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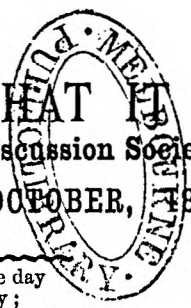
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SPIRITUALISM. "WHAT IT IS."

An Essay read before the Free Discussion Society,

ON
SUNDAY EVENING, 29th OCTOBER, 1871,

By G. S. M.



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"Through the harsh noises of the day  
A low sweet prelude finds its way;  
Through clouds of doubt and creeds of fear  
A light is breaking calm and clear."

WITHIN the last twenty-five or thirty years there has grown up a scepticism founded upon the revelations of science and research, which has spread so widely, that every class of society is more or less affected by it; and that to an extent almost too great to be readily believed.

I allude to the doubts that have arisen in reference to the literal correctness of the Bible statements respecting God, Nature, human origin, and man's final destiny.

I do not mean to imply, however, that vital religion has been in any way retarded in its growth thereby, but that the religion of the day seems to be one of the "understanding rather than of the feeling or blind credulity," as in times gone by.

The first great quarrel was probably that between theology and astronomy, after that geology stepped in, then came Adam the first man versus many more first men; now comes Spiritualism. And perhaps there are few subjects with which the public are less familiar from personal experience, than they are with Spiritualism; few certainly less understood, and fewer still that have been so often misrepresented. But with all it is daily gaining ground among the thinking portion of mankind, as well as claiming a great deal of attention from the general public everywhere. Notwithstanding this, the nature, aim and object of Spiritualism are but little comprehended; there is still a great deal of misconception entertained respecting it. But that *misconceptions do exist*, that it is *not* better understood, should not be thought strange, nor need it be a cause for wonder, especially when we take into consideration the few opportunities there have been, in this country at least, for a thorough investigation of it. My purpose is not to attempt to prove the truth of Spiritualism. I believe I am fully justified in assuming that the subject has become one of sufficient importance to be dealt with as an established fact. But while I assume so much, I do not, therefore, take for granted that the question is finally settled. A new science is ever open to be assailed by a multiplicity of questions, which, from lack of fuller information, it would perhaps be impossible to answer. We should not however take that as a proof of the falsehood of the subject so assailed; it would merely show that it had not yet reached maturity.

This is exactly the case with regard to Spiritualism to-day. Questions are continually arising (and in the minds of none more than in the minds of Spiritualists themselves), which from the present imperfect state of our knowledge, and the difficulties attending spirit communion cannot be satisfactorily replied to.

The great questions of life and its eternal destiny are still unsolved. Its beginnings and causes are still open questions. The destiny of the soul in the eternity future, is an enigma that is shrouded in the most profound mystery, that no eye can pierce no penetration discover. God is still the Infinite and the unknown. Nature with all its beauties and grandeur, is ever an object of admiration, wonder, and astonishment.

But for all this the great panorama of existence is being gradually filled with light and shade, prophetic of the coming future. Slowly but nevertheless surely, is the knowledge by which we shall be enabled to read this enigma of nature and life dawning upon us; and we are compelled to gaze in wrapt admiration at the scene. Our souls thrill with delight as we contemplate the prospect; as truth after truth is established, that raises, though it be but a little, the veil that hides the golden age of knowledge from our view.

The great and fundamental idea of Spiritualism, is the communion between the inhabitants of the Spirit-world and the residents in earth life, including the idea of "mind interchange with mind," whether in or out of the body. And in this particular, even the most rigid religionist cannot disagree with its claims, that is if he has any faith in the teachings of his own creed, which teaches the "communion of saints."

The Rev. W. E. Channing said, "We need not doubt the fact that angels, whose home is heaven, do communicate, visit our earth, and bear a part in our transactions; and we have good reason to believe that if we obtain admission into heaven we shall still have opportunity, not only to return earth, but to view God's operations in other distant spheres, and be his ministering angels in other worlds."

The Rev. G. Hepworth, Unitarian, states, "I have the firmest faith in that kernel of inspiration which has given to Spiritualism all its value; the assertion that heaven is close to us and that its inhabitants walk the earth both when we wake and when we sleep. Yes I do believe in this possible communion with all my heart."

Two other orthodox ministers, the Rev. Dr. Ballou and his brother both testify their belief in spirit communion in the following language. "We believe that angels from the Spirit-world do communicate with the spirits still in the flesh. That there is an exquisitely subtle element communicable from one soul to another, under appropriate conditions, and thereby the two souls come into *rapport*, as the French call it, or soul communion."

Mrs. Harriet B. Stowe also, in her brother's paper, the "Church Union," declares her opinion of it in clear and unfaltering language thus:—"We hold to that belief in the *unbroken unity* possible between those who have passed to the higher life and this. We hold to that vivid faith in things unseen which was the strength of primitive Christians. The first Christians *believed* what they said they did—we do not. The unseen spiritual world, its angels and archangels, its saints and martyrs, its purity and its joys, were ever before them, and that is why they were such a mighty force in the world. St. Augustine says that it was the vision of the saints gone before that inspired them with courage and contempt of death—and it is true."

"That these phenomena do occur and are daily becoming more common among us is a fact that ought to arouse true Christians to consideration. They are not confined to paid mediums and spirit

circles so called. They sometimes come of themselves to persons neither believing in, looking for, nor seeking them. Thus coming they cannot but powerfully move the soul." Further on she says "the continued identity, interest and unbroken oneness of the departed with the remaining, was a topic frequently insisted on among early Christian ministers; *it was one reason of the rapid spread of Christianity.*" How altered now, when for believing in such a truth Christians are unceremoniously thrust out of the churches!

The spiritual heaven is quietly doing its work. It is the "still small voice" that gets the patient hearing at last."

Again in the following touchingly tender lines, she expresses her firm belief in her own communion with those whom she had loved and lost:—

"Those halting tones that sound to you  
Are not the tones I hear;  
But voices of the lov'd and lost  
Now greet my longing ear.  
I hear my angel mother's voice—  
Those were the words she sung;  
I hear my brother's ringing tones,  
As once on earth they rung."

I might continue to quote from modern orthodox writers to show, that spirit communion is neither a new nor strange thing among them, but that it has been believed in from the earliest ages of Christianity, and that early Christianity itself owed all its vitality, power, and influence, to this one great fact, namely, the proof it afforded of a future state of existence.

This belief pervades also the writings of ancient nations, such as the Chinese, Hindoos, and Egyptians, and formed a principal feature in the religion of the North American Indian.

In fact I am not afraid of successful contradiction when I say that Spiritualism has been before the people in all ages and in all countries, though it has not been acknowledged as such.

This has been reserved for modern times to accomplish; as well as to behold and understand its power and influence on the human family. Modern Spiritualism has come upon us like an avalanche, overthrowing error and superstition. It has shown us that the writers of the Bible were but mediums of truths from the Spirit-world; that even Jesus himself was under an influence (direct and powerful undoubtedly) that baptized him in a flood of spiritual illumination, lifted him up from the plane of gross materiality, and enabled him to recognize more clearly the divinity that dwells in man, and the link that binds as in one family the entire human race. Hence also the purity and sublimity of his teachings, recognizing as he does the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. But all these teachings were more or less tinged with the character of the medium through whom they were given.

There was the fiery and impulsive Peter, Paul with his mighty intellect, his towering ambition, and his indomitable will, hardly redeemed from his intense love of Judaism. And so it is in the present day, the minds of inspirational mediums *do* colour the messages which they receive from the Spirit-world; but there are those (test mediums so called) through whom messages are transmitted pure.

Time will not permit my referring to many such messages, but I have selected one, and though some of you may have met it before, I

will with your permission read it, as it in a measure answers the question "What good has Spiritualism done?" as well as shows that we can, under certain conditions, obtain messages direct and pure from those who have passed on before:—

"Mary Jenkins is a widow who has just lost her son William, twenty years of age. He was not vicious; he was not religious, but kind to his mother, whose affections were centered on him. He was her all. A fever seized him, and the cold grave has closed over all that was left, and she cannot be comforted. She opens the Old Testament and reads: "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." "But how many?" she says. "When will they awake? Will my boy awake then, and shall I also awake, and shall I see and know him?" Where can she obtain the answers to these important questions? She turns to the New Testament for the comfort that the Old is unable to give, and she reads: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." Ah! but *my* boy did not die in the Lord; he cared nothing about the Lord. What blessing is there for him? She reads again: "The fearful, the unbelieving, and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." She remembers that William was an unbeliever, and scoffed at sacred things; nor did he always tell the truth. Her fears say: "He has his part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." And her mother's love says: "I wish I was there with him, to comfort him. Oh! shall I ever see my boy? Would to God that I might go where he is! I'd rather be in the deepest hell with him, than in the highest heaven without him."

She hears of Emerson, the Concord philosopher; of his profound wisdom and his benevolent heart, and she resolves to call upon him and inquire of him in the anguish of her heart. She states the case: "Now, Mr. Emerson, *is* my boy alive, and shall we meet again?" "Well," says Mr. Emerson, "we have no proof of immortality, but it is highly probable that he does live somewhere, and you may possibly meet him again." "Highly probable!" says the mourning widow, "it is possible," rings in her desolate soul—"is this all?" and she turns, sad and sorrowful, away. Some one informs her that our friend Alger, the Unitarian minister has made the subject of the future existence of man a special subject of study for many years, and to him she also applies. Her heart is breaking with grief, doubt and anxiety, and she cannot rest. "Yes," says Mr. Alger, "I have studied this subject for twenty-three years. I have read all the books that I could find which treat of it, and my conclusion is, that I know nothing of the existence of man after death—neither does any other man, much as some pretend. It is impious to discern what God has not thought proper to reveal." Sadder, fearfully sadder, but no wiser, she turns in silence and sorrow away.

She has heard of Spiritualism, but it had always been regarded by her as something low and vulgar; it was the Nazareth out of which no good thing could come. But at length she goes to a medium, a total stranger; raps are heard upon the table at which she sits, and they profess to come from the spirit of her boy. But she is not to be convinced by any such cheap test as this. She is told by the raps to place a sheet of paper under the table with a pencil upon it. She instantly hears the motion of the pencil on the paper, and on taking it out, reads to her astonishment and delight:

DEAR MOTHER,

Cheer up I am with you; your William watches over you for good; we shall meet again.

Your loving son,

WILLIAM JENKINS.

There was a facsimile of his writing; away go clouds and gloom, joy chases sadness from her soul, and she blesses the *only* source that has brought immortality to light, and revealed to her that her son has survived the shock of death, that the portals of the tomb have been passed, that her son lives and is transformed into her guardian angel.

But this is only one instance out of hundreds, nay thousands, that may be adduced to show the good it has done, and how often it has

been the means of transforming the gloomy portals of the tomb into the pearly gates of Paradise. Henceforth the hereafter is no longer to be dreaded, as the "Weird wild clime out of space out of time!" No; but as Longfellow beautifully shows, "The Spirit-world lies all about us, and its avenues are open to the unseen feet of phantoms that come and go, and we perceive them not, save by their influence, or when at times a most mysterious providence permits them to *manifest themselves to mortal eyes*," and then—

"When the hours of day are numbered,  
And the voices of the night  
Wake the better souls that slumbered,  
To a holy, calm delight;  
Ere the evening lamps are lighted,  
And like phantoms grim and tall,  
Shadows from the fitful-fire-light,  
Dance upon the parlour wall—  
Then the forms of the departed  
Enter at the open door;  
The belov'd ones, the true hearted,  
Come to visit us once more;  
With a slow and noiseless footstep  
Comes that messenger divine  
Takes the vacant chair beside me,  
Lays her gentle hand in mine,  
And she sits and gazes at me,  
With those deep and tender eyes,  
Like the stars, so still and saint-like,  
Looking downwards from the skies."

Spiritualism also teaches man's individuality, that he is to grant to all the right he claims for himself, viz., the right of private judgment, and that he must, if ever he attain happiness, work out his own salvation. That he is to be a follower of no man, to accept no authority, to be bound by no creed, but that truth and reason are to be his only guides; that he is to use, not to silence that highest and noblest of all his faculties.

Further it teaches that he is an eternally, progressive being, that nature is, always has been, and ever must be, one eternally expanding scene of progress and development, in which retrogression is impossible. That man never could have fallen from that high estate of perfection represented in the Old Testament, but that as a "constituent of the universe" he must ever endlessly progress in all the faculties and power of his being.

But progression implies growth, and growth is positively a law of the universe, as we see from external nature, in all the varied phenomena of change that are going on around us, which phenomena are the result of the combination of forces, or elements in nature, which are continually operating and producing this growth.

That we do not comprehend these forces, elements or principles, and their modes of acting, is no argument against their existence, nor should it be thought strange. "For there are more things in heaven and earth than were ever dreamt of in our philosophy."

All admit that "progress is the law in mundane things—in science—in the diminution of time—of space—distance," and a thousand and one other things point to the same great fact.

Are we then to suppose that this law terminates on the material side of the universe, and does not extend itself to the spiritual side of

things? As we reason from the lesser to the greater we have every inducement to lead us to the supposition, that it does extend to the Spirit-world, and this is the crowning glory of Spiritualism; for it produces evidence of man's immortality and his progression in the second life.

Most of us have been taught that those whom we have loved and lost are the denizens of a far off heaven, chanting their own redemption in songs of praise, unmindful of *our* welfare or even existence, and that they will either greet us on our entrance at the portals of the New Jerusalem, or look down from its battlements on our damnation with equal complacency. But Spiritualism has for ever exploded this repulsive dogma; and given us a knowledge more in harmony with the spirit of love that dwells within.

It is a religious system in which the natural desires of the soul are gratified; in which the soul rests on spiritualities, which are flooding it with light and leading it through obedience to law, to rise above and soar away beyond confines of mere mundane influences. And unlike all other systems it embraces all mankind within its folds, for being based upon the spiritual laws of the universe finds its recognition in every truth-loving and truth-seeking mind.

Its aspirations in the language of the poet, are—

“Transfuse me with Thy consciousness  
O! Spirit of Creation, I would be so merged in  
Thy existence, as to know, to live, feel,  
Meditate, enjoy in Thee.  
O! give Thy nature to me,  
Let Thy soul through all my faculties descend,  
Be thou the root of all my being  
Which from Thee shall flow  
A deathless flower of love divine.  
If I have reasoned wrongly—let the light of thy pure love  
Transform the inner mind—make it a glorious mirror  
To reflect Thy perfect love, Thy attributes, Thyself.”

Such aspirations need no comment from me.

In connection with the subject, however, it will perhaps be well to show in what light prayer is regarded by the Spiritualist; and I cannot do this better than by quoting the language of another poet on the subject, as it conveys the idea clearer than any language of mine can possibly do:—

“True prayer is a boon to the soul,  
And brings many blessings with its control,  
A ladder that lifts every child of the sod  
Into closer communion with nature and God;  
And brings it in union with angels above.  
But God, ever changeless in laws and decrees,  
Is ever unbending regardless of pleas.  
Yet prayer aids the soul that aspiringly prays,  
Not only resolving but mending his ways.”

In one word, Spiritualism teaches all that can make religious worship true devotion; all that can make life pure, man holy, elevate the soul, and fit it for its future home of happiness and enjoyment.

But Spiritualism has also a scientific side, and has opened up new fields of research in the realms of science, and shown that there is a force in existence unknown to science, unclassified by scientists—“a problem which science is bound to solve or remain baffled in ignorance.” Spiritualism teaches that all the phenomena that occur, proceed from natural laws and natural forces.



The great question what is mediumistic power or force, has never yet been scientifically explained. The science of Accoustics has never yet accounted for the raps; nor Optics for the apparitions—Mechanics too have failed to explain the movements of heavy bodies without visible contact, or to account for the floating of bodies in mid-air, contrary to the supposed laws of gravitation. These are facts that cannot be denied, but have never been explained by scientists.

Professor Varley in a letter to Mr. Crookes, dated London, July, 1871, says—"I am anxious to hear how you will explain the phenomena (the performance of music upon the instrument) by *physical* force. I do not wish to press you to answer this letter, nor do I wish to interfere with your course of investigation, but I feel certain that by *interrogating* the new FORCE ITSELF, you will come to somewhat similar conclusions to those arrived at by Spiritualists almost without exception." Before giving Mr. Crookes' reply to this letter let me read parenthetically what Mr. Varley had said in a previous letter to Mr. Crookes on the same subject:—He states, "I know of no instance either in the New or Old World, in which any clear-headed man, who has carefully examined the phenomena, has failed to become a convert to the Spiritualist hypothesis. The abuse and ridicule we have had to encounter come only from those who have never had the courage or the decency to make an investigation of it before denouncing, that about which they are entirely ignorant. In this respect the world seems to have made absolutely no progress during the last 170 years."

In reply to Mr. Varley's letter Mr. Crooke's writes—"My reticence on this subject (the association of the psychic force with intelligence) has been caused by a desire not to venture an opinion on so momentous a problem without having sufficient evidence drawn from my own personal experience to enable me to answer ALL objections. I have always kept prominently before my mind the fact that the accumulating evidence was such as might lead to the belief that independent intelligences—spirits—were at work. I have therefore carefully avoided saying anything that would render an ultimate retreat to that view difficult. But at present I wish to reserve my opinion on the causes of the phenomena until I have submitted the facts themselves to sufficiently accurate scientific tests. In the meantime I submit the Psychic force theory as common ground on which all parties may meet. For scientific men *cannot* now *deny* that we are getting evidence of a hitherto unrecognized force or power in nature. Whilst Spiritualists will see that I have simply used the term psychic force for magnetism, electricity, nerve-force, &c. But how that force is controlled are problems of vast interest to the future, but which I believe will yield solutions when intelligently submitted to scientific experiments."

W. CROOKES, F.R.S., &c.

In conclusion, I think you will agree with me that from the present aspect of Spiritualism we may confidently hope that the time is not very far distant when it may be said—

"Now will the darkening cloud of doubt be rent in twain,  
Never by its gloom to shroud the free-born mind again,  
Light, from the world divine will flood our world with light,  
Nature in glory shine and there be no more night;  
Give wing to thought, arise! and swiftly soar,  
Where truth with love abideth evermore."

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