immeasurable distance from us, as he would teach, but that it is ever around and near us, leading us on toward that goal which in his creed is too far off for us to comprehend, but is now brought so near that we can understand what it is, and learn how to attain it. He would learn that it would be no more a source of unhappiness to our departed friends thus to labor for our redemption from sin, than it is now for him in his ministerial functions to lead a sinner to repentance; and descending from his lofty position on the Episcopal bench, to enter the brothel or the prison-house, and lift an erring

brother to the light of the Gospel. He would learn to bear to the mourner's heart such comfort as he has never yet borne, and to speak to it, in most effective tones, of righteousness and the judgment to come. He would learn then, if he has not yet learned, that it could be no such great unhappiness for the Christian mind to remain amid strifes and sorrows, where it could sympathize even if it could not alleviate, and he would see, practically, that there is no sorrow for suffering humanity, which Heaven, through its messengers, can not heal.*

5. It demonstrates also, that through this Spirit influence—be it what it may—the sick are healed, the blind are made to see, the lame walk, and “devils cast out” of those who are possessed.

These are some of the marvels which are now being worked in this land by the influence which is stigmatized by this reverend Prelate as of the Devil. There are hundreds and thousands of witnesses of their existence around us everywhere, *and every man who pleases can behold them for himself*. I could enumerate many, very many instances, but the limits of this paper forbid, and I have yet a few words to say on other topics.

The Bishop says that “none of the so-called discoveries were even new to mankind as proclaimed or received truths.” In this he is in a great measure correct. The great law which underlies the whole spiritual philosophy is that proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth—“Love God with all your might, and your neighbor as yourself.” Such is the law, which for eighteen hundred years the Christian world has professed to believe—such the law which over thirty thousand priests are weekly preaching from as many pulpits in this nation. Yet with what effect? Let facts answer. Out of a population of nearly twenty-five millions, not five millions are professing

* Might he not also obtain the idea, that as God himself descends into the spheres of vice and misery, to reclaim the erring and comfort the suffering, it could be no degradation for the Spirit thus to imitate God?

Christians, and the sect to which this reverend Prelate belongs can not number one hundred thousand.

Is it not proper to ask why is this? It is because there is not inducement enough held out to man to overcome the selfishness of his material nature, and to obey this law of his spiritual existence. Eighteen centuries have demonstrated this, and it is high time that something should come to hold out such inducement. To perform that task is now the great mission of Spirit intercourse; and it is, day by day, as fast as we are capable of receiving it, performing it, by so revealing to us the condition into which we are to be ushered after death, that we cannot help realizing how necessary it is for us to obey the law in life. As the burnt child dreads the fire because it realizes the danger, so will man, when he shall fully realize what is the nature of the existence which is to follow this life, be ever on his guard against the temptations with which his animal nature constantly surrounds him.

This neglected function of the priesthood, Spiritualism is now performing in our midst.

And why not? The Bible is full of it. An angel appeared to Hagar, *Gen.* 16; three, in the shape of men, appeared to Abraham, *Gen.* 18; and two to Lot, *Gen.* 19. One called to Hagar, *Gen.* 21; and to Abraham, *Gen.* 22; one spake to Jacob in a dream, *Gen.* 31; one appeared to Moses, *Exodus* 3; one went before the camp of Israel, *Exodus* 14; one met Balaam by the way, *Numbers* 22; one spake to all the children of Israel, *Judges* 2; one spake to Gideon, *Judges* 6; and to the wife of Manoah, *Judges* 13; one appeared to Elijah, *1 Kings* 19; one stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan, *1 Chron.* 21; one talked with Zachariah, *Zach.* 1; one appeared to the two Mary's at the sepulcher, *Matt.* 28; one foretold the birth of John the Baptist, *Luke* 1; one appeared to the Virgin Mary, *Ibid*; to the shepherds, *Luke* 2; one opened the door of Peter's prison, *Acts* 5; two were seen by Jesus, Peter, and James and John, *Luke* 9; and one spake to John the Evangelist, *Rev.* 22.

It will not do to say these were angels—a distinct order of beings from man, for those seen by the apostles were Moses and Elias, and that seen by John, though called by him an angel, avowed himself to be his fellow-servant, and “one of his brethren the prophets.”*

And now may we not ask, if man in the olden time could see and talk with angels—if, in former ages, the Spirits of departed mortals could appear to and commune with those yet living—may we not, I say, ask wherein has man’s nature so changed that the same thing may not happen to him now?

Why! how often in the ceremonies of the Bishop’s own church does he call upon his people to say, “I believe in the communion of saints!” which the articles of his religion say, “may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture;” and yet that communion which is holy when only spoken of, he would fain have us believe is evil when actually practiced!

Briefly, then, to sum up the argument: Spiritualism prevents hypocrisy; it deters from crime; it reclaims the infidel; it proves the immortality of the soul; it recognizes one God, and man’s responsibility to him; it enforces the great law of the Creator, by inducements hitherto unknown to man; it heals the sick; it gives sight to the blind; it cures the lame; it comforts the mourner; it enjoins upon all the utmost purity of life; it teaches that charity which rather mourns over than rejoices at the failings of our fellow mortals; and it reveals to us our own nature, and what is the existence into which we are to pass when this life shall have ended.

And this we are taught by a reverend Divine, holding a high rank in what he calls “The Church of God,” is of the Devil! Alas! if it be, by what sign shall we know the work of God?

* Nor will it do to speak of the undignified character of the manifestations of to-day, for surely the reclaiming of erring man from the “deep damnation of infidelity” is of as much importance as relieving Peter from temporary imprisonment, or telling Hagar where to find water.

But the chief basis of the Bishop's position, that spiritual intercourse is satanic, seems to be found in the revelations as to the Spirit's surroundings, after it has passed from this life. These he denounces as gross, material, and of the earth earthy, and as conflicting with the sublime teachings of the Gospel, and therefore "Devilish!"

I do not learn that he paused to detail to his hearers what is the condition of the future, according to the Gospel, as he understands it. I have known this attempted many times by Divines, but I never knew any two of them to agree in their description. Whereas, in these revelations, there is no discrepancy on this point.

I do not learn that in reading extracts from my book he departed from the practice of his calling—namely, that of drawing particular passages from their context, and thus giving them a very different meaning from the true one—a practice which I do not hold very high either in law or gospel, and which I have often seen excite the smiles of contempt among the intelligent minds in church.

Nor do I learn that he called the attention of his hearers to the reasons given in my book (Sec. 62 of Vol. 2) for our faith on this subject, whereby they might have been enabled to judge for themselves, instead of being governed by his authority or mine.

But he seems to have contented himself with just so many and such extracts as would tend to prove his position, and let the rest go.

But let that pass. And let us inquire what is the great difference between us on this point, which makes my teachings "devilish," "unchristian," and "positively hurtful," and makes his to be holy, and sublime, and Gospel-like?

He teaches that man, on dying, becomes suddenly and marvelously changed—that he passes far away from the earth, out of the reach of its cares, anxieties and affections—that he passes into a state of existence whose condition is entirely unknown, except that it is either unutterably miserable or inexpressibly happy—that the state either of bliss or woe, into which he is first ushered, never changes and is never-ending—and that his condition of

happiness or sorrow is not of his own creation, and can not be affected by aught he can do in this life, but is dependent—particularly in its happiness—upon a vicarious atonement.*

On the other hand, I believe that man is the creature of progression—that it is his destiny from his birth to progress on to eternity, toward the Godhead—that no man is exempt from this destiny—that while man can not prevent, he can retard or accelerate its consummation, and he can make the interval of progress for long ages happy or woful, as he obeys or disregards the law of his spiritual nature, which is love for God and man—that death is but a continuation of this life, and this life but a preparation for the next—that we pass into the next state of existence with all our faculties, memories and affections, as we have cultivated or perverted them here—and that we are for a while, until our minds grow to become elevated above them, surrounded by all those objects which would be calculated to give us the weal or wo we have earned for ourselves.†

Such is, in brief, the difference between us. I will not pause here to ask which is most acceptable to the rational mind! which is best supported by Scripture!

That would take too much room. But I will ask, what is there in my belief that is “devilish,” “unchristian,” “hurtful?” And I will answer the question, not in my own language, but in that of one of the Bishops of the Episcopal Church of this country—one who sits in the same House of Bishops with him of Vermont.

I extract from a sermon preached in Connecticut in 1852, and published.

“I have now closed my argument, and would be glad if time allowed to pass to the survey of another most interesting question. What are the conditions of our future existence? But as it is I can only allude to one or two

* Or, in other words, that its unhappiness can be caused by us, but its happiness cannot.

† As in manhood, we outgrow our attachment to the objects which pleased our childhood, so in Spirit life we will in time outgrow our love for the objects which pleased our earth-life.

g aeral points, and then leave the subject to your individual reflection.

"1. In the first place, provision will undoubtedly be made hereafter for the culture and the exercise of all the intellectual and moral faculties of our nature. Heaven will not be a monotony. All which belongs to our nature, that is not sensual and sinful, will there find free scope for its development. Nothing, then, which we learn here is lost. No elevated taste is cultivated in vain. No healthy affection withers under the touch of death. There are strains of melody, and sights of beauty and holy friendships in the spiritual world. Everything which God has made on earth, and which man has left untouched by sin, is only a symbol of something greater and more resplendent in reserve for the holy hereafter. What music will be heard in heaven! what prospects will charm the eye! what thoughts will be uttered there! what emotions will be kindled there! what variety of enjoyments and yet nothing servile, nothing selfish! How is it then that we shrink from the future? Why does eternity come before us a cold blank void—a sea without a shore, moaning and groaning under a starless sky, where the soul floats, like a helmless wreck, solitary and despairing! Because there is a stain of corruption on the soul which needs to be washed out—because the sense of sin makes us afraid.

"2. In the second place we observe, that to the righteous the future will be a state of constant and unending progress. The law of this progress may be essentially the same as it is now, only it will operate under greatly improved conditions. We shall never reach a point where we shall stop, and make no further advance, for then there would lie before us an eternity without occupation.

"All mortal creatures are capable only of a limited improvement, because theirs is a limited existence. Man must advance forever, because he lives forever. The time will undoubtedly come when we shall look back on all that we have acquired and done in this world, as we now regard the experiences of our earliest

infancy, and we shall wonder that we then thought ourselves so wise.

"3. And finally our future destiny will be in precise accordance to our deserts and character. We shall reap what we have sown. We shall begin our life hereafter as we close it here. There is no such thing as separating the man from his character, and there is no such thing as separating the character from the destiny."

Such are my sentiments, too! Such are the principles which Spiritualism teaches! And now, if they are "devilish," "unchristian," and "hurtful" in me, pray! what must they be in the Right Rev. Bishop of Rhode Island, whose language it is that I have quoted?

A few words on one topic more and I have done.

I can hardly believe the Bishop is correctly reported when he is made to say that the law of the Scripture forbids our communing with the Spirits of our departed friends, as well as dealing with witches and those having a familiar Spirit. For I have never been able to find any such injunctions in Holy Writ,* nor can I conceive how that can be, and Peter, and James and John escape condemnation for beholding Moses and Elias, or John, in the Revelations, for communing with the Spirit of "one of his brethren, the Prophets," or Saul obeying the Spirit when struck with blindness on the wayside, or Peter, when listening to the injunctions to call not the Gentile unclean.

But it is true that in the law of Moses there are injunctions against dealing with witches, or those having familiar Spirits. But does the Reverend Prelate mean that his Christian hearers shall understand that that law is still binding upon us? He certainly must mean so, or he would not quote it as evidence of our "unchristian" deportment. See, then, where it would bring him. One part of that law must be as binding as another, and

* I once asked for the passage, of one who insisted that the Bible did contain such prohibition, and I received for answer the quotation of "the bourne whence no traveler returns!" I confess I was malicious enough to reply that I had found that in Shakspeare, but was not aware of its being in the Bible.

yet right by the side of that to which he appeals, are commands like these:

"Ye shall eat no manner of fat." *Lev. 7: 23*

"Ye shall not eat of the camel, the hare, or the swine." *Lev. 11: 8.*

"When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest." *Lev. 19: 8.*

"Thou shalt not sow the field with mingled seed, neither shall a garment, mingled of linen and woolen, come upon thee." *Lev. 19: 9.*

"Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard." *Lev. 19: 27.*

"Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards." *Lev. 19: 31.*

"The man who committeth adultery with another man's wife, the adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death." *Lev. 20: 10.*

"A man, also a woman, that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death. They shall stone them with stones." *Lev. 20: 27.*

"In the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land. Thou shalt neither sow thy field nor prune thy vineyard." *Lev. 24: 4.*

"Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof." *Lev. 25: 10.*

"When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence." *Deut. 22: 8.*

"Thou shalt make thee fringes on the four quarters of thy vesture." *Deut. 22: 12.*

"A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord." *Deut. 23: 2.*

"Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which has escaped from his master unto thee." *Deut. 23: 15.*

"And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot

for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." *Exod.* 21 : 23-25.

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." *Exod.* 22 : 18.

"Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause." *Exod.* 23 : 3.

"In six days shall thy work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord. *Whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death.* . . .—*Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.*" *Exod.* 35 : 2, 3.

But enough—enough in all conscience! to show to the candid mind the basis on which this "Right Reverend Father in God" rests his denunciations. No word of comment is necessary, unless it may be to inquire if we are entirely to lose sight of the later teaching of Jesus: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say unto you that ye resist not evil," and of the consoling announcement, that on the command to love God and one another hang all the law and the prophets, under the Christian dispensation?

J. W. EDMONDS.

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