

THE
RATIONALE
OF
SPIRITUALISM.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE
CHICAGO PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY,

BY
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With the Compliments of the Author.

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THE RATIONALE OF SPIRITUALISM.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN : I am not unmindful that the subject to which, with your kind indulgence, I shall invite your attention this evening, is one seldom discussed before the elect. In the world at large it frequently forces attention, often with positive rudeness; but wherever opinion is organized, whether religiously, socially or scientifically, it meets with little hospitality, and, when tolerated, it is either with compassionate condescension or undisguised contempt.

I do not allude to this state of things to find fault. The rather, so long as the field of human nature remains what it now is—a mere playground for the passions—I would not have it otherwise. I could conceive of nothing more disastrous happening to the race at this time than a universal acceptance of supersensual phenomena. Without adequate preparation and discipline, the end would be a return to superstition.

Only the most superficial treatment has hitherto been accorded what is known under the name of Modern Spiritualism. If its phenomena have an objective veracity, their importance to mankind cannot be over-estimated; and it is from this point of view that the subject should be studied.

The time having arrived in the order of human progression to widen the avenue of communication between the two worlds, two methods were open to the spiritual powers—to admit only the higher class of minds at first, and let the truth in diluted and contracted form work

downward ; or, taking the opposite course, start the movement at the very foundations of society, diversify it to the utmost, employ chiefly blind forces, and hedge the whole about with mystifying safeguards. The first course represents the human method of teaching ; the last is the mode adopted by the more enlightened spirit-world. The difference is expressed by preaching and practising. In this lies the solution to all the mystery.

It is charged against the movement that it is almost wholly confined to the uncultured. While the ranks of the believers contain many of the most enlightened minds of the age, I am free to admit that its potency lies, as yet, chiefly with a class untrammelled by precise definitions or exact thought—that it is these who give it substance, stamp it with their peculiarities, and represent it in the eyes of the world.

One day mankind will rejoice that this is so—that in the infancy of this dispensation the blunders of human wisdom were kept out of its experience, and that the guides were wholly spiritual.

We sometimes learn most of the true side of a question by studying its false side. Let us suppose, therefore, that the spirit-world had taken the human-wisdom course in this instance, and confided its secrets first to the learned. See a scientific world in the direst confusion, despairingly searching for its most cherished and now exploded premises ! Behold a religious world in the throes of soul-agony, sitting haggard and distracted amid the *débris* of its shattered creeds ! Religious beliefs have their roots in the heart, and when you tear them out by force you take that which is almost dearer than life itself. The late Walter Bagehot well remarked : “ One of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea.” No, a wise dispensation would not thus inflict the race. It would work precisely as it is working. It is stealing upon the world like a thief in the night. The change comes, but no man knows whereof. It operates as a gentle amelioration ; its disintegrating force, though potent, is scarcely perceptible ; fully one-fourth of the native-

American element is even now converted ; another fourth has become quite familiar with the idea, and is ready for acceptance without a pang ; and with all this wonderful work accomplished, within less time than is allotted to a generation, the mischief done is a minimum. This shows how completely the destructive forces of the movement are hedged about.

The more study is given the method of the introduction of Spiritualism, the more is the student impressed with its wisdom. Scientific truths, having but a remote connection with the feelings, come first to the learned ; but religious truths, which may be said to be *all* feeling, can only be planted where formulas and creeds have lost their significance—where the spirit has wholly superseded the letter. Spiritualism is therefore carefully veiled from those who are either not ripe for a change, or, being individually advanced, would through their influence too violently disturb the religious and social equilibrium. The first class includes all that is orthodox : the second the leaders of science, with a few carefully selected exceptions. Had this truth come first to the *savants*, as a discovery, and subject to no conditions except such as are commonly recognized with regard to scientific experiments, directly it would have permeated the entire social economy, producing untold misery. No doubt there are thousands to whom the revelations, even in this abrupt way, would have come as a boon ; but on the other hand, there are millions in whose minds the unwelcome truth thus ruthlessly forced would have called into action all the baser passions in defence of their cherished dogmas. What cry more pathetic than that of the old heathen, who, bereft of his idol by the missionaries of a strange religion, wailed out piteously : “ You have robbed me of my god.”

The religious chapters in the history of mankind are written in blood. Changes involving not a tithe of the revolution expressed by Spiritualism have convulsed the civilized world. Society is wholly an artificial structure. It is furthermore all superstructure. Not a law, not a custom is founded in abstract right or the facts and possi-

bilities of human nature. Progress thus far has been all patchwork, clumsily held together. As the fabric is now constituted no new idea can adjust itself to it without complete readjustment. To admit a new article into any creed, religious, social or scientific, necessitates a revision or reconstruction of the whole. When the least change involves so much trouble, what would not a universal revolution do? This : it would shatter the entire social structure to fragments. It would be a return to chaos.

The nineteenth century marks the most important epoch in the history of the world. To it will be traced the genesis of a new line of progression. The year 1848, a time of political and social revolution, marks the transition from the *artificial* to the *natural* order. It was the year that heard the awakening *raps* at Hydesville. It was the *rap* of the spirit Master Mason, laying the corner-stone for a new social structure. Spiritualism puts human nature for the first time on solid ground. It is as broad as life itself. It is all-inclusive. All truths adjust themselves to it naturally. *It is a universal solvent.*

To the world at large Spiritualism is merely a superstition, having for its basis a latent credulity, forced to activity by a system of clumsy deception, trickery and fraud. Holding to this view, it is in a measure creditable in the intelligent masses that they sternly set their faces against what they believe to be but a form of Fetichism. Civilization is a hard-won fight. On its altar countless lives have been sacrificed. I am in fullest sympathy with those who would guard this sacred flame from the stifling influence of superstition. But in doing this we should be careful lest we fall into error in the opposite direction, and foster intellectual bigotry and intolerance.

Man is a creature of conformity. Spiritualism is readjustment. These postulates give us a key.

In order to deal justly with Spiritualism, our first duty is to study man, both in his mysterious individuality, and as a complex whole. Who of us understands the operation of the human mind? Is not man the proverbial symbol of perversity? Ask the reformer by what methods

he circumvents this self-sufficient incarnation of conceit! Are not the wise often the most foolish ; are not the foolish wise ? The truly great die unhonored in their day, and it is left for future generations to revere their memories. These things have come to be the veriest truisms ; all of us recognize them when we hear them ; but how many give them practical application ? Whenever a science of the human mind shall be revealed it will be discovered that in essence *all permanent progress is reaction*. First conceptions are nearly always erroneous. In legislation this truth has found expression in the aphorism that the wisest laws are those which repeal others.

I have dwelt thus at some length on the human side, because I deem its right understanding essential to a proper consideration of the spiritual side of this problem. We have not only perverseness but a diversified perversity in human nature. To this Spiritualism is adjusting itself with a view to readjustment of the entire social fabric. Its object is revolution without the usual blood-stained concomitants.

Let us now contemplate this movement with reference to some of its general aspects. It is thirty years old ; it counts its adherents by millions ; its literature is published in nearly a score of languages. It has entered the pulpit, the laboratory, the busy marts of trade—no place is so remote that it does not make a stir in it—and it differs from all other movements that have heretofore left their impress on the race in this, that it is not transplanted, but is spontaneous and self-propagative. It often comes an unbidden and a most unwelcome guest.

It is unique in other ways, but most in this, that its best friend is its radical opposite, the materialist. This point is well worthy the serious attention of thinkers—the sort, I mean, who classify Spiritualism among the delusions. Was ever delusion so rational that it could recognize essential good in its antithesis ? If madness, Spiritualism evinces wonderful method. Its ranks are chiefly recruited from rationalists, secularists, materialists, infidels. It is only now and then that a member of a

church is converted, and when this happens, the victim feels as much out of place as a fish out of water. Now, this tendency of *unbelief*, to what most men as yet regard an *overbelief*, is certainly a very curious phenomenon, and if Spiritualism is really the delusion science would have us believe, is it not time to stay the spirit of doubt, if the ultimate threatens to be morbid and groveling superstition.

We have been contemplating the human mind and certain general aspects of the movement. Now let us turn our attention to another side of this enigma. What does Spiritualism imply? To what changes is it likely to give birth?

Spiritualism is Revolution, not simply Reform. Reform works downward; it is scientific in its spirit, and, though not generally regarded so, is practically conservative. Revolution works upward; it reasons far less deeply than it feels. In rare instances the revolutionist and reformer are blended. The difficulties that attend a religious transition are enormous. Man is by nature lawless. Religion, whether expressed by Fetichism or an ethical refinement, aside from brute force and the love of kindred, is the sole influence that can keep this lawlessness under control. Now a readjustment is decided upon! what an uprooting must not take place! and while the transition is in progress, what care must not be exercised! Elements in their revolutionary or readjusting stage are always extremely destructive. Conservatism is simply another word for adjustment accomplished. In view of the trifling mischief that is doing during this most wonderful and radical of all transitions, I would call conversions to Spiritualism a process of spirit selection. It is so wisely ordered that the light is vouchsafed only under carefully guarded conditions. It seeks and blends only with such elements as are in affinity and individualized. Somewhat of notoriety is bound to attach to all things that are in their nature marvellous, but the aim is ever to minimize the excitement, as essential to a rational propagation. And this is the reason why spirits do not meet the demand to

prove themselves in such public exhibitions as the finding of Charlie Ross and the like exploits. I allude to this not because I have at any time deemed these challenges for public tests worthy of notice, but solely for the reason that they are the stock-in-trade arguments of the superficial, and as the world is composed mostly of this class, the matter may be worth reverting to in this discussion.

The question is often asked, if Spiritualism is true, why did it not come before ? It came before ; it always has been, but in variously modified forms. However, the question for all that is quite natural, and was asked nearly two thousand years ago, with reference to Christianity, the forerunner of Spiritualism, by one reputed to have been the teacher of the noble emperor, Marcus Aurelius. The question was propounded to one of the Fathers. In those days it was Christianity that was a superstition in the eyes of the learned, and it was with extreme condescension that any of the heathen scholars deigned to enter into a controversy with a Christian. And had *The Atlantic Monthly* been published during the reign of the Antonines, and a certain, as yet anonymous, author lived, the culture of the period would no doubt have been favored with an extremely well-written essay on "Some Dangerous Tendencies in Roman Life."

It is difficult to resist the temptation to pursue this thought ; to point out that Christianity, on which our civilization up to the present is founded, came also as a revolution ; was also marked with excrescences ; was the one active force then in the universe, and, by a laborious process, this thing that was decried as immoral established a high moral standard among a people whose immoralities had become worse than brutish ; subdued passions that knew no law, either human or divine ; raised woman from a position of servitude to almost equality with man, and did a thousand other noble things for which it now-a-days seldom receives credit. The culture of Rome saw only superstition and a moral degeneration in the upstart religion. The priest of the Sanhedrim could imagine no good come out of Nazareth, and cannot yet. Let those

who heap contumely on the one, and plead for the civilization of the other, remember that nascent Christianity and nascent Spiritualism are exact parallels, except in this, that the former came in a time—and was thereby modified—when it had to pay for its existence with blood.

The chief characteristic of Christianity was that it operated on the conscience—almost discovered it, opened it, developed it. But a conscience suddenly set in operation is a terrible force, and coming as this did on the unprepared masses, produced a condition of mind bordering on frenzy. Hence we see the whole Christian population in sackcloth and ashes. By tens of thousands they seek the deserts, take refuge in gloomy caves, stand solitary and motionless for years on the top of high pillars, lacerate their flesh, and in a thousand other ways turn order into bedlam. Still, if all this was necessary to develop the conscience in the dominant race who will grudge the price? Now, let us observe how perfectly the Christian scheme was adapted to meet this emergency—to cure what it had made ill. It was absolutely essential that human nature with a conscience suddenly quickened should be provided with a refuge. The new religion stood ready with a protecting church, the cleansing blood of the Lamb and a host of mediators. To the calm, individualized thinker there is somewhat almost ludicrous in these agencies; but to men steeped in immorality, suddenly subjected to a process of self-examination involving eternal salvation or endless torment, there was a terrible reality in the state of things that confronted them. The church has been blamed for overdoing its work. I doubt if the charge be sustained when the facts of history shall be more intelligently interpreted. What ignorance and brutality require to subdue them are the barbaric twins, force and fear, not high ideals. The essential thing at first is subjection; for the rest do the best you can.

I enter into the philosophy of this matter so fully for the reason that I intend to draw from it an important conclusion—the necessity for a new religion. What is the essential characteristic of Christianity? *Dependence.*

Now, let me ask if this quality is not in its nature stunting? And whether it does not follow that those who possess the elements of growth, in order to grow, must remove themselves from its influence? As Christianity is constituted, progress within its fold, beyond a well-defined limit, is utterly impossible. To this limit it has brought the world triumphantly. So long as men *must* be kept in leading-strings, I have nothing better to recommend than the Christian religion. But what for those who are growing into self-hood? What, if Spiritualism be not true, but bleak, dreary Materialism? This is the logic of the situation, and no candid, thinking mind will gainsay it.

The Orthodox Church is fully alive to the truth and force of this conclusion. It is folly to deny the paradox—dependence is its strength. What is known as liberal Christianity is a beautiful tribute to man's heart, but no credit to his head. It is an entrancing illusion—the mystic vale through which men pass, almost without halting—from the dark, iron-bound beliefs into the clear light of Spiritualism, or the dreary wastes of Materialism. Liberal Christianity is a name only—a hazy nothing—the smoke from fast-dying religious fires. In Orthodoxy there is yet somewhat of spasmodic force. Its lurid flames ever and anon light up the religious horizon, though with every effort they sink lower and lower. But the pale exhalation known as liberal Christianity is utterly sparkless. It warms for a time with a borrowed heat, it shines with a reflected light; its aroma produces an intellectual intoxication—for a time there is even a semblance of enthusiasm. But alas! Soon the heat diminishes, the light grows dim, the aroma is dissipated, sober second thought steps in, and the whole illusion is dispelled. And what remains—a barren ideality—some people call it “Culture”—food for shrivelled stomachs, mayhap, but the soul-hungry, before whom such fare is set, cry in anguish, “Give us to eat; we are starving; our lot is despair.” I could almost wish this were otherwise. Had I found an inherent flame in either Universalism or Unitarianism, I could well have rested by its

fireside. I looked for it with passionate desire, only to be sadly disappointed. Religious force and life is not ethical, but eschatological. Morally, all the leading religions are pretty much alike. Ethically, Marcus Aurelius and Christ were brothers, but the kinship failed of religious recognition, and the former, although the noblest of men, persecuted the followers of the latter to the death. A sect that could thrive on culture would fatten on east wind.

In Swedenborgianism there was once an original spark, but its over-zealous friends, troubled with a bad attack of respectability for fear of being called Spiritualists, have closed the door of inspiration, wrapped their somewhat premature bantling in layers of cotton, and now sit gloomily about a huge pile of literary dreariness and metaphysical abstractions—the smallest, most stunted, most unsympathetic pattern of a religion under the sun. It is the most desperate attempt to prove that one swallow makes a summer anywhere on record. It is a sort of a religious “what is it?”—too gloomy for a farce, and too comical to be serious.

Finally, Altruism, the ultimate of an unchecked, unreasoning scepticism, is not only an illusion but a delusion. It worships in a palace of ice, permeated by a chilling atmosphere called humanity. The effort to make believe that there is warmth here is only less comical, because sadder, than the conceit of the immortal Col. Sellers, in Mark Twain’s “Gilded Age.” Having placed a lighted tallow-dip in a stove, this expert psychologist tries to impose on his shivering guest the scientific theory that the imagination is the greatest factor in the universe, and that, if he can but bring himself to believe that the semblance of fire in the radiator equals the reality, he will soon be in the enjoyment of an exalted state of perspiration. Soon Altruism will not use even this paltry candle to delude itself with ; it will cease trying to delude itself altogether ; its emblem will be a ghastly, grinning skeleton. If now it indulges in a semblance of emotion, and holds up to the world a religious caricature, it is because it feels

it must make a showing for the sake of appearances. Some of the worshippers at the shrine of humanity—devotees like John Morley, Frederick Harrison, Leslie Stephen and John Fiske—no doubt really feel a glow in their natures. But the warmth is transmitted ; it has come along a line of religious ancestors ; it is a remnant of heredity, stirred into activity for a time by the friction of combat. Let the conflict once cease ; let Altruism be the reigning influence—as it soon would be but for incoming Spiritualism—and a gloomy Pessimism would take the place of present enthusiasm ; more and more would the motto be “every man for himself,” and by rapid stages the world would revert to barbarism. I have an intense admiration for the Altruian ideal—almost realized in such a character as Marcus Aurelius. It is pure, unselfish, crystalline, but it is only for angels. In another and better world I believe we shall all fully realize it. But so long as the selfish propensities are the most active in the race—and our very existence on earth is based upon them—our ideals and realizations must ever remain distinct and separate. This is the dread law of matter.

I think I have now prepared the way to direct special attention to the chief characteristic of the *personnel* of Spiritualism—individuation. Individuation is essential to admission ; and once admitted, it is above all the mental quality that is more and more developed. Here then we have perfect reciprocity—a tendency on the part of thinkers toward individuation, and departure from the established religion, and a new religion that can only exist where individuation is measurably accomplished.

It is, indeed, a wise dispensation, and could have been ordained only by the powers of whom Tennyson, with his rare spiritual insight, affirms :

“Who know the Seasons, when to take
Occasion by the hand, and make
The bounds of Freedom wider yet.”

Spiritualism came not before because it could not come—must not come. Perhaps I can best illustrate the extremely

subtle relations between the two orders of existence—the mundane and the spiritual—by taking you along with me, as, step by step in my experience, I proceeded to reason upon them.

Like most men, when my attention was first called to the subject under discussion, I regarded it as a sad farce, compounded about equally of imposture and delusion. But I soon found reasons to change my mind. Through the enshrouding fog, the surrounding darkness, amid the jargon of strange sounds, I now and then caught glimpses of rare light. But all natural order seemed inverted. I seldom received what I expected, and usually got what I did not expect. Sometimes the brightest intelligences—or who purported to be such by name—would spout the veriest drivel, while the ignorant Indian control, laboring painfully through a perplexity of ragged English, would surprise me with the wisest counsels and choicest bits of philosophy.

I had, indeed, fallen upon a will-o'-the-wisp. For months, during a patient investigation, it was all hide-and-seek. But the more I penetrated this world of contradictions, the more I became convinced there was something in it well worthy a thoughtful man's attention. I might have said with Joe Gargery, "It's a' a muddle;" or following the fashion, laughed at the notion that spirits, our dear, departed friends, should return only to play the part of mountebanks. Either is a happy way of bridging the difficulty, and saves considerable trouble. But I chose rather to leave the *à priori* ground to the philosophers and scientists, acknowledge that I knew nothing about how men and women would act under a new order of existence, and accept the teachings of *experience*. I have held to this course during the past six years, and have reason to be well satisfied with the results.

After studying the varying phenomena for awhile, and as the perplexity only increased with each new experience, I began to question my mode of procedure. From attempting to solve spiritual methods from the human standpoint, I began to study *human methods* from the spiritual stand-

point—that is to say, I studied the operation of the human mind, both individualized and in the mass, from the highest altitude to which my finite discernment could carry me; and although this light was necessarily very limited, yet soon the atmosphere cleared wonderfully, it was not long before, one by one, the fog-veils lifted—and what before, to my mind, had been no better than the fribbling of fools, suddenly became instinct with the highest wisdom—not that the words always took on new meanings, but that I saw more clearly the motives that prompted them.

Let us, as circumstances will permit, put ourselves in the place of exalted intelligence in contact with man in his present development. What do we find? An unbroken line of failure! I say it without fear of contradiction—an unbroken line of failure. What success has been achieved, year by year, century by century, has come in spite of us; has been the result rather of reaction than action. Of course, I refer to the mass of mankind—and let it be remembered that Spiritualism deals with the mass directly. In those branches of science where man comes in contact solely with matter, he does passably well; but whenever he deals with a problem in which mind is a factor, he is hopelessly at sea, and it is only through an endless, never-ceasing buffeting that he is measurably forced into the right. It has been well said that progress is martyrdom. It lies invariably in a direction opposite the path along which the masses insist on plodding, and its pioneers are always crucified.

The perversity of the human mind can scarcely be overestimated. Few, indeed, have been able to deal with it understandingly. It is far more than is flattering, like the Irishman's pig. Pat was driving it to Limerick market, when he met a friend. "Where are you driving the pig, Pat?" was the greeting. "Whist, be aisy," rejoined the astute Hibernian in great trepidation and under breath, "to Limerick, but the pig thinks I want to take him to Tipperary, and that's what makes him go along so foinsly."

I dwell upon this point thus persistently, because the human mind is the solvent of the whole problem, and I

feel convinced that philosophers, statesmen, psychologists, and all who make a study of the mental characteristics of man, will, in ages to come, turn to this period as an inexhaustible mine of psychological wealth. I am not of those who believe that the manifestations of spiritual power now so general will always abide with the race. They occur only in transition periods. They come to inaugurate new dispensations, and, having set the movement well agoing, the power is wisely withdrawn ; because, it is doubtful if human nature be strong enough to make them permanently profitable. Hence I regard this as essentially a history making epoch. It is a time when an intelligence superior to the human or embodied mind is shaping events—and how it deals with the perversity that at every turn opposes it, will be a subject of research to the student for ages to come.

Let me pause here a moment to establish a base of operations from which all may proceed together. To what extent do sceptics and believers stand upon common premises with reference to this subject? It will be granted, primarily, on all sides, that a movement, be it founded on delusion or fact, known as Modern Spiritualism, and counting its adherents by the millions in the most civilized portions of the globe, has a vital existence. How rapidly it is growing I dare not venture to assert, for fear of seeming to strain a point, but this much I may say, that it is to-day a more potent propaganda than all the sects and churches of Christendom combined. I mean by this that it converts more from an absolute non-belief. And what it gets, it keeps. A pervert from Spiritualism is a curiosity.

For all practical purposes, a sufficient common base has now been established, and we may proceed to an examination of the structure. Let us enquire first as to the method of its growth. All other religious movements of which the world has any account, started from a single centre, were indented with a single individual, and were subsequently propagated almost wholly through the zeal of missionaries. The single point where Spiritualism makes contact with its religious predecessors, is in its missionary force. But the Spiritualist missionary or lecturer—except

he be a medium—is not a converter ; he is little more than a familiarizer ; he does not even establish organized *foci*. In all else, Spiritualism differs in method from all other religions. It is, in the first place, universal. In no proper sense can any place claim its birth. Its second peculiar distinction is spontaneity ; but for all that, it is forced—an exotic. Apparently we have here a contradiction, but it is such only in terms. Spiritualism is spontaneous, because in most instances the phenomena on which it rests its claims come unbidden. It is exotic, because in the order of evolution, as we understand it, it is without natural antecedents, and, if evolved at all, comes to us from a set of conditions, which, except through a law of reaction or contrariety, should produce precisely opposite results—a destructive scepticism.

Having explained the mode, what are the results sought to be accomplished ? Nothing short of revolution in every department of thought ! It means all this or nothing ; it is either an intelligent, most potent, and wise dispensation, or the maddest freak that ever possessed the human mind. I hold it to be the first, and upon those who shall choose the last I will put this task : Explain to me the genesis and evolution of the delusion ! Where or in what are its antecedents ? There is no effect without an adequate cause ; now in what subjective potency lie these tremendous results, regarded as delusion ? I have been at some pains to study this subject, but nowhere can I discover a parallel ; for be it remembered that Spiritualism flourishes best where scepticism is most active. It works hand and hand with the materialist. Literally it lives, grows, and thrives upon what, according to all scientific prescriptions, should kill it.

I wish I could treat this subject in detail, but time forbids more than a mere outline of suggestions. In truth the theme is one pregnant with volumes. As I glance along the vista of my experience I observe a broad, well-defined line which divides Spiritualism into two distinct orders of activity. On one hand it is exoteric and on the other esoteric. It is one thing for the world and another for it-

self. Along this dividing line come the multitude. It is a curious medley of minds—all humanity thrown into a lump. It is an eager throng; it comes to be amused, to be awed, for excitement, to jeer and scoff, to seek surcease of sorrow, to drown despair. Now let me ask you in all candor, what would you think of a dispensation that would listen to the ignorant demands of this motley crew, and fill them blind as they are, with yet more blinding revolution. Surely, you could have but a poor opinion of it. No, the spirit-world can give but sparingly, and yet it must give in sufficient quantities to make headway—and to balance these proportions, so as to minimize the mischief, is a task calling for a wisdom that can be nowise lower than that of angels.

The observant student, as he passes along with the jostling crowd, will note great gaps marked “exposures.” The presumption is that these expose mediums; but, in fact, only human ignorance—they are *safety-valves*—sacrifices to the Moloch of prejudice—meat cast to ravenous wolves. Somewhat in the line of “exposure” is always kept on the stage. But, in the meantime, another work is going forward—a process of spirit selection. There is an esoteric Spiritualism into which there is no prying except by consent of the spirit-world. The crowd that clamors to be admitted is carefully scanned. Perhaps, not above 25 per cent. of those who investigate at any time, be their motives never so good, are chosen. Sometimes it happens that a person is refused at one stage and admitted at another—the result depending on all the conditions, social, religious, moral, intellectual or otherwise, that at the time, or promise in the future to environ the investigator. You have all probably heard that “conditions” are necessary to manifestations. This word has been much abused because, as related to Spiritualism, it is little understood. The “conditions” to a successful séance are the most subtle factors that can be imagined. They are far less physical than mental, but they are both, and much beside—they are also spiritual.

As well as I am able I will illustrate these subtleties.

You will readily acknowledge that the success of any movement depends in large measure on what may be called its charter members. These give it form in accordance with their mental bias. As the power to make proselytes to Spiritualism is and must remain almost wholly with the spirit-world, it follows as a necessary corollary that they will carefully guard and supervise the admissions, in order to have at their disposal the best material to serve their purpose. The elements that enter into this calculation vary with the ends sought to be accomplished, but a few general characteristics may be noted. Individuation is the prime quality in all cases where it is intended that the person admitted shall be an active force, for the subject is still very unpopular, and in certain walks of life it requires no little courage to stand for an unpalatable truth. This class constitute the missionary element in the movement. Another that may be mentioned is almost the reverse of this. It is as pliant as possible, and, as an aggregate, is nearly a blind force. It is, however, none the less valuable, since often

“ They also serve
Who only stand and wait.”

Between these two leading elements there are minor ones made use of for special ends—to teach, mayhap, needful lessons. It is for this that such men as Vanderbilt are admitted.

Spiritualism is essentially a personal investigation. Each communication is potent for discipline. There is said to be danger to the race in the intercommunication of the two worlds. So there is always danger to error when brought in contact with penetrating truth. Just now almost every act of the spirit-world is *one for public lesson*. It is of less importance what effects result to the individual receiving a message or other token of spirit presence or power, than to the mass, and great results are accomplished through reaction. A deal of ground must be broken before spiritual truths can be sown in their integrity—before the intercommunication can be conducted, so to

speak, in an open-handed manner. Before the way could be opened at all, it was essential that a spirit of toleration should prevail. That, however, is the mere permission. Thereafter all the human weaknesses have to be met, toned down, conquered—and this is often done by exaggerating them, relying upon the consequent reaction for the desired result. Thus, one of the first lessons taught is the necessity of self-reliance on the part of the investigator. However much the value of this precept may be acknowledged in theory, it is continually violated in practice. Hence the need for shining examples—hence those humiliating exhibitions in the courts that have followed the *démise* of such men as Com. Vanderbilt and Capt. Ward.

A great stumbling-block to the progress of spiritual truths in their essence is man's cupidity. It is a pitiable fact, but nearly the only thought that possesses most men in connection with this force is how to turn it to worldly advantage—how to make money out of it. The attempts to divert it into personal channels have strewn its pathway with human wrecks, *and will continue to do so* until the lesson is learned that merely personal ends can under no circumstances be gratified. The spirit-world makes little account of preaching. This shows them to be wise, for could people be taught ethical as we teach mathematical truths, the world would have arrived at the millennial period ages ago. Startling examples alone have any effect, and this by producing a reaction. To what is the world most indebted for its toleration? To anything that has been said, written, or preached on the subject? Verily, very little. To examples of toleration? Perhaps in small measure among philosophers and thinkers, but surely they have had little effect on the masses. What is it, then, that is making the world tolerant? It is the reaction from the violent spirit of intolerance exhibited especially during the reign of the inquisition. Anything short of such an extreme would never have given the necessary rebound. A philosopher may arrive at abstract notions of liberty, but the masses require the lash and the rack—while some races seem to have sunk to such a state of mental inertness

that the law of reaction has ceased to operate. For such there is but one future—extinction.

Some very severe things have been said about the *personnel* of Spiritualism. Judged by the prevailing standard it does not, perhaps, present the highest moral development—but I would not have you judge too much by appearances. Remember that Spiritualism is not unlike an active volcano. Its evil as well as its good qualities are alike cast to the surface. Had it the discretion of older organizations—did it but make a study of hiding its defects as do the hypocrites in the churches—it would no doubt pass muster with the best. In the possession of genuine qualities, those that spring from open natures and loving hearts, it is rich indeed. And the new order of morality, the new ethics, will give these a place of pre-eminence.

However, there are most potent reasons why the *personnel* of Spiritualism is and should be what it is. An effort is making by a narrow minded element in the ranks to make the movement “respectable,” but thus far they have only succeeded in exhibiting their own intolerance. I pray that it may be many a day before Spiritualism shall be fit to go into what is known as “good society.” My reasons are many. In the first place we want, the world wants, as was said the other day by the Presbyterian *Interior*, of this city—of all papers where I should least expect to see such a declaration—a *lower religion* than has hitherto prevailed. We want a religion that is not afraid to go into the slums—that is devoid of all outward form, but is rich, and strong, and self-reliant in each individual—a religion that, as far as is compatible with the rights of and obligations to others, will make the individual a law unto himself. Spiritualism is such a religion, and if, thereby, some people get into the fold—*i. e.*, become believers—that are not over respectable, is it any matter for wonder, or should it be deplored? Spiritualism, as I have before said, is revolutionary in its present relations to society, and requires revolutionary elements for its *personnel*. Respectability, except it have a strong dash of philosophy in it, is not revolutionary—is, the rather, eminently conservative.

Now, to my way of looking at it, the longer you can keep this mass from cooling into dead formality—premising, of course, that in the meantime it be not violently destructive—the better for the world. It is not a bloody revolution; it has not and will not cost a single life—except it be too seriously interfered with. But I anticipate no trouble—the movement is provided with too many safety-valves. At any time a single, well-advertised, so-called “exposure” converts it from a formidable, bristling man-of-war, in the eyes of the world, into the most harmless of hulks, fit to receive, instead of hot-shot and shell, only the sneers and and mocking jeers of its vaunting but hoodwinked adversaries.

There is a disease which I will call mental blindness. The darkness is densest where culture is highest. The arrogant and self-sufficient always look up, never down. They despise the things at their feet. But these things grow and expand with uncommon vigor sometimes. While this self-sufficiency snuffs the upper air, the thing despised has coiled itself with desperate purpose around its feet, and at the proper moment Sir Disdain rolls in the mud. The blindness that is now upon the boasted intellect of the world was never exceeded but once. The blindness then was more complete because it had to be. Christianity came when the word tolerance had little significance. The culture of the period was seemingly not aware of its existence until it announced its presence by overthrowing nearly all existing institutions. On this point I desire to quote a few words from the historian Lecky. In his admirable “History of European Morals” he begins the third chapter, “The conversion of Rome,” as follows :

“There is no fact in the history of the human mind more remarkable than the complete unconsciousness of the importance and the destinies of Christianity, manifested by the pagan writers before the accession of Constantine. So large an amount of attention has been bestowed on the ten or twelve allusions to it they furnish, that we are sometimes apt to forget how few and meagre those allusions are, and how utterly impossible it is to construct from them, with any degree of certainty, a history of the early church. Plutarch and the elder Pliny, who probably surpass all other writers of their time in the range of

their illustrations, and Seneca, who was certainly the most illustrious moralist of his age, *never even mention it*. Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius have each adverted to it with a passing and contemptuous censure. Tacitus describes the persecution by Nero, but treats the suffering religion simply as an 'execrable superstition;' while Suetonius, employing the same expression, reckons the persecution among the acts of the tyrant that were either laudable or indifferent. That the greatest religious change in the history of mankind should have taken place under the eyes of a brilliant galaxy of philosophers and historians who were profoundly conscious of the decomposition around them; that all these writers should have utterly failed to predict the issue of the movement they were observing, and that, during the space of three centuries, they should have treated as simply contemptible an agency which all men must now admit to have been, for good or evil, the most powerful moral lever that has ever been applied to the affairs of man, are facts well worthy of meditation in every period of religious transition."

Somewhat more should be said regarding the mission of Spiritualism. What does it seek to accomplish? One object, of course is paramount—to establish our relations to the future life on a basis of certitude—implying many modifications in our habits and modes of thought. This would seem enough, but there is more to do. The new dispensation does not propose to take up the old, worn-out social establishment, and carry it on by endless patching. No; it means to start from new foundations.

It is a human misfortune that the moment an old friend appears in a new guise he is disowned. Our ignorance will allow us to recognise such forms only as are familiar. To the ignorant all unfamiliar plants are weeds. The possible is ever circumscribed by the known. Many strange plants of rarest virtue are now springing up in the Spiritualist garden. Ignorance cries "Weeds," "weeds," and is eager to stamp them out; but a higher power guards these germs with vigilance, that the world may be the better for their growing.

To the spirit-world mere form is nothing, the real substance everything. When they speak of liberty, they mean the subject in its fulness, not as applied to present earth conditions, personal, political, religious, or moral. Now and then a mind is born that has somewhat of this power to rend the veil and see the order of the universe

in its true relations. Such an one was John Stuart Mill, incomparably the greatest of modern thinkers. In the domain of thought he was the completest man that has ever lived. He was an antique, and yet thoroughly modern. He was all of Socrates, and more than Aristotle. He was an economist, logician, scientist, speculator, philanthropist, reformer, revolutionist, moralist, philosopher, prophet. He was always all of these combined. He possessed the rare faculty of actualizing the ideal. He understood human nature, could foretell how it would act under given conditions, and hence what was yet remote in time was to him present in mind. I dwell thus upon this personal and seemingly irrelevant point, because, so far as I have been able to study spiritual plans as now related to earth, they conform more nearly to the Millian standard than any I could name. Note, for example, the important part that woman plays in the new movement. Three-fourths of the mediums are women; women figure as officers of societies, on the rostrums, and as in the case of Woodhull, they are pushed forward to a point where for a time they attract the attention of the whole world. Then they are as suddenly withdrawn. Has it not seemed strange to you that this woman has been able to maintain comparative silence for a period now covering several years? The solution is that she is a mere instrument—hundreds of other women were employed similarly during the same period, though in a less degree; it seemed for a time as if this free-lovism they preached would deluge the country. Suddenly, as if by magic, the influence was withdrawn. It had served its purpose. What that purpose may have been I will not now discuss, but that the effect produced will ultimately result in amelioration, and improve the condition of woman generally, I leave no room to doubt. Marriage is sacred only when its natural laws are sacredly observed. When the tie is abused it is no better, no more sacred, than any other abuse. Somewhere in human possibilities there is no doubt a natural basis that will make marriage what it should be—not a sacrament because the church has made it so—but a sacrament

because consecrated by all the better qualities that as yet lie dormant in average human nature. Through what throes of pain the race must pass before it reaches this goal, it is impossible to say—if nothing worse than to tolerate a Woodhull, it may well congratulate itself.

In another respect Mr. Mill may be regarded as the archetype of Spiritualism, though he was far from being a Spiritualist. He was a moderate socialist or communist, not as these terms are at present interpreted, to mean assassination, riot, spoliation, and political and social convulsion, but in the sense that he recognized that good might be accomplished through the modification of certain deeply rooted customs which in the eyes of the world have come to mean human nature, but in essence mean things unnatural. It is to these that Spiritualism is addressing itself—almost blindly so far as its *personnel* is concerned. It is intensely interesting to observe the activities of the movement from a purely philosophical standpoint. But any study will lead to little good, and much disturbance of mind, unless to a searching analysis the observer joins a far-reaching synthesis.

The most active element in the ranks just now is one of destruction. It is revolution incarnate, but the revolt is bloodless. By the score men and women go about the country—often keen of argument, quick at repartee, sometimes more forcible than elegant, ever on the alert, intent only on tearing down. These are the plague of the preacher, the object of the scorn of the self-sufficient, the terror of the timid. These are the pioneers. Their manner is often brusque to rudeness. When they mean a spade they say a spade. Their office is to shock, to unsettle, to wound.

Then there is another class composed of somewhat milder-mannered men and women. When the pioneers have given a community a sound shaking, these come forward with the balm of Gilead, and pour the oil of healing into the lacerated sensibilities.

Finally, there is a third class. These call themselves Christian Spiritualists. Thus, it will be seen, Spiritualism

is what St. Paul wanted Christianity to be, all things unto all men. These forces are nicely balanced, and most wonderfully adapted to their work—but how? Solely by spirit selection. Remember that Spiritualism is wholly without centralization or leadership. It is simply unorganized individuation. Each one works by himself without the least reference to what his neighbour is doing—but, because of spirit supervision, the work is the most effective ever accomplished under the sun.

In this connection I desire to call attention to something that scarcely is yet, but soon will be. If Spiritualism has been under a cloud because of its connection with free-lovism, it is destined to pass under a still darker cloud—but one that has a golden lining. This cloud is called socialism. As yet the points of contact are but few—the occultation is not taking place under the observing eye of the scientist, and the process is therefore attracting no attention. But the world will not be kept long in ignorance. Soon the cry, “Spiritualism is no better than communism,” will be joined to those other cries, “Spiritualism is free-lovism,” “It is a fraud,” “It is a delusion.” Well, Spiritualism can bear the last as it has all the rest. But there will be no little squirming even among believers. There is a class of Spiritualists who are, in truth, aliens to the movement, and always in hot water. Like a great many other half-individualized people, they are troubled with an itching for so-called “respectability.” It is ever their lamentation that Spiritualism has not yet made its way into “good society.” Such as these will cry aloud against the fusion. They will give utterance to a vast amount of cant about “defiling our beautiful philosophy,” “prostituting this God-given religion,” and more of the same sort of unmeaning stuff. But their cries will pass upon the wind unheeded. The work will go on. It must go on, for it is the sole instrumentality that can save society.

I am aware that I am threading my way over extremely dangerous ground here—that I shall receive thanks for these predictions from no one—no, not even from the

socialists, who, as a class, turn up their noses at the "delusion" a trifle higher than anybody else (though with some of the leaders it is different); but for all that I shall follow a plain line of duty, and, by throwing such light as I possess on the path may make it clear even for others.

What is socialism in its latest development? Is it not an invulnerable monster? It is cruel; it is bloodthirsty. For every head you chop off a thousand others will grow. But last and worst, it is infidel—it is nihilism. Here we have the most destructive of creeds—conduct that refuses to be governed by the laws of man, and knows none other—a thing that lives only for to-day, and bitterly flings in your teeth that to-morrow may take care of itself. Whatever of inanimate and death-like beauty an intellectual Altruism may possess, when its pale moonshine has filtered through to the lower strata, the result is dark and diabolical. I myself once sat in the grave-damp of Materialism, and tried to make myself believe—and thought I succeeded—that man is not inherently a savage, and that it was something beside the religious sentiment that ennobled him. To strengthen my position I drew for support upon such shining examples as Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, forgetting that with all their noble aspirations the world went down lower and lower all around them. The noble emperor was the sublimest of the stoics—but he was also the last. The sect for once fairly realized its ideal, and then went out. It was a dream—it is a dream still. Non-religion left the world in such plight that it was not until more than a thousand years afterward that the Christian religion—acting somewhat in its purity—was able to infuse the spirit of civilization into the mass. Some will say that civilization has come in spite of religion. Of such I would ask what was this "in spite" doing before the Christian religion came? The "in spite" means no religion—it is not even as good as an active paganism. It was this "in spite" that witnessed the downfall of Rome; that made that downfall possible; that transformed it into a Bacchanalia and a Saturnalia.

It ruled supreme in the transition period that marks the decadence of paganism and the incoming of Christianity. But another class will ask: If Christianity was so potent to deal with barbaric and brutal forms eighteen hundred years ago, why may it not perform the same office now? It could were it the same thing now it was then, and were human savagery the same. Both have significantly changed. Christianity is "respectable" now. It is—but why waste time diagnosing the disease when the death-rattle is in the throat? On the other hand the modern malcontent is somewhat of a reasoning product. When he is not burning or assassinating, he wants to argue with you. In fact the fellow calls cold-bloodedly for the proofs, and, in the modern acceptation of that term, Christianity is sadly out of the article just now.

Under this state of things what should Spiritualism do? It claims to have the proofs. Shall it make use of them? Shall it enter the very den and tame this unchained tiger? Has it permission to do this? Any way, permission or no, it *will* do it.

Man is a curious paradox. For many years all sorts of respectable people, both pious and infidel, pointed to the Catholic Church as the mother of all evil, the scarlet woman of Babylon, the nursery of ignorance. But of late we hear another song. The church appears in a new light to these folk. By many of its bitterest religious opponents it is beginning to be regarded as a sort of social savior, because it is able to hold in check a vast amount of ignorance—ignorance that might otherwise become the blind and destructive tool of socialism. But a short sighted generation will accord Spiritualism no such praise. It will see only the fusion, and condemn it.

And yet, how, otherwise, is this monster to be curbed—how, if you do not go boldly up and bind him? Will he come to you? Yes, by-and-bye, with fagot and sword! Two courses are open. Both should be utilized. One is free discussion. That serves as a safety-valve. The other is the bringing of the mass around to a new way of looking at the world. To do this, a radical change must

take place. Primarily this must involve aspirations connected with another life ; also the belief that the things that are wrong here are righted there. It must be demonstrated more clearly than ever before that there is justice in the universe—that this justice is absolute and unvarying—that the measure of all men, in the ultimate, is the same. If such justice now exists on earth, it is most successfully veiled, all finely-spun theories to the contrary notwithstanding. Life here is *not* even-handed, and no amount of sophistry can adjust the balance.

Socialism grows in the proportion that religion wanes. Religion alone can recover the lost ground. Shall it be allowed to do so peaceably ? For Spiritualism to enter socialism, it is not necessary that present Spiritualists should attach themselves to the socialistic body. As I have before indicated, Spiritualism is spontaneous. It will spring up unbidden in the very centre of the socialistic camp. At present, a point of contact is the free platform of Spiritualism. In many places Spiritualists and free-thinkers have joined forces, occupy a hall in common, and establish what is known as a free platform. From this any one may have his say, and no one is responsible but himself. This affords communists the opportunity ever coveted by them. In this way a beginning is making for one of the most remarkable struggles in the social history of the world—a phenomenon well worthy the attention of the student—but this biped whose sight is altogether rearward—is just now wrestling with protoplasm—the fully developed man, making history as it was never made before, has no interest for him. The mediumship that will develop within the ranks of socialism for a time will no doubt represent the boldest kind of agrarianism, since it needs must to ingratiate itself. But by-and-bye, when the whole lump shall have been leavened, will come the amelioration—not as a miracle, but as a growth, an evolution—and by gradual changes this pestilential bayou will be turned into the common stream of life once more. When this is done the great problem—I will not call it conflict—that lies in the adjustment of

capital and labor will be solved. Socialism will have given up its destructiveness and capital its rapacity.

The acorn is the prophecy of the oak. Tendencies are the cradle of mighty movements. That these truisms are seldom more than words to man, is perhaps, fortunate. The age that is would be blinded by the light that comes to one that is to be. Could man foresee the end of a beginning—without realizing the adaptation that waits upon and accompanies progress—he would throttle every new idea at its birth. Man fails of prevision because he is a mental coward. The faculty is not cultivated by him because it is filled with the shrieks and groans of his follow-men.

The elements and tendencies of the two movements are such that a meeting and partial merging of Spiritualism and socialism is as much a necessity, under natural law, as the attraction of bodies possessing chemical affinity. The characteristic of the material of both is individuation. They are also alike in this, that both are, so to speak, in solution—both represent transitions—are, in fact, revolutions. But here the similarity ceases. For the rest, all their activities are antagonistic—one works downward and the other altogether upward. One points toward the brute, the other toward angels. The object of the one is to destroy all religious beliefs, of the other to put religion on a basis of fact, and merge all differences into a consistent and harmonious whole. Both sides are intensely active—possess, in fact, nearly all of the activities now visible in the civilized world—and but for the mental blindness that is abroad, this endeavor would be to thinkers a most absorbing study of contemporary sociology.

Spiritualism is re-writing the history of man—the history of civilization. To the effects which are alone apparent to man's dull apprehension, it is adding the legitimate causes. Under its magical touch the things that are now most obscure will be brought into the clearest light. It will even solve the riddle of the Sphinx.

In conclusion, let me say that none is responsible for the views expressed in this thesis but myself. I have followed an independent line of research, and the result is in part before you. My knowledge of human nature, and the relation of the subject to current views on science, religion and philosophy, do not warrant me in indulging the hope that my argument will carry absolute conviction to any mind. But this I may claim, without incurring the charge of egotism, that I have established a plausible theory—one that cannot be met and turned with a sneer—a theory that answers, at all events, many of the *à priori* objections leveled against the phenomena—and, if this be acknowledged, my labors have not been altogether in vain. That the *à priori* line of argument, or rather of objection, has been allowed to have so much weight, in an age whose boast is that it is pre-eminently inductive, is far from creditable. The attitude of the scientific mind at the present time toward this subject will one day be a pregnant lesson to the world. It is well that this rebuke is in store, for science is assuming an air of arrogance next to intolerable. In general, scientists are slow to admit this, but the moment a controversy arises in their own ranks, this manifestation of intolerance is keenly felt by the more sensitive, and deeply deplored. The mailed hand of authority holds despotic sway in the ranks of the elect; this galling yoke, self imposed, is casting a stifling atmosphere over the whole domain of thought; a self-constituted hierarchy, in the form of a mutual admiration society, brooks no opposition, and its *ex-cathedra* edicts have all the dogmatic flavor of a bull from the infallible occupant of the Vatican. This spirit is easily traced to natural causes. Until the present century the whole course of science was a defensive one. It was sadly put upon, and, hence, determined, when once in the seat of power, to make its position impregnable. So long as the opposition was really formidable, such an attitude was not altogether unbecoming; but at this day, when it is sole arbiter in the world of thought, it would lose little and gain much by broadening its field of research, and, true

to its motto, to investigate all things, and cast behind it the *à priori* assumptions that are now placing it in an attitude of glaring inconsistency. Because stoutly opposed by the church, it goes to the irrational length of insisting that there is an irrepressible conflict between itself and religion—forgetting that the law of evolution, if true regarding one class of facts, must be true with regard to all, and, that religion, as the expression of a dark age, must undergo modifications under clearer lights, and remain none the less religion. From this spirit, which is itself the result of reaction from church oppression, there must in turn come a reaction, and the equilibrium thus established will probably be as near the golden mean as fallible human nature will permit. The day that shall witness the fulfilment of this prediction, is not as far distant as some may suppose. Soon the only combatants in the field of thought will be science and Spiritualism. The war for a time will be bitter, but not destructive. By slow, but sure approaches, a perfect fusion will take place, and then science will be religion, and religion—at least, as to its main postulates—will be science.