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WHAT OF THE DEAD?

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WHAT OF THE DEAD?

A STRANGE and complex problem is the human soul. A question that with all the boasted advancement of the day yet remains unanswered. Who can solve its mystery? Who can estimate its powers? Who can say I have analysed the nature of the soul and will spread before you in orderly array the nature of its attributes? That the soul is insatiable in its desire for knowledge, we know, for it is ever craving to know, and the more it knows the more it craves—ever craving, continuously receiving. If the soul could cease to desire, all energy would be removed; existence would lose its greatest charm, for man will never cease craving for knowledge while aught remains undiscovered; if all knowledge were attained man would have mastered all—he has then but to pine away. There is no more work for him to accomplish; there is no more joy for him to reap; there is no happiness for him to attain to. We cannot say that day is near, nor can we say that we have a glimpse thereof. We cannot point upwards and say that we can even see the dawning of that day. It is far, far distant; the souls of men both here and hereafter are destined to run through endless ages of activity before even the thought of the necessity of rest ever shall cross their minds. Ceaseless activity is a characteristic of the human mind. Grand and glorious have been the benefits that have accrued to the past and present, from this ceaseless activity, for all the advancement that the age is possessed of to-day is due to this one simple fact. It is thought honourable to have an active mind, to apply that mind to the comprehension of nature and the problems of social life. To improve the condition of the world wherein we dwell—to leave it better than when we entered it. Let that activity once verge into a consideration of the nature and attributes of man, and then, that which was once meritorious ceases to be so; it becomes dangerous; it is a condition of activity that is not to be thought of, for, says the world, have we not Science to teach us of the laws of life; have we not Art to give us a due estimation of beauty; and have we not Religion that shall teach us of the mysteries of our spiritual destiny. Why, then, start an investigation for yourself? Why pass out of the stated authorities; who stated them? Cannot we trust to that bridge that has carried us safely over the stream for so long? Cannot you trust to the bark that has sailed over the waters so worthily? No for we see the bridge is crumbling, it will ere long be carried away by the force of the stream. The bark is no longer seaworthy; she is well nigh a wreck, and the first storm that arises on the waters will cause her to sink. A day shall come and the bark shall be seen no more upon the waters. If the bridge is imperfect, we must have a new structure; it is the law that the old must give way to the new. Let us keep pace with the genius of the age; let us go with the stream, ever onwards towards the Sun of truth, that lights the shores of eternity itself. Spiritualism may be called a new bridge; may be said that it is a new bark, and, being new, it is untrustworthy; It has not been tried say its objectors; How know we that this new thing can do us any good. Oh! it is extremely dangerous, my dear friend, to trust yourself to this new scheme. It has been in the world no time; it has not been tried in the practical affairs of life; it is extremely dangerous to trust yourself on this new bridge, or in this new bark. So say the objectors; so said the objectors when Jesus preached Christianity; so said the objectors when the Apostles of that heavenly disciple carried on the

battle of truth ; so said the objectors to those who received their authority from those Apostles. Each one said, Oh ! it is a new bridge, we must not desert our old gods ; we cannot leave our old religion for this new-fangled scheme ; we have not tried it, and cannot estimate its merits ; and yet, to-day, if one dare to question the value of Christianity, what a howl is raised from one end of Christendom to the other. We say so advisedly, for it is the howl of fear. If Christianity was firmly fixed in the hearts and minds of the people, there could not be this slavish fear of error within us. Truth is invincible. If we fear error from without, then do we betray the fact that we are conscious of the instability of our own foundations. Christianity has had a longer trial than Spiritualism ; We admit it has flourished over 1800 years ; surely it could be well tried in that time ; its fruits and merits could be well discerned, and its influence well known. But what is the case : we find our jails and workhouses filled, and the degradation and enslavement of the race exist to-day in the midst of Christian countries, where Christianity, the vaunted pioneer of progress, is said to flourish ! It has had a long trial ; why, then, does this state of things exist ? is its power of non-effect, that it hath not removed these curses and blots upon human society ? Let us be just ; Christianity challenges us and says that modern Spiritualism is but a new bridge. Can the new teach better than the old ? Can it teach truth better than the old ? We claim it can. But, let us also be just on another ground, though Christianity to-day declines and is losing power and vigour, yet, in its day it hath done great and glorious good in the work of human redemption. It was an advance upon the religions which preceded it, and was the dawning of a glorious day in the world's history. It hath done much to cheer the heart of many a doubter and bring consolation to his soul. The Christianity of to-day, and that of its founder, are distinct in every particular. Jesus, the man of love, preached love, taught love, practised love, universal in his aspirations and hopes ; he sought to enfold humanity in one embrace of ever-flowing love ; no creed, no covenant, no condition, all were like unto himself children of God. There is no need for us to extend the parallel. Love may be a cardinal doctrine of the church, certainly it is not a virtue. Universality may be one of its creeds, certainly not one of its practices. The church, as we have already said, has done much good ; so has science ; so has art ; so has philosophy. Many goods come from various collectors, we must not elevate one above the other.

Simple questions are often related to vast issues, wherein are bound up many strange and perplexing problems, the solution of which would replace darkness with light, error with truth. What of the dead ? A simple question, one that any might ask ; it could even be propounded by a child, who might say to its father : Father, what of the dead ? Can he answer the question ; theoretically in the light of his faith, yes ; in the light of his belief ; in the light of his hope he may answer it ; but to answer it satisfactorily, positively, and conclusively, none of these methods can assist him to frame a solution to the simple question of the child : Father, what of the dead ? Spiritualism brings an answer to the question—a question deep in its bearings and relationship, and yet withal so simple.

There are three forms of thought that are popularly supposed to be adequate to the teachings of the people, Religion, Science, and Philosophy. Each of these are thought to be the levers that effect the elevation of humanity, educationally, morally, and spiritually ; they are the trinity in unity, whose mission is to educate, to elevate, and expand human thought and action. Let us, then, considering that they are the prime causes of the

progress of the human race, see if either of these can afford us a simple answer to the question of the child: Father, what of the dead?

The duty of religion must be to deal with questions of this nature. Is not the aim of religion to fit men in the life that is, to enjoy that which is to be; to *prepare them in the present for the future*; to prepare by moral precept and example; to aid them by proper spiritual culture to a due expression of the attributes of their spiritual nature; to deal in fact with those complex questions, the nature of man; man, the spiritual, and man, the natural. In a word, to train man here in the natural life, that he may occupy a position of glory in the spiritual state. Let us then interrogate the church.

Minister, what of the dead? The doctrine of my church is, that when the soul is separated from the body it meets its reward; if it hath lived a sinful and vicious life here in the natural state, it is punished in the life hereafter. Outragod justice, on the part of God, demands the sacrifice of that soul, and it is consigned to the place of punishment. On the other hand, those who have lived a virtuous and faithful life, receive a rich reward for their labors; they enter into a condition of never ending bliss; there in that never ceasing *day to eternally praise the Lord of their being—the giver of their joy!* My church, also teaches that, for the vilest sinner there is hope; that if they will come within our folds to receive the quickening grace of our religion, they shall be freed from their sins, “though they be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow;” though they be as black as the darkest night they shall be changed to the brightest noonday. Thus changed, they shall pass into that happiness and glory we spoke of. The questioner is not satisfied, but propounds the question yet again: Minister, what of the dead? I have told you! You have told me what your church teaches; you have told me honestly and conscientiously, I question not, what you believe, but I have to repeat my question: Minister, what of the dead? How know ye these statements to be true? My church saith they are true. The revelation that has been granted to my church proclaims that they are true. The belief of our church since its foundation authorises me to state positively that they are true. My own convictions commend them to me as true. Minister, what of the dead? These are only beliefs, faiths, suppositions. They may be for all I can see vain imaginings. Minister, what of the dead? How knowest thou that the dead live? How knowest thou that when the consciousness of life has merged in the unconsciousness of death that we can ever be resurrected? *How do you know that I who am now standing before you shall still live after death?* The minister replies; I believe that it will be so. Thy assurance is not mine. Minister, what of the dead? We can get no further; the positive, practical proof of the belief of the minister is not forthcoming. He will say that it is not the province of his church to give evidence of its claims, and that the position the church occupies is a sufficient warrant for its assumptions. By the same rule, any institution grown hoary with age, be it ever so corrupt in itself, must claim respect from the multitude. By their fruits ye shall know them! Evidence, where is it? We demand the proof. What of the dead? The church knows not even that they live; it hath no evidence; for if it offered evidence—if proof positive was forthcoming and that the dead were seen and communications received from the mysterious land, would not the proclamation of that truth be neither more nor less than an admission on the part of the church that Spiritualism was true! The church cannot make the admission for two reasons. The first and most substantial of the twain is, that it does not receive that counsel. The second, equally potent in itself, is that if it were to admit that communication *could* be received from the life hereafter, its occupation would be

gone; its crown would be taken from its brow, for to other hands would be delegated the privilege of practically demonstrating, What of the dead? The church cannot admit another into a field of labour that it occupies itself; if it did so, it would lose its power: lessen its power on the world, and it would cease to have chains on the men of the world, and to lessen its power would be to destroy its influence, and worse than all it would be obliged to confess that it had not received the seal of its charter. That seal consisting in the fact that the church should be the continual recipient of spiritual manifestations. The church, then, apparently, is incapable of answering the question satisfactorily, What of the dead? We will not deny, far from it, that she has been useful to the world; great has been her use, as we have already referred to, but she has allowed her property to slip from her; the ground is gone, covered as with a rising water, till inch by inch it has surrounded her. She sees now that the rising waters of the ocean of truth have entirely submerged the dreary waste of churchal superstitions, a waste that was once fertile in spiritual manifestations, though since choked with the weeds of ignorance and superstition. Disunion brings with it its own consequence; thus the church to-day is unable because of its forgetfulness in the past to use the power which naturally and legitimately belongs to it.

Science as a teacher of the people claims to be practical, positive, and exact; admits nothing but what is capable of being demonstrated. We meet the disciple of Science, and we say, Scientist, what of the dead? What of the dead? says the Scientist, we know not! Know not of the dead! indeed, how is this? We believe, we are obliged to, in the teachings of our churches, because if we were to push our scientific researches to the extreme, the doors of the respectable portion of the community would be closed against us. It would be said that we were infidels, that we were outside the pale of the church because we did not accept her statements. So you see we are obliged to accept the doctrines of the church in the main, though we reserve to ourselves the right of believing or disbelieving; but this does not answer the question, What of the dead? Scientifically we know nothing of the dead. We cannot experiment upon them in any way. Then you mean to tell me that you have no knowledge, not in the slightest particular, of the life hereafter? Not one jot! All our knowledge is of things that we can handle and experiment upon; but the dead are removed beyond our powers. Indeed, I question very much this problem, and I cannot arrive at a satisfactory solution of the question, whether there are any dead to be experimented upon at all. I see before me a human frame, I subject it to all the experiments we have referred to, and I can know to a grain what are the weights of the elements in its constituent parts, but I can find no trace of a soul; no appearance of an intelligence apart from that body; no indication that would lead me to assume that a something has departed from that frame. I find the human body, dead, allowing for its condition, is precisely the same as the body, living. I cannot come to a conclusion as to whether that body had a life apart from itself. This is the result of science! It is candid, we will admit, and that is a great merit after all. It is when that candidness becomes merged into something offensive, when it ceases to be an open frank confession of doubt upon the subject, but becomes a stern denial of the immortal life, that is when we wage war with the Scientist. Let him not deny unless he has positive evidence to enable him to clearly disprove. The negative can only be disproved in one way, by the production of the affirmative. So here I stand to settle the question! Though science stands in this position, many are its triumphs in other directions. The fault has been that scientific men in all ages have been too materialistic; dealing

with matter in its qualities and properties, disregarding or being ignorant of the existence of spirit. Directly she verges to the region of the unseen she returns. Here in the region of the seen she feels safe, because she knows what is here; she knows her land-mark; she is afraid, however, to launch away upon the wings of speculation; if she does attempt it, she is fain to return, aye, even when the very knowledge that the world is paunting for was almost within her grasp, when her hand had but to close over to bring it down to the understanding of her fellows. A little more courage, one step further on the road, and science would have redeemed her true nature, and stood forth in the glory of man's best instructor, because his truest and most conscientious friend.

Philosophy will really aid us little, because it is in some respects speculative. True, it founds its claims and themes upon the experience of the Scientist, but it builds up many a graceful theory on assumption. It matters not even if its assumptions are untenable. Philosophy, what of the dead?

We believe that they exist hereafter; doubtless they exist in a state appropriate to their nature; and, if so, they will be content to receive all the joy possible for them to receive. Though we believe philosophically in the existence of an immortal condition—you see it is an inferential belief. We hope and trust it may be true, and thus really philosophy falls short in the weight of the essential fact. That which is proof to the philosopher and proof to the theologian will be valueless in the eye of the Scientist, for the simplest of reasons, that their proof is not reducible to material experience; if it was so, then religion and philosophy could join hands; science would unite with them, and they would, indeed, be a trinity, powerful in unity for the demonstration of man's immortal life.

We must call in a new agency; we must in a word venture on the new bridge, and trust ourselves on the new bark, and risk it despite the lamentations of those on the shore. We must go forward. If there were no pioneers on the dark sea of human ignorance, how could the way be cleared for the coming day? And here we stand face to face with those strange insane people denominated Spiritualists; so insane that they are perfectly capable of giving a conscientious, upright and honest verdict upon any matter, except the most vital question—the nature of their own souls. On any other question their evidence would be estimated at its right value. But let them speak of their experience of the nature and power of the spirit, and all their intelligent power and vigour is at once ignored, and they would be stigmatised as raving mad. It is very strange, indeed, that for so little, that for a belief in one question, all the remaining portions of a man's actions should be forgotten and ignored. It is passing strange; it is wondrous strange; it is marvellously strange. Perhaps, after all, the madness is on the other side, and they are far more mad who stigmatise. The world has yet to learn the lesson, and possibly it may wake up to the conclusion that we have just stated.

Let us now enquire of these poor deluded mortals. Spiritualist, what of the dead? Stay! pause awhile before you give an answer, estimate aright the weight of the question. Spiritualist, what of the dead? Think in your answer you are called upon to speak to a problem that involves the dearest aspirations of the human heart. A question that contains within itself the most vital issues of human life. Speak not lightly, then, but speak with due deference, lest by an incautious word you peril the happiness of yourself and fellows. Give it full consideration, for it is a deep, deep question. Spiritualist, are you prepared to answer, what of the dead? Your adjurations to solemnity are useless to me; there is no need for you to press the wondrous weight of the questions upon me; no need to attend to the issues contained

within it. For exclaims the Spiritualist, I do not mean to answer your question! Surely if you are not willing to answer it, who will? Who shall I turn to? Stay, though I will not answer your question, I will say let the dead speak for themselves. Let the dead speak for themselves! How? And then the Spiritualist will tell you of the means, of the methods, of the instrumentalities that he employs to hold communion with the inhabitants of the life hereafter. And after you have pursued the natural course of investigating for yourself to prove the truths mentioned by the Spiritualists, you come to the conclusion after due investigation that what the Spiritualists assert is true; that the dead can and do speak for themselves! Thus it would seem that Spiritualism supplements Philosophy, Science and Religion. Thus it would also seem that it restores to religion what she has lost. Confers upon Science what it has not possessed, and proves to Philosophy that her sublime speculations are correct.

What say the dead of themselves? These things, briefly: That they are intelligent beings; that their intellectual or intelligent identity goes with them; that their personality is maintained; that the expression of their intelligence, the manifestation of their personality, the continuance of their identity, are dependant upon the fact that they possess a frame, a form, that the dead are organised existences! If we were transported into the immortal condition, our bodies removed entirely, if there were nought that we should know ourselves by, how could we gain the consciousness of our existence? But intelligence is dependant for expression upon organization. If then, we separate these two, could intelligence manifest itself? How could it comprehend itself in its own condition? It could not do so. If intelligence remains, organisation must be associated with it, and this implies the personality and identity of the individual—thus the great and glorious fact comes forward that death is but the transference of the *man* from one state to another. Consequently the dead say that their condition is a higher, a more ennobling one, than that which they have hitherto occupied, so that the transference of the man from the one state to the other is the elevation of the man.

The natural life is the introductory career in the progress of the soul, here for a time in the rudimental sphere at its close to be transferred to the life hereafter. The dead also reveal the fact that the condition there depends upon the life here, the motives here are the accusers there: as the motive was here, so the position is over there. The dead also say, that possessing all their intelligence in the life hereafter (for intelligence is susceptible of infinite and eternal unfoldment), wisdom is the sole object of their existence—that wisdom which pertains to life and right. That over there, when freed from all anxieties and cares accruing to their natural career, they are free to march onwards and upwards to the home of universal peace and power, to God—in a word, to eternal progress. That retrogression in the absolute is unknown; compensative retribution, we have already discussed as being the results of the motives of all human beings in this life. Freed from the consequences: for by their good deeds they have overcome their bad ones, all march onwards eternally. The dead say that we know of the existence of the great All father. It is an eternal fact as indisputable as our consciousness; we cannot dispute it, nor attempt to reason it away, we are content to know that it is, we dare not reason upon it, or endeavour to comprehend it, the older and wiser we grow, the longer we remain in the fields of eternity, the less able do we feel ourselves to comprehend this great problem. They are conscious also of the beneficence that flows therefrom, therefore we are content to live and know that even as we are, so is God. This is what the dead say of the dead; but they say other things, they say

that with us the power of love still remains, a bright and holy light, intensified and strengthened, purified and cleansed, that which was noble in the natural life becomes doubly noble in the spiritual, the love that bound kindred and souls together here, still burns with a holy radiance there; and that by the aid of certain laws in nature, the so-called dead are enabled to hold communion with the inhabitants of earth, the loved and so-called lost can and do return to hold sweet communion with the friends they have left behind; love survives death itself, the link that bound kindred souls together here is just as firm over there as it was before death, and love is the link that binds man to God. The dead know this, for God is love; and they say for man to be godlike in himself is, to cultivate to the highest and fullest extent the power to love his fellows. And they also say that if man would be happy and joyous in the life hereafter, if he would stand free from stain and impurity in the sight of the angels, it is well that he live an honourable life here, that he endeavour in all his actions to fulfil his duty to himself, his fellows, and his God; and if he trample underfoot any of the sanctities of his life, he must suffer for that act, for as we cannot violate the laws of being physically without suffering the consequences, how can we expect to violate the laws of our spiritual constitution and avoid the consequences? According as he soweth, so shall he also reap. See that ye endeavour to sow seeds of beauty in the garden of life, that ye may hereafter reap happiness and peace in the plains of eternity.

Many and various matters are omitted in connection with this question, what of the dead? Matters that we have not the time or the opportunity to enter into upon the present occasion; but, previous to leaving the subject for a time, it behoves us to draw a parallel between what is said of the dead, and what they say of themselves. The Christian church saith of the dead—and certainly perhaps the argument we now use may seem more congenial to many than the theories of the spiritualists—that if a man doeth wrong he shall reap punishment as a retribution, and *vice versa*. It saith if he will repent him of his evil ways, and come into the ways of God and truth, he shall also reap reward. There is great truth in these statements, for they are absolutely and unqualifiedly true: for the dead say, in the language of the spiritualist, if a man will forsake evil and turn his efforts for the diffusion of good, then he shall free himself, his good actions will atone, in a great measure, for his evil life in the past, but it must be a thorough and complete departure from his evil ways; he must eschew evil as he would a pestilence, and plant himself on the rock of truth and right; he must moreover, from the very centre of his soul, endeavour to remove evil from himself and fellows. No half measures, no professing to do this and that, in the hope of getting rewarded hereafter, but a thorough hearty renunciation of all that is evil in himself, and an unflinching adherence to that which is true and right. The Christian church preacheth truth on this head—a truth which we commend to our friends whether they accept the conclusions of the spiritualists or not. Science and philosophy will, in due time, receive the light which the church once had, and which she will have again. They will then see that all knowledge is deficient in one respect if it ignores the spiritual, they will see that a due apprehension of the spiritual nature of man is necessary. The two worlds thus linked together will come into view for man's benefit and progress, the religious teacher, the scientific teacher, and the philosophic guide will all unite, and the result will be that there will be a grand union of the three. Humanity will then possess a practical and scientific religion, and none will have cause to propound the question: What of the Dead? for the answer will be plain to the meanest understanding: All who run may read.