

# IS SPIRITUALISM A SYSTEM OF BLASPHEMY AND IMMORALITY?

An Extract from a Lecture delivered in the Polytechnic Hall, Bourke Street, Melbourne, on Sunday Evening, February 16, 1873, in reply to the REV. R. POTTER'S attack on Spiritualism, by J. TYERMAN.

MR. POTTER'S first sermon having been replied to on the previous Sunday evening, Mr. Tyerman disposed of such other portions of the second sermon as required noticing, before replying to the two principal charges against Spiritualism. Mr. Potter had chosen two texts for his sermon, and on the first—Gal. i. 8.—Mr. Tyerman remarked that it had always been a favourite one with religious bigots and persecutors. Those who had dared to doubt any portion of the "Gospel," or deny the orthodox interpretation of it, and to advance any system of truth, no matter how rational and elevating, which the Priesthood disapproved of, had always been met in the language of Paul with a—"let him be accursed." Astronomers, Geologists, Naturalists, Ethnologists, and Free Thinkers of every class had been richly "cursed" by the messengers of a Gospel of love and peace. And now Spiritualists, for preaching the real Gospel of Christ, were receiving their full share of this pious "cursing," from the "ordained" lips of those holy men of God! But those *Christian anathemas*, whether hurled by the Pope from the Vatican of Rome, or by the Priest from the parish pulpit, were now powerless to injure or terrify, and were treated by all sensible people with that contempt they deserved. As to the second text—I John iv, 2, 3—he said, Spiritualists believed that "Christ had come in the flesh," but denied his Deity, which he never claimed for himself; and contended that all who worshipped Christ as God, broke the first commandment, and were guilty of as rank idolatry as the poor savage who bowed to the rising sun, or prostrated himself before the carved image of the "Great Spirit." To the ancient question—"What think ye of Christ?" he replied that the "Master" differed widely in spirit, teaching, and practice from most of his "servants" who professed to preach his gospel. The Master began his sermon on the Mount by uttering a "blessing;" many of his servants, like Mr. Potter, began their sermons by pronouncing a "curse." The Master generally chose the open air for his temple, and the hill side for his pulpit; many of his servants dealt out their strings of dull platitudes and cant phrases in magnificent buildings, which the people had been drained of thousands of pounds to erect, and which were often locked up in dusty uselessness six days out of seven. The Master spent most of his time in instructing the poor, and ministering to the wants of the needy; many of his servants preferred feasting at the tables of the rich, and attending to the necessities of the poor and needy by proxy, if at all. The Master was self-denying, and sought not social position or worldly goods, not having even "where to lay his head;" many of his servants strove with wondrous zeal for the fattest livings and the fewest duties. The Master was charitable, tender, forgiving, and prayed even for his murderers; many of his servants were selfish, intolerant, hard-hearted, given to underneath persecution, adepts at hurling foul epithets from the "sacred desk" at those who lived pure and noble lives, but could not swear that "one" makes "three" and "three" make only "one." Of course, there were many honourable exceptions among those who claimed to be the "commissioned servants of the Lord;" and when the pulpits were filled with true servants of the Lord instead of priestly "hirelings," the religion of Jesus would have a chance it had never yet had, to reform and bless society. After dealing with several other portions of the sermon, Mr. Tyerman proceeded to refute the two principal charges which Mr. Potter had, in the following words, preferred against Spiritualism:—

"Its moral system and its theological system may be summed up, by the Christian at least in two words, and these two words are—*whoredom* and *blasphemy*—the former is its *moral code* and the latter is its *creed*."

I. I will first deal briefly with the charge of "*blasphemy*."

"Blasphemy" is generally defined to be—an indignity offered to God: in other words—anything that imputes unworthy motives, purposes, or actions to God—anything that reflects on His character as a Being of infinite wisdom, justice, and benevolence—is blasphemy. And according to this definition, we shall see whether we or our accusers are the greatest blasphemers. It has been the custom of the Priesthood of all Churches, in all ages, to brand that as blasphemy which differed from its views of truth. It is still the custom of the sacerdotal class. But the standard by which they justify their charge is most arbitrary and unreasonable. It is simply based on an assumption that their's is the only correct and infallible standard of divine truth. And on the strength of that assumption, they vigorously denounce all as blasphemers who question their dictum, and hold doctrines contrary to the standard they have set up. But what arrogant intolerance they display! They must first *prove* that they alone possess the truth, and that their interpretation of it is the only correct and defensible one. Standards vary in different religions. That which would pass for genuine orthodoxy with Christians would be rejected as the rankest blasphemy by Mahomedans, and vice versa. Yea, even in Christendom, among those who acknowledge the Bible as the final authority in religious matters, charges of blas-

phemy are plentifully flung about. The Catholic denounces much of the Protestant teaching as blasphemous; the Protestant returns the compliment, and hurls back the charge at many of the popish doctrines. The Catholic and Protestant alike anathematise the Unitarian and Universalist, as blasphemers, and give chapter and verse to support their case; while the latter quote Scripture copiously to prove that the former are the *real* blasphemers. All those who thus brand each other with such charming brotherly love, take the "unerring guide"—the Bible, for their authority! Yet, strange to say, those broadsouled Bibliolaters seem to forget how tenderly they have been blessing each other for ages, and blend their voices in one mighty chorus to *curse* us poor Spiritualists! We are counted the most audacious blasphemers on earth, and among the most certain victims on whom his Satanic majesty has fixed his eye! But let us see whether our orthodox friends are not the *real blasphemers*, and we the exponents and defenders of God's eternal truth.

Mr. Potter and his Christian friends believe that, many thousand years ago, some of God's children offended Him, as all children do their parents at times; that though it was their *first* offence, and perhaps not a serious one, He would not forgive them, but banished them from heaven, and, like an unrelenting monster, resolved to admit them back to the family circle no more; that He sunk a "bottomless pit," kindled a quenchless fire, and ruthlessly cast those created children of His into it; and that He has kept them there in "outer darkness" and unutterable misery ever since, and will do to all eternity! Thus came the "Devil and his angels" by their present character and doom, and thus hell originated! They believe that God made the first man and woman perfect, and fixed their abode in a beautiful garden; that He placed a strong temptation before them there, and endowed a snake with powers of speech, to press the temptation home; that, as might have been expected, and as *He clearly foresaw*, before He created them and placed them there, they fell into the temptation—fell into the trap, in fact, that He, their Heavenly Father, had set for them; that for taking a forbidden apple—not a very *heinous* crime, and like that of the Devil and his angels, their *first* offence, "He drove" them out of the garden, and, lest they should steal in again in the evening to seek the shelter of its shady bowers, He placed a "flaming sword which turned every way" to prevent them; that He not only cast out these two children of His from their beautiful and happy home, after having created them so *weak* that they could not resist the first little temptation, but He cursed for their sake *innocent and unoffending nature*, both animate and inanimate; and that not only did He curse Adam and Eve, and curse all nature for that little apple transaction, but He actually *cursed us* who had no part in it, and *cursed our children's children to the end of time!* Would any *earthly parent* treat his children for their *first* or *any* offence, as God is said to have treated the first offenders among His children in heaven, and the first of His family on earth! Our orthodox friends further believe that after the world had stood some time, and was getting nicely peopled, neither it, nor man, nor brute answered God's expectations; that He "*repented*" and was "grieved at His heart" for having "made them," though being *omniscient*, he must have *foreseen* that they would go to the bad, and being *omnipotent* he might have prevented them; that He resolved to "*destroy*" them, without devising any special means, or putting forth any special efforts to reform and save the human race; and that He proved the *sincerity* of His "repentance" by "opening the windows of heaven" and sending a tremendous flood upon the earth, which swept to destruction all the "cattle, and creeping things, and fowl of heaven, and every man," except a family of eight persons, some of whom, especially the father and two daughters, do not appear to have had more claim to exemption from the catastrophe than many who were drowned! They believe that God commanded Moses, Joshua, and other Bible worthies, to ravage whole countries, desolate populous cities, and not only slay armed warriors, but *murder thousands of defenseless women and innocent helpless children*, and in some cases devote *blushing maidens to a fate infinitely worse than death*; that, in fact, by divine direction, parts of the earth were literally converted into vast reeking slaughterhouses, where *human beings were deliberately butchered wholesale along with their cattle!* They believe "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart," so that he refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt; that when Pharaoh "would not let them go," because "the Lord" had hardened his heart on *purpose* to prevent their departure, the "Lord smote all the first born in the land of Egypt," so that "there was *not a house* where there was not *one dead*;" and that He finally "*overthrew*" and *destroyed* "all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea" in pursuit of the Israelites, though they simply pursued in obedience to the impulse of Pharaoh's *Divinely* "hardened" heart—in other words, put in plain English, they believe that God was the *author* of Pharaoh's obstinacy, and yet He punished him and all his subjects, with frightful judgments for conduct for which *He himself was responsible!* They believe that "the Lord," in a fit of "*anger*" "*moved David*" to "number Israel and Judah," and yet, as a punishment for having done what God had "*moved*" him to do, He "sent a *pestilence* upon Israel." and swept off at one stroke "*seventy thousand men!*" They believe that, though mankind had *no part* in the transgression of Adam and Eve, yet God involved them *all* in its consequences, and placed them under the "*curse of the law*" for an offence they had not committed; that His "*wrath*" was so "*hot*" that it could only be quenched by a "fountain filled with *blood*;" and that, notwithstanding the boasted depth and intensity of His "*love*" to man, He would not "forgive" his sins, no matter how sincerely he repented and correctly he henceforth lived, till a *horrible murder* had been perpetrated—the murder of *his own* "*well-*

*beloved Son!*" Some of them—the Arminians—believe that God "devised a scheme of salvation for the whole world," which has signally failed of its intended object; that the "Devil," and His fallen children whom he would not forgive, has baffled His purposes, and outwitted Him nearly every turn; and that this *finite creature* has positively defeated his *infinite Creator* such an extent that he drags at least *nine* "redeemed souls" to *hell*, for every one "Almighty," with the help of the "Son" and the "Holy Ghost," manages to get to *heaven*. Others of them—the Calvinists—believe that God from eternity, and all "for His own glory," elected a portion of the human family, in no way better than their neighbours, to enjoy His Gospel blessings in this world, and everlasting felicity in the world to come; and that "passed over," in sublime indifference, all the rest of the race, and calmly predestinated them to eternal darkness and misery *before they had committed a single sin*—yea, endless ages *before they were born!* And lastly, the orthodox believe that God will not only cast the vast majority of His children into hell, because they were not quite angels in this wicked world, though *trinsically* every whit as good as many of the "saints" in heaven, but will keep them imprisoned there for ever; that He will turn a "deaf ear" to their *pitteous appeals for mercy*, and from His "eternal throne" behold *unmoved, their sufferings and woe*; and that to all eternity He will compare far the "glory" which may spring from the fulsome adulation of the "*few*" He has "*saved*," than for the deliverance and well-being of the "*many*" He has "*lost*!"

These, however they may attempt to deny or explain them, are some of the doctrines which Mr Potter and Christians generally believe and teach. Can more unworthy and abominable "motives, purposes, and actions" be "imputed" to God than are ascribed to him by much that is called *Gospel teaching*? And because we, as Spiritualists, reject such teaching as false and debasing, and strive to present views of man, of nature, of the world to come, and of God our Heavenly Father, that are more rational and ennobling; we are, forsooth, branded as "*atrocious blasphemers!*" Compare the doctrines you have often heard us enunciate with many of the dogmas of the Churches, some of which I have briefly indicated, and then judge for yourself who are the *real blasphemers*.

II. Mr. Potter's second grave charge against Spiritualism is that of *immorality*. Its "moral code," he coolly asserts is "*whoredom!*" This foul allegation has already been pretty fully and effectually dealt with, in the columns of the daily press, by Messrs. Bright, Terry, Ross, and myself. Its *coarseness* is only equalled by its *falsety*. A portion of the press has long been trying to raise an opposition to Spiritualism on this ground, and now we have the pulpit following suit and outdoing the press in the vulgarity and audacity of its charges. The object was evident to fix a moral stigma upon the growing movement, and thus turn the public against it. That was the only way likely to check its rapid spread; but it will have the opposite effect! Mr Potter must have known that he could not render Spiritualism odious, without *seriously injuring* its adherents in public estimation. What a woeful prostitution of the ministerial office! preferring such a grave accusation, he ought to have furnished along with it ample and incontrovertible evidence of its truth, but not a tittle was adduced. When evidence was afterwards demanded, an attempt was made to supply some. But what a miserable *failure* the attempt was! A few passages from different writers were given, but not *one* of them as they stood sanctioned *immorality* in any form, while the context clearly showed that a most *unworthy* and *disingenuous* attempt had been made to give some of them a meaning totally different from what the authors intended. Upon Mr. Potter's principle I can make the *Bible support atheism*. In a passage—"The fool hath said in his heart there is no God;" leave out the first part, and the atheist can affirm that the Bible itself declares "there is no God!" In reply to this charge would remark—1. *There is nothing immoral, or tending to immorality in the works of Davis and Wright*, and others of a similar class, to which reference has been made of late. On the sense that Spiritualism is an *all-embracing* system of ethics, religion, and philosophy, and those works be said to be Spiritualistic works. In dealing with such questions as marriage and divorce, those writers go to first principles, and try to ascertain what is *intrinsically and naturally right*, rather than what is legally recognised or conventionally sanctioned. The law regards marriage as only a civil contract which may be broken under certain circumstances; and they wish to promote *real, natural marriages*, based upon *pure, mutual love*, rather than mere *legal unions*, which is all many marriages now are. As the law already admits certain grounds of divorce, it would be only extending the principle it acknowledges, to include another cause *a want of harmony and consequent happiness*. They contend that if a husband and wife are living a very unhappy life, and are willing to separate, the law ought to allow them to do so because that, if even an evil which they deny, it would be a far less evil than their living a life of *misery and legalised prostitution*. In such a case, why should one of the parties have to render themselves guilty of "*cruelty*" or "*adultery*" before a divorce can be obtained? Those writers have no wish to abolish nor evade the marriage law, but seek to amend it; and if the reforms they aim at are ever effected, such reforms will only be legally recognised and ratified as the people become prepared to adopt their principles without serious abuse. The whole aim of those writers, then, is to go to the very *root* of immorality, and lead men and women to live pure lives and to charge their works with what has lately been flung at them, is as great an outrage of truth and propriety as it would be to charge Christ's sermon on the Mount with immorality.

2. *All the general literature of Spiritualism is characterised by the purest tone, and inculcates*

**strictest morality.** Without egotism, I venture to say that I am, at least, as well acquainted with the literature of the movement as our Reverend vilifier, and I have met with nothing which I do not fully bear out this description. If there is one thing that strikes an *unprejudiced* reader more than another, it is the pure spirit that breathes through the whole "Harmonial Philosophy," and the lust-destroying and virtue-developing principles everywhere insisted on. 3. *The chief in, and practice of, spirit communion cannot but have an essentially moral tendency.* Why will you wallow in sin before the eyes of their relatives or friends in the body? And will not the knowledge that the saintly eyes of some dear departed ones may be watching man's every step, and to restrain the sensual tendencies of his nature, and stimulate and strengthen his virtuous principles? Tell me, what young man or young woman will be likely to plunge into gross immorality when they feel assured that a venerated parent or beloved sister is attending them as a guardian angel, and acquainted with all their *secret* doings! 4. The spiritual doctrine that *no man can be forgiven*, that all transgressions of moral as well as of physical laws entail *inevitable penalties*, which the *transgressor himself must bear*, tends to check sin of every kind, and promote obedience to the laws of chastity. The Spiritualist has not the convenient belief that the sinner who has committed one moment can be forgiven the next. He knows that, according to the immutable law, "what he sows he must reap," that if he sins, *repentance, prayer, faith, and blood* will not avert its consequences, which can only be got rid of by the atonement of *personal suffering*; and the salutary influence of such a belief all will admit, save sectarian bigots.

5. As a *matter of fact the actual morality of Spiritualists, their enemies themselves being judges, is of as high a character as that of their censors.* It is strange that if Spiritualism be such a very bad thing our opponents should be compelled to admit that they can find no fault with the *actual lives* of its adherents. If the tree were so very "*corrupt*" its fruit could hardly be so good as it admittedly is. Bad principles lead to bad actions; and, if their clerical opponents were correct, Spiritualists should be the worst persons in society as regards morality. But are they? *Facts* upset the theory of our slanderers, according to their own confession. Spiritualists are not perfect, but their lives as a whole are the best refutation of the base calumnies which pious impertinence has hurled at them. 6. All *true* Spiritualists will tell you that the spiritualistic principles they have embraced have a *most beneficial effect upon them.* If they had "class meetings" to tell their experience in, you would hear many emphatic and joyous avowals to this. And surely Spiritualists are better judges of the tendency and effects of their system than those who have only looked into it to find, if possible, some plea for attacking it. 7. *The real tendency of Spiritualism is decidedly more healthy and elevating than that of orthodoxy.* cannot compare their respective teachings: at length on the present occasion, but look at the tendency of their doctrine of "forgiveness of sin." A man may plunge into any depth of moral turpitude and yet, through "repentance and faith," he can be *instantly* "washed in the blood of the Lamb," and made "*white as snow*." What a licence to sin such a belief is apt to be made! that a premium upon vice it often proves! Many Christians abuse this doctrine, though, of course, not all. "Greater the sinner greater the saint" is the plea with some. 8. *The Bible is one of the most immoral books in existence*, and its defenders should remember the old adage about "those living in glass houses not throwing stones" before they begin to pelt their neighbours. I wish to hurt no one's feelings, but our opponents compel us to speak out plainly on this point. I gladly admit the many excellencies of the Bible, but it is *disfigured*, especially in the Old Testament, with some of the most filthy and disgusting things that ever "soiled the pages" of any book. Talk of "stark obscenity," can Mr. Potter point to *one* example in the whole range of spiritualistic literature which equals the *many* abominable passages that stain the "*Holy Word of God*?" Are there not many portions of the " *sacred Scriptures*" which *no decent parent would read to his family*? And what of such characters as Noah, Jacob, Lot, David, Solomon, &c.? Davis and Wright are saints indeed in comparison. I will not pollute my lips, nor outrage your sense of decency, by reading any of those *choice* portions of "*divine truth*." Those who feel inclined can look at the following passages when alone. Many others who are loathsome could be given:—Gen. ix., 21, 22; xix., 31-38; xxx., 3-5; xxxviii., 9, 14-25; Jer. xx., 16; Num. xxxi., 17, 18; Deut. xxi., 10-14; xxii., 15; xxiii., 1; xxiv., 1, 2; 2 Sam. xj., 1-5; 1 Kings xi., 3; 2 Kings xviii., 27; Job xl., 17; Isa. xiii., 16; Hosea i., 2. These are a few gems of *Bible* morality! Let our Christian friends in future "sweep their own steps" before they throw any more mud at us. The vulgar charge of "whoredom" I submit I have proved to be a *vile slander*, and all the vilier for having been made under the mask of sanctity, and without any just provocation. The race of *Pharisees* is not yet extinct!

When read please pass this Tract on to a Friend.

*Spiritualistic Services are held every Sunday evening in the Masonic Hall, Lonsdale Street, and the Polytechnic Hall, Bourke Street. Admission Free.*

PUBLISHED BY SUBSCRIPTION FOR GRATUITOUS DISTRIBUTION

By W. H. TERRY, 96 RUSSELL STREET MELBOURNE.