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WHAT IS DEATH?

A LECTURE.

BY

HON. J. W. EDMONDS

(KNOWN IN SPIRITUAL LITERATURE AS "JUDGE EDMONDS"),

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WHAT IS DEATH?



THE course that has been pursued of late in these meetings has been to reveal to you the condition into which man passes after death, and termed by the able and indefatigable speaker* here "the Summer-Land." In furtherance of that purpose, and to aid it so far as lies in my power, I propose upon this occasion to give you some of my experience and my observation as to the entrance into that land. And I shall ask you, therefore, to go with me while I answer the question that is propounded day after day in almost every heart—What is death?

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How far we have been led into error by the teachings of the past! We are so prone to look behind us, forgetting that our eyes are not in the back, but in the front part of our head. We have been in the habit of looking to the past for knowledge and instruction, and out of that unhappy habit have grown many of the errors which are now hindering our progress. Some of them are strange indeed; for instance, in religion, to be a free-thinker is tantamount to being an infidel. And the religionists of to-day, forgetting the great lesson which was taught at the beginning of Christianity, of freedom of thought, are stifling it with the cry that he who thinks freely is a heathen or an infidel. They will cite to you from the pulpit the words of the Apostles, and quote them as their texts, and lose sight of the fact that these were the language of the strongest advocates of freedom of thought, telling us one moment to "Try the spirits, and see whether they be of God;" "Prove all things: hold fast to that which is good;" "The law of the spirit within has set you free from this old law;" and, finally, "Let the prophets speak, but let others judge." And yet in the religion of the day to be a "free-thinker" is to be an infidel!

So also in other matters are we indebted to the past for errors which surround and blind us, and retard our onward progress; and among these is the error that we have laboured under so long, as to what death is.

There are two instincts in our nature that have been taken advantage of by those who have sought to make instruments of their fellow-men. These two are, first, the natural repugnance that is planted within us to a human corpse; and the other is the instinct that teaches us, almost without thought, to attempt to preserve life. We share these instincts with the whole animal creation. They are planted within us, in order that the object of our life upon earth may be accomplished. And they

* A. J. Davis, whose volume "Morning Lectures" on the spirit-world is one of engrossing interest.

who have been our teachers in politics and in religion, in national affairs and in morals, have taken advantage of these instincts and our consciousness of their existence to mislead and enchain us. And it will not be until, by our superior enlightenment, we are able to shake off these chains, that we shall be able to rise from the degradation into which the error has sunk us. Government and the Church have alike availed themselves of these instincts in our nature: the Government by the most absurd of all enactments, viz., the death penalty; man, in his intercourse with his fellow, by the most absurd of all modes of venting revenge—by taking life; and the suicide by the most futile effort that ever was made—to seek rest; and the Church, by constantly ringing in our ears the fear of death—binding us as submissive vassals to its domination, and having now no other hold upon humanity but fear of death. The time once was—and alas that I am obliged to speak of it in the past!—when the Church had its hold upon the human heart through the affections and the understanding. But it found it so much easier to guide and govern and enslave man through his fear than through his affections or his reason, that now, instead of telling us of a loving Father, whose heart is overflowing with love for everything that is made, and who has spread out a universe before our understanding, we are taught day by day from the pulpit, of an angry God who claims that vengeance is his and he will repay.

But—thanks be to God!—the day of our emancipation has come, for now we can know what death is. And when man becomes enlightened upon that subject—and day by day this is going on in our midst, and has been for some ten or fifteen years—when that result is brought about, I repeat the question here that I have asked elsewhere: What imagination can picture the advancement of humanity in purity, in wisdom, and in happiness?

This bondage, however, is not confined to those who have united themselves to some church. It extends to all classes, through the instrumentality of the education our childhood receives; and even among us, who claim to be Spiritualists, the superstitious fear of death thus engendered holds us in bondage, not the less certain that it is unavowed, and, in a measure, overthrown by the light we have obtained. With all, the great cause of sin and suffering is ignorance of what death really is.

Unless you, my friends, who are now here, have paused sometimes to think upon this subject, you can hardly be aware of the extent of that ignorance, or of its influence upon your feelings and your conduct. I could spend the whole time allotted to this discourse in simply calling your attention to that phase of my subject; but I must content myself with one or two illustrations.

Only a few days ago I was reading a treatise on astronomy, in which a philosopher, who has written much and gained a good deal of distinction, was speaking of meteoric stones that have at times fallen upon the earth with great violence, and of an explanation of the phenomenon. That explanation was, that matter fills all space in various forms, in every conceivable condition of combination; and that the earth, as it rolls in its orbit through space, in company with planets and suns, will frequently

come to places where it meets with disjointed matter in the form of these meteoric stones; and when they get near enough the earth attracts them, and they fall upon its surface, and in such quantities and with such force as to endanger human life. That philosopher, well instructed as he was in astronomy at large, insisted upon it that that could not be a true solution, because God would never permit our lives to be put in hazard by such an accident as that. So little he knew what death was, and yet his book was full of thoughts upon the power and love and wisdom of God.

Another instance: Not long since, I was talking with an English lady. We were speaking of the Indian tribes, which once had been sixteen millions upon this continent, and have dwindled down to about two millions; and she spoke of it as being a monstrous outrage on our part. And forgetting that out of the two hundred and fifty years that white men have been operating against the Indians, her people had had the most to do with it, she insisted that we had been committing a great crime in our treatment of the savage. I made the remark that, as I understood it, it was a law of Nature pervading every part, animate and inanimate, that the superior must always necessarily root out the inferior. It is a part of the law of Progress: the inferior must give way to the superior, and therefore the superior race now populating this continent must of necessity supersede the other. She could not believe that that could be so; that God could by any possibility design the extinction of the Indian—that he could possibly design that the Indian should thus die off. “Why,” said I, “my good madam, does not God serve all the old folks just so?”

The question is often asked, and perhaps some of you may now be inclined to ask, “Why does God leave us in ignorance of what death is?” Why does he leave us in ignorance? Cast your eyes back upon history, both sacred and profane, and you will find that for eighteen hundred years he has been trying to teach us this very thing—what death is. But the Church has so long monopolised the teaching and the teachers, that it comes to us with all the superstitious dread which darkens our life. The difficulty, therefore, is not with God, but in us.

In times past, when men have attempted to reveal to their fellows that which Mr. Davis* has been so industriously engaged in teaching, and which I am now feebly aiding, they have been burned at the stake or drowned as witches; or they have been crucified and done to death for their infidelity. And the time has not yet gone by when the desire thus to serve those who teach these truths, which, for eighteen hundred years, have been given to men, is entirely extinguished.

It is the perverseness of the human heart which has kept back from our consciousness this knowledge which God has been giving us for these many years. It would now, but for the superior enlightenment of the age and the change which has been going on in mental freedom, produce the same effect as in times past. It is our fault, therefore, if we have been in ignorance so long, and it will be our fault alone if we remain in ignorance any longer.

* See more particularly “The Philosophy of Death,” price 2d.

The truth almost always comes slowly. If it comes suddenly, it astounds rather than enlightens us. And it is only when man is prepared for a truth that he is able to receive it. And the question now is with me—and it is a serious one—are we ready yet to look death in the face, and, like sound philosophers, ask ourselves what it is? Let every man ask that question of himself. With all your advantages, how few of you dare now ask the question of yourselves! But it has got to be done, and it is out of that question and its answer that is to come our enlightenment and our advancement.

There are two things involved in this question: one is the process of dying, and the other, what ensues after death has been accomplished. The first question is the one I am to speak about this evening.

In the first place, let me call your attention to an error that we all fall into when looking upon death as one single event. When the breath ceases and pulsation stops, that is what we call death. There we mistake. Death is a gradual process, and has many steps. It does not consist of that one only which is palpable to our senses; but there are many others, and it is all those steps that lead to this great change to which our attention must be called. I speak now of what we call a natural death—the death that comes from old age or from disease. That from accident will be considered at another time. Disease and old age both are preparing us for the separation of the soul and the spirit from the body.

You may not understand, without a word of explanation, what I mean by speaking of the soul and spirit as distinct things. As I understand it, man is a trinity, consisting, first, of the animal body, which is possessed of attributes, which he shares in common with the whole animal creation; secondly, of the soul, which has its intellect and its affections proper to itself; and thirdly, of what I may call, for want of a better phrase, his electrical body, which connects the soul with the animal body, and which at death leaves the body and passes into the spirit-world with the soul, and there constitutes its form or tenement. As the three united constitute the mortal man on earth, so the soul and the electrical body together constitute the spirit in its existence beyond the grave.

It is of this separation between the body and that which afterwards constitutes the spirit, as a distinct individualised existence, that I am speaking, when I say that it is a gradual process and has several steps, and is not the mere single act of cessation of breath and pulsation.

Those steps are the gradual preparation which old age and sickness make for the separation; the unconsciousness which often precedes death; the cessation of breath and circulation; the departure of the electrical from the animal body, the formation of the spirit body (justly called the resurrection of the body); the entrance of the soul into that body; the unconsciousness which follows after death; the spirit hanging around the animal body; even after the separation, and lingering still around the earth, even after, in the language of the old patriarch, we have buried our dead out of our sight. Of these several things I shall speak by-and-by; now I would pause a moment to call your attention to one of those considerations.

How many of us, after death, linger still around the earth, drawn there by the mere selfish animal lives we have led, by the sense of some duty neglected in life and still to be performed, or by the strong ties of affection toward the near and the dear ones we have left behind! It is out of this consideration that there has sprung the increased interest in Spiritualism which we are now beholding, and which is bringing thousands to inquire and to investigate.

Within the last two years, in this country, some two hundred thousand men, in the full vigour of their manhood—not worn out and effete by a long life, nor rendered decrepit by old age—have, by means of the war, passed into the spirit-world, leaving behind them ties and attachments that bring them back; and we are surrounded by this host of men; and think you that they are silent and inactive at a time like this, when they find that they can speak? Nay, my friends, the revival of the interest which we now experience proclaims their presence. They begin to tell upon us, and they will, by-and-by, tell upon our country and its future.

Their work has begun, and we err when we speak of their death as a misfortune. It is not a misfortune to them nor to us; for they have passed from this troubled scene nearer to their God, and they can do more now fighting God's battles against error than they ever did in fighting Lincoln's against slavery and rebellion. They are now toiling hard, and day by day shall we see their handiwork in our midst.

But that is not all. Thousands of families have been bereaved by these deaths. Affliction and sorrow and mourning have entered many a household. Mothers, children, wives, friends, have looked around for comfort amid the deep affliction which these deaths have caused, and they have gone to the Church in vain. They are coming to us. They are seeking comfort and support in spiritual intercourse. Their hearts are ready for the great truths which that intercourse teaches, and their cry for succour will be heard and answered.

But this is a digression which I could hardly avoid. I return to my subject, and call your attention to three things which often precede death, in respect to which erroneous ideas are entertained:—

1. The presentiment of death which so often precedes its advent. One who was very dear to me had this presentiment for several months previous, though not so ill as to excite any apprehensions in my mind until the very day it occurred; and my brother, though not ill enough to be confined to his bed, was so strongly impressed, that, several days before his death, which was sudden and unexpected to everyone else, he gave particular instructions as to what should be done as to his family and his property after his dissolution.

We all know how often this occurs. Yet how seldom do we profit by it! We are falsely told that it is the fear of death which causes this, and we doff the lesson by and bid it pass, unimproved and unavailing. We are not taught, as we ought to be, the source whence the premonition comes, nor how, profitably, to avail ourselves of it; but, on the other hand, it is often used as the instrument of our torture and subjection by our teachers and our own superstition.

Understanding it in its true aspect, as enlightening us from on high as

to the future—as one of those things which our spirit-friends, seeing our approaching dissolution, can reveal to us—of how much avail it may be to us when regarded with good sense, rather than when, in our ignorance, we are driven to the foot of the priest and are made to endow him or his Church richly, at the expense of wife, children, and friends. It takes away the dreadful fear of death in those who are well instructed, and can easily be made the instrument of comfort rather than of suffering. Yet how many are deprived of that comfort by the miserable misdirection of their religious feelings which their teachers have caused!

I once knew a female, a strict member of an orthodox church, who would by no means violate what she called the Sabbath. She attended all the prayer-meetings of the church, and filled her life full of strict observances of the discipline of her church, and death approached with this presentiment in herself. But it was a fearful death in her, for uppermost in her mind was a doubt as to whether she would live at all, and the conviction that if she lived her chance of an eternity of damnation was greater than for an eternity of happiness; for she had been taught that she could earn the one and not the other. And sad indeed was the spectacle of the death of that strict religionist, the presentiment there being robbed of its benefit and converted into an instrument of torture.

2. Another thing connected with death we should bear in mind; there is not generally that suffering which the external throes we behold would induce us to suppose. I have been told by spirits, over and over again, that during all those throes and groanings or struggles that we behold at the moment of dissolution, there is no consciousness of pain—it is the mere insensible struggle of the spirit to part with the body; and there is not, therefore, such cause of uneasiness and unhappiness on our own part.

I recollect on one occasion I was standing by the death-bed of my nephew. The father of the boy, my brother, had to retire to his bed, having been exhausted by several nights' watching, and I took his place. The boy died during my watch that night. His stepmother and his aunt (my sister) on one occasion during the night came into the room where I was watching. And while they stood by his bedside looking at him, he was in the state of unconsciousness that preceded death. A few moments before he died, a beautiful smile came upon his face, and those two women said: "How he suffers!" "Suffers!" said I; "he rejoices! his sight is opened—he sees where he is going and who are to be his companions." And yet they shrank from a beautiful spiritual manifestation, and interpreted it into an evidence of his suffering. Had they seen, as I did, who were hovering around him ready to receive him, they would have rejoiced as I did.

I attended my dearly beloved friend, Isaac T. Hopper, for the last day or two of his life; and for several hours he was afflicted with these throes and struggles of approaching dissolution, which seemed to those of us who stood by his death-bed to be full of great suffering. He has told me since, frequently, that there was no pain, no suffering there, no anguish.

3. Another event that frequently attends death (and I am now speaking of those things that precede the moments of dissolution) is beholding the spirits around the dying person—the dying person himself

beholding them. How often in our medical and religious books do we read of these incidents! The world is full of these scenes, and yet no man thinks of putting them together or of making anything out of them. They are generally viewed as a deranged condition of the person who is dying. But how miserably we mistake when we look upon that as derangement and delirium and unworthy of notice! It is, in very deed, the spirit looking to the land into which it is passing—seeing clearly what it is into which it is about to pass, and who are they that will receive and accompany it.

I have had on several occasions to witness this. When my nephew thus smiled at the very moment of death, he saw, as I did, that it was his mother, a cousin, and an aunt who were attending on him and waiting to welcome him to the spirit-life. His mind was on them, and not on his mortal throes or his mortal friends who stood by his bedside. I saw, too, the joy with which, in a little while, he joined them, and in their loving company passed away from earth and its scenes.

So, too, in the case of a brother-in-law, who died after a lingering illness and of advanced age. I saw who attended his dying moments. I visited him frequently during his illness, and, at his request, I detailed to him what I had then learned as to the life after death. One night, when sleeping in my own home, I was awakened out of a sound sleep about midnight, and saw his spirit standing by my bedside. He told me that he had been up there with his sister-in-law, who had been dead some months, and he had found it to be just as I had told him. I supposed he was then dead, but I found the next morning he was not—that he had that morning revived from the unconsciousness that had been stealing over him, and told his wife that he had been in the spirit-world; that he had there met some friends, whom he named; that he had found it to be as I had told him; that he knew where he was going; that he was very happy, and wished her not to be distressed at his death, for it was all well with him. A few days after that he died, and he was attended by his son and his father-in-law, who had died several years before, and he and I alike saw them when his departure occurred.

These are some of the many instances in which it has been shown us how the life into which the spirit is to pass is revealed to us before the final consummation of death. And now, when we can see this in our midst and can understand it, why, in the name of God, should we not cultivate the knowledge, and thus relieve ourselves from the fear of death, which performs no other office than inflicting suffering and creating mental bondage? Thus far as to what precedes the cessation of animal life.

The next consideration is, What happens immediately after death? The first thing, as I understand it, is the formation of the spirit body. Connected with this subject, there are many particulars of infinite importance, which alone would occupy me for several successive Sundays. I must, therefore, on this occasion, content myself with the endeavour to convey to you the general idea in a very brief statement, and leave you to work it out for yourselves, and see whether I am speaking truthfully to you, or whether I am misleading you. I ask you to receive nothing of

this kind upon my authority. The road that I have travelled I merely ask you to travel, and see whether I have viewed the scene aright.

The formation of the spirit-body has been beheld by me on two occasions, and once, if I recollect aright, it was described by Mr. Davis as having been seen by him. That was in the case of a man who was crushed by a falling bank of earth. When we die, the mortal body decays—passes back to the dust from which it is said to come. But the other two parts of the trinity which I have mentioned—the electrical body and the soul—together pass into the other world. The spirit forms its body there. At the moment of, or immediately after, death, it passes out of the corpse in the shape of a pale, smoke-like flame, and hovers directly over it, an unformed, unshapen cloud, for awhile, but gradually assuming the human form. When this process is completed, and the electrical body has thus passed from the mortal, and is hovering above it, it assumes the precise form of the corpse it leaves behind. And here you see two persons—the dead body of the person lying on the bed, and the electrical body hovering over it, and both inanimate.

I beheld, in one instance, the spirit-body forming directly over the body of the man that lay dead, and, when thus formed, I was struck with the marvellous resemblance to the earthly form of the individual who had thus died, represented in this cloud-body first formed. It lay there perfect in form, but there was no animation; suddenly it started into new life. I understood then what it was—it was the soul entering that spirit-body that was its tenement for the other life.

The first thing, then, that occurs to us all immediately upon death, is the formation of the spirit-body. And if we are right in this respect, we have a wonderful illustration of the manner in which we have been led astray by the teachings of our ghostly instructors. The idea of the trinity, you observe, is a correct one, but it is a trinity that belongs to every human being; we have the three parts in us and every one of us—the one part, the soul, being an emanation from the Deity, and peculiar to immortal man alone of the whole animal creation. And, catching that idea—not fabricating it—having a faint conception of the reality, but attaching it to only one individual of those who have lived upon the earth, and running off with a distorted idea of the trinity—our “ghostly teachers” have called upon us to worship Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, in a sense in which no other human being can share with him the position in which he stood upon earth; and out of that error mankind have been miserably misled, and discord and contention have marked Christianity for ages.

That is not the only error of the kind into which the churches, catching the idea, but perverting it for their own purposes, or misunderstanding it in their ignorance, have misled themselves and others. I ought not to say, I must not be understood as saying or intending to say, that in all instances these errors are designed. There are errors of ignorance—the want of knowledge—in which we share with them in many respects in which we have not been instructed; but there are others in which they received some knowledge, and in their ignorance misunderstand it, or in their wilfulness misteach it; for instance, the idea entertained by some

of the churches, of a purgatory and forgiveness of sin while in that condition. If the doctrine of progression is true, there must be some such condition as that which is thus termed purgatory. In reaching up from our present condition to the highest possible attainment in the kingdom of heaven, there must be various steps. One of these the Church calls purgatory, and it is not without its semblance of reality. But the error is in what has been engrafted on that idea, namely, that with paltry gold and silver, administered to the priesthood, you can buy your friends out of that condition.

So they have the shadow of truth in regard to the invocation of saints. What is our communion with spirits but invocation of saints? When we speak to our friends in the spirit-world, and ask them for knowledge on any subject, or for protection, what is it but invocation of saints? So, too, when they speak of our redeemer. I know that my redeemer lives, and I know that the redeemer of every human being lives. It is not one man alone, however, that is the redeemer of the whole human race. That spirit that comes to us in our darkness and in our sorrow, that lifts us from the despair into which ignorance or misdirection has led us, which opens to us the door of knowledge, which tells us that there is a future which we can attain—that spirit, when it descends from its high and holy habitation and performs its task of withdrawing me from error and from sin, to me is indeed my redeemer. And I, when I speak to my fellow man, and give him the answer to his inquiry which leads him upwards—I am his redeemer. And in that sense, and in that alone, has man a redeemer. And yet, with a glimmering of truth, see how much man has been misled!

So, too, when they speak of the resurrection. Have you not already been told of the spirit-form that is created immediately after death, and do you not see in that the resurrection of man? Then, understanding how that is, instead of being misled by terror and superstition, we are able intelligently to approach this final consummation of our earth-life and enter upon the next without being terrified or enslaved.

I have alluded to these things that you may see what cause of gratitude to God you have for the superior enlightenment vouchsafed to you in regard to matters long since revealed to man, but in his ignorance imperfectly received and imperfectly taught. And this gratitude is due, not because you have been chosen as the particular favourites of the power now again making these revelations to man, but because you have been blessed with the understanding that has enabled you to separate the error from the truth, and with the courage to follow the truth wherever it leads, undeterred by the hostility which the perversions of the past have thrown in your way.

The next step, after the formation of the spirit-body, is the awakening to consciousness in the spirit-life. With some this is a long time coming, with others it takes but a single instant, varying in different persons between these two extremes, and is produced partly by physical causes, but chiefly by our moral condition.

I can best illustrate the proposition by telling some incidents that have enabled me to come to something like a correct conclusion upon this subject;

whether right or wrong, judge you upon your own examination. I say, in some instances it is long before consciousness returns. Once, at a circle, I was visited by the spirit of a young girl—this was, I think, in the month of March—she was the granddaughter of an English nobleman; she had died in London when dancing at a party. When she awakened to consciousness, she was with us. She thought she had been carried into the greenhouse, and that she was there when speaking to us. She heard our voices, and talked with us under that impression, and she was wonderfully surprised when we told her she was not in London, but in America. She was surprised to find that we were not savages, as she had always thought the Americans were, and in the course of my inquiries I found she had never been awakened to consciousness from the moment that she fell and expired until that moment. Then the inquiry was, how long that unconsciousness had continued. She could not measure the time, but she remembered one of the feasts of the Church which occurred just before her death, and we knowing when that was, were thus enabled to know that she had been in this state of unconsciousness from the previous November until March. During those four months she had known nothing; she supposed that she had merely fainted in the ball-room, and was then recovering her consciousness in the greenhouse immediately adjoining.

On one occasion we were sitting at my house on Sunday afternoon, and enjoying a beautiful day in June, with our hearts uplifted in joy and gratitude to God, and we were laughing. A spirit came and reproached us with desecrating the Sabbath. We found he had been a deacon of a church in Alabama. He had been dead several months, and the only consciousness he had had since his death had been that every Sunday he went to that church and was conscious of the services there. I asked him what he had been doing the rest of the time—what were his thoughts or actions on the week-days. He answered: "I must have been asleep the rest of the time." Months had passed, and the only consciousness he had had during the whole of those months had been that he went to the same church every Sunday, and was conscious of his being there, and there was preaching. Thus his consciousness had only been partially aroused.

On one occasion a sailor came to me. He had been on board of a vessel in its return from the Pacific Ocean, and he had fallen from the mast-head, and been drowned at sea. I asked him when he fell overboard. He could not tell the time, but said that when the ship put into Rio Janeiro he heard of Gen. Taylor's death, and it was after they had sailed from that port that he fell overboard. But he said when he came to consciousness it was right over the spot where he fell into the water; the ship had gone on out of sight. He followed and overtook it, and he must have been some time unconscious.

I had a friend who died here a few years ago, a most good-natured, honest, noble-hearted fellow, but rather indolent. He was brought on one occasion, after his death, to my house by some spirit-friends, who desired to rouse him from this state of semi-torpor in which he was involved. He had heard it all his life long preached about the last judgment day; so when he arrived in the spirit-world and began to awaken, he settled

down into a state of dreamy composure and waited to hear the last trump. He determined he would not stir and ought not to stir until the trump had sounded. He was brought to my house by those friends, in order to see if they could fully awaken him; and when told by those friends that he was then in my presence, he said it was all nonsense, and sank again into his half-unconscious condition, and refused to be disturbed.

On one other occasion a friend of mine had been engaged in the same lawsuit with me, but on the opposite side. I had missed him a day or two from the case, and on inquiry learned that he was confined to his house with a bad cold. On the day that I learned that, and at seven o'clock in the afternoon, while in a stage going home, and when opposite the City Hall, where we had been engaged in that cause, he came to me and said: "Judge, I am dead." I felt his presence accompanying me up-town. When opposite Grace Church, a gentleman got into the stage and mentioned to one of the passengers that that person was dead, and had died about two hours ago. I had not then heard of it except from himself, and it thus appeared that he was awakened to consciousness in a very short time after his death.

But there was one case more remarkable than all, and that was the case of my dear old friend, Isaac T. Hopper. I was with him until seven o'clock in the evening, when I had to attend a circle, and I told the family I would return after the circle was over and spend the night. After we had got through the ordinary operations of the circle at nine or ten o'clock, I asked, mentally, how long he would probably live. The answer was spelled out through raps. It was: "I am now in the spirit-land. I am united to the companion of my early days. Tell my family of this." Signed with the initials, "I. T. H." Nobody at the circle could understand the communication, because they had not heard my question, but I understood it. Thus he came and announced to me his death.

In conversing with him afterwards, I asked him how long his consciousness had been suspended, and his answer was: Not one instant, for he knew all of death as he passed through the change from the mortal to the immortal form.

Thus the man whose whole life had been devoted to doing good to his fellow men—he who told me in his last moments that he died owing nothing and owning nothing—who had lived his three-score years and ten and had been occupied with no other thought than that of doing good to others—had passed from earth to heaven, from man to God, with all of God awake and alive within him. What a lesson does it teach us! and what is there of death to be feared by him who thus fills the earth-life as God designed that it should be filled?

There is another topic, and I am done—that is, in regard to how we are surrounded after the mortal has put on immortality. One of my brother judges came to me after he died. He said to me: "Why, Judge, I am surrounded by the spirits of those men whom we condemned to be hanged, and they say I must go with them. Good God!" said he, "must I?" Those were his surroundings!

When Mr. Hopper died, he first encountered his wife, who had preceded him many years, and was next surrounded by great numbers of those

whom he had aided and relieved in life, and, as he told me, they bore him at once through what he called the sphere of remorse, where he was not obliged to linger one moment, and away to the home that belonged to him who had thus laboured to imitate God.

When my wife died, she first met her two children, then many others whom she had known on earth, as well as spirits from other planets, with all of whom she passed away from earth.

One other instance, lately coming under my observation, I will relate, and then bring my discourse to a close. Many, perhaps all of you, are aware that in February last my only brother died. He had been opposed to my Spiritualism, and particularly ten years ago, when I made a public avowal of my belief. He really at first believed it was a mental delusion in me. His opinion in that respect was afterwards modified, but he did not regard Spiritualism with any more favour. He was a very exemplary man in all the relations of life—a member and one of the officers of an Episcopal church, and much beloved by all who got beneath a rough surface and saw the genuine goodness that was abundant there.

His death had been very sudden. He had gone to bed at his usual hour, and about four o'clock in the morning his wife had found him sitting up in his chair quite dead.

About six weeks after his death he came to me and said: "My dear brother John, I am much happier than I can express that I have power to return to earth, a conscious living identity, and have power to convey to you my wishes and experience. As you are aware, I was always opposing you in this theory, and now, in all due honour to you; I feel it no more than duty to return and tell you that I was terribly mistaken, brother, while you were and are correct, and I crave your forgiveness if I have unwittingly or through ignorance opposed you so as to have made myself disagreeable to you or yours, and which I sincerely acknowledge to be wilful stubbornness on my part—fighting against well-authenticated facts. But, brother, there is nothing so positive as tangible evidence, such as I have had. I, however, feel sorry that I was unwilling to see the truth until this most positive personal experience was forced upon me, which I could not, dare not refute. And just as soon as I felt I could communicate with you, I desired to make the acknowledgment and receive your blessing.

"I am happy here—much more so than I dared to hope; have met father, mother, brothers, and your dear Sarah. She is so cheering. I wish you could see her as I do—full of the milk of human kindness and love to all. She is near you most of her time, shedding rays of love over your pathway."

I asked him what were his sensations or perceptions after awaking to consciousness after his death, and he answered:

"Surprise! Perfectly amazed at what surrounded me! I saw my dear wife sleeping sweetly, and blessed her. Knowing how much alarmed she would be at the mortal form of her dear husband inanimate and lifeless, I tried to make the blow as soft as possible.

"I suffered so much that I could not remain in bed, so got up to get breath, and soon passed away.

"As I saw earthly objects fading, I saw our dear mother's spirit, which convinced me I had made a great change. Then I soon saw father and brothers, and was satisfied I had gone from earth. I had feared the pangs of death, and not suffering them I thought at first it must be a delicious sleep, on awaking from which the stern realities of life would be made manifest; but to my joy and great happiness that was not so."

I asked: "What next did you see?" He answered: "My darling boy, whom I had so deeply mourned: then vast beauties in Art and Nature; a soft, gentle atmosphere, sweet with perfume; melodious music and bright faces beaming love upon me, bidding me welcome to their abodes of bliss. Oh! I was overcome with joy, and wanted all my friends to die instantly, that they might realise what I was enjoying. But they told me that I must not carry my selfishness into spirit-life; that was to be left behind. They whom I desired had glorious missions to perform among men, and must live for the good they could do to mankind, while I must aid them with my influence and experience. I was too happy, and wept with joy. Then I came to you and tried to speak to you through Laura; but I was fearful I might injure her, and desisted. Then I tried to have you see me, but could not convey my full idea; but now I will be able to."

"Well," I asked, "what have you been doing since?"

He answered: "Everything in my power that would impart, even in a small degree, good to others."

I asked: "When you saw father, mother, &c., did you see them as you saw them on earth, or was there a difference?"

He answered: "Not any, apparently; only upon scrutinising them I saw an ethereal appearance—a luminous brilliancy from within."

I asked if he had looked at his watch when he got out of bed, so that he could tell the time.

He answered: "Twenty minutes past one o'clock, and at twenty minutes to two I was gone from earth."

I inquired if he could tell me what had made his condition there so happy and joyous.

He answered: "The knowledge that I lived on in happy consciousness."

"But," I remarked, "the vicious and depraved must have that same consciousness there."

He said, "Well, I had tried to live an honest man. They tell me that assisted me to be happy. I do not, on looking back, see that I wronged any man."

Such was death to one who, even beyond the grave, could say, "I tried to live an honest man, and do wrong to no one."

Let, then, the craven fear of death flee far from your minds; for thus comes the voice to all of us from beyond the grave. It is deep speaking unto deep. It is a voice from the ground, proclaiming to us our resurrection. It is a revelation from on high, crying to us, Come up hither! And may the good God give us the capacity to hearken and obey!

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