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THE

RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF SPIRITUALISM

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AND

Its Relation to the Churches.



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The Religious Aspect of Spiritualism



ITS RELATION TO THE CHURCHES.

ALL things have their spiritual counterpart. As we have a visible, physical body, and an invisible, spiritual body, so there is a visible, physical universe, and an invisible, spiritual one, in as immediate a connection with our little world of sense as our physical is with our spiritual body.

Our horizon of sense-perception is extremely limited and one-sided. Our senses represent to us the outer world in certain definite appearances and modes of motion; but they merely touch the outside of things, they give us no insight into their real nature. We have no certainty whatever that things we see and hear and feel are really such as they appear to us. All we can be certain of is, that we are sentient beings, that we receive certain definite impressions from the outer world, to which we have given certain definite names.

Consider, moreover, the numerous objects which our senses take no cognizance of, but of the existence of which science has given proofs, and is daily augmenting our knowledge. The very oxygen we breathe and live on, the withdrawal of which for a few minutes would terminate our terrestrial existence, we cannot see or feel. Myriads of organic germs and animalculæ, thronging this essence of life and entering our lungs with every breath we take, are imperceptible to our eyes, yet each and all distinct and separate entities.

The universe, with its innumerable and diversified modes of existence, has not inappropriately been compared to a mathematical figure, a polygon with many thousand sides or facets, of which only one side—the sphere of our ordinary sensual perception—is turned towards us. The man who is conceited and shortsighted enough to affirm that this sphere is the sum total of existence, and that there is nothing beyond the physical, may with equal appropriateness be compared to a mole, deeming his little hill a mountain, and the whole of creation comprised within the few feet of ground his tiny eyes can see around him.

Everywhere within and around the physical, permeating its every fibre, moulding and shaping its form, the very essence and condition of all life, is the spiritual, the life-creating breath of the great Creator. The spiritual world is not far away in some distant corner of the great universe; it is an everlasting Here! Most intimately blended with our own mundane sphere, it ever guides and ~~controls~~ human development and human destiny, individually as well as collectively.

Whether this influence, which none of us can dispense with, be for good or for evil; whether it speeds us on the bright road of progress and development that lies before us all, and thus draws us nearer to God, or whether it retards our onward march by beguiling us into the dark allies of misery and sin, depends entirely on ourselves. Earnest aspiration, even were it never to express itself in words of prayer, but only seek vent in that best of all prayers the firm, inflexible determination on our part to think and to do our best, will most assuredly draw around us superior spirit aid and influence; whilst low, undeveloped spirits are ever ready to associate with us if we allow full sway to the lower instincts of our nature and stifle the still, small voice within us. Like attracts like, not only between man and man, but also between man and spirit, for essentially man is spirit, though imprisoned within this tenement of clay, which blunts his spiritual perceptions and confines all his views within the narrow limits of space and time.

That we are unconscious of this influence is no proof of its non-existence, but to a very great extent the consequence of our having become altogether unspiritual and materialistic, completely engrossed with purely terrestrial pursuits and interests. Truly writes the great Goethe: The spirit-world is not closed. Thy sense (to perceive the spiritual) is dead; thy heart (to feel its nearness and influence) is cold. In these enlightened times of ours the belief in the reality of spirit-existence and a spirit-world has almost completely died out, and from the learned professor down to the ignorant booby, people shrug their shoulders in disdain and pity at the man who is foolish and

superstitious enough to believe in spirits. Even the belief in a hereafter has become wavering, vague, and undefined. The wicked and the unbelieving are supposed to go to a place of everlasting punishment, which is said to be somewhere below; the good and faithful to one of everlasting bliss and happiness somewhere above; but where in the great universe this above and this below are situated, nobody knows, and if the truth were known, very few trouble themselves about.

To suit this scepticism even history has been cast into a fresh mould, from which all accounts of spiritual manifestations have been eliminated as myths and fables—the superstitions of bygone ages. Yet in many ripples, and at times in mighty waves, they may in almost continuous sequence be traced on that sea of human progress called history. Seers and prophets of all ages testified to their reality, and were the instruments of inspiration, conveying eternal truths from the realms of spirit to the minds of men. All the leading religions of antiquity and more modern times owe their origin to waves of spiritual influx; in all, the spiritual nature of man and his life beyond the grave, form the foundation of their moral code. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, teems with records of these manifestations, that will constitute its value to mankind long after the belief in the literal truth of every sentence of it as the word of God has died out.

But history moves in cycles. The great wave of spiritual influx that ushered in Christianity 1800 years ago, has been gradually receding. The knowledge derived from actual experience of spirit intercourse and spirit aid, which animated the early Christians; the belief that where two or three were gathered together in His name, there Christ was in the midst of them really present, though not visible, as he appeared to the assembled disciples, have lost their living power and become mere dead formulas of faith, barely even indicating our actual relations to the spirit-world. And in the same degree as the knowledge of these relations, and finally the very belief in spirit existence died out, gaunt and heartless Materialism has gained strength and invaded every department of human thought. "Eternal matter, containing within itself the promise and potency of all things," passing on its own accord through an endless cycle of changes, the highest product of which are animated beings; and the very highest of these beings is sentient, thinking man." This is the fundamental thesis of Materialism. The logical sequence of it is a universe without a soul, and man without a soul; Atheism and annihilation of the individual at death. With nothing to oppose them but obsolete dogmas of authoritative faith, these materialistic views have

permeated all classes of society, from the highest to the lowest, and in the place of those noble aspirations, which only religious devotion can create and sustain, they have established universal selfishness and mammon-worship. Before the chilling, icy coldness of these conceptions, all the most beautiful flowers that have ever sprung from the human mind must finally wither and die. The bond that unites the whole of the human race as members of one family, under one all-embracing Deity—the *poetry* of the soul, created in the image of God, and ever striving for reunion with its maker—the ideal of infinite excellence, ever unreachable, yet ever desired; all these would vanish one by one, and with them everything that makes life worth living, and prevents us going the way of the brutes, if Materialism had its sway, and were allowed to reign supreme.

But, according to an old and true proverb—"When need is greatest God's help is nearest." Thus, when the doom to all humanity's highest treasures appeared inevitable, another great wave of spiritual influx was sent forth from the eternal shores, showing in a manner most unmistakable that human development, collectively as well as individually, is guided and directed by a special Providence through the medium of the spirit-world.

Formerly, in critical periods of man's history similar to ours, some great prophet and seer would be chosen as the instrument to wake a dull world with impassioned inspiration to a sense of its real destiny, and thus to turn it from a wrong course. But prophet and seer would preach in vain to an age searching and inquiring like ours, admitting as the only basis of all sound reasoning, facts and facts only. These requirements have been met; the supply has been proportioned to the demand; the astounding but incontestable facts of what is now universally known, and ere long will be universally accepted, as Modern Spiritualism, have demonstrated the utter hollowness of Materialism, and shown to a sceptical world that there are more things in heaven and on earth than what are dreamt of in its philosophy.

"Facts—another old proverb says—are stubborn things." They court inquiry, and you may turn them about and twist them as you like, but whether they agree with your own notions or not, you cannot change them or alter them in the slightest degree, for they are part of the order of God's universe. Facts are also most eloquent and convincing. If they don't fit in with what you think "is or ought to be," you may shut your eyes against them for a time, ignore and even deny them; but you can only put off the day on which you must give in and surrender to their irresistible logic. The influence, therefore, of

every newly discovered fact, no matter how paltry it may appear at first sight, is of incalculable importance, more especially if it is found to bear on some great problem of which the exigencies of the age demand a solution. Facts are, in short, the true educators of the human race. This proof, shown on every page of history, is now being demonstrated before our very eyes by the facts of Spiritualism.

Let us briefly glance at their history.

In North America, the cradle apparently of a new civilisation, they were first observed almost simultaneously in different and distant places during that eventful year 1848, when nearly all the nations of the civilised world were stirred by a strange longing for more light, more liberty, more progress. In the presence of certain persons now called mediums, strange sounds were heard, tiny mystic raps, which, stranger yet, were found to proceed from invisible intelligences, and to be directed by them. In an humble dwelling at Hydesville, near New York, this discovery was first made by a little girl, Kate Fox, only ten years of age, who afterwards became a famous medium, and is now the wife of a respected barrister in London. Not sharing in the consternation of the rest of the household at the persistent rappings which seemed to accompany her in particular, the child one night, that ever memorable one of the 31st of March, 1848, when the knocking was unusually loud and almost uninterrupted, playfully addressed the invisible knocker, asking him to rap as many times as she made a certain movement with her hand in the air. Immediate compliance with this and similar requests amused the little one greatly, whereupon she communicated the intelligence exultingly to her mother with the words, "O mother, look, it can see as well as hear." The mother now joined her child in questioning the mysterious visitor, neighbours were called in, and far into the night the examination was continued, the unseen witness signifying by raps that he was the spirit of a man murdered five years ago in this house, whose body, he alleged to have been buried ten feet deep in the cellar. Raps indicating a certain spot, subsequent investigation disclosed at the exact depth of ten feet the following: a plank, a vacant place or hole, some pieces of crockery, charcoal, quicklime, some human hair, human bones, and a portion of a human skull. By means of the alphabet, the names of both victim and murderer were given; but though collateral evidence appeared to strengthen the accusation, and the accused, who had lived in the house at the time of the alleged murder and had afterwards removed to New York, could only produce in refutation a certificate signed by some twenty New York citizens, testifying

that they knew nothing against him, the authorities did not take up the case.

Revenge, however, was apparently not the motive that prompted the spirit of the murdered man to intrude himself and bring consternation into an honest farmer's family. He was but the instrument of higher spirits, the first messenger they chose not only to proclaim, but to demonstrate to modern scepticism the great and joyful evangel that there is no death, that those we call dead, not only live, but actually can communicate with us. The time had come and the urgent necessity for the curtain to be lifted that separates the two worlds. It was done at Hydesville, because the conditions were unusually favourable in the Fox family, all three children being strong mediums. But the Hydesville manifestations were only the first signal of that vast spiritual outpouring over the whole civilised world, which has ever since been continued, and is by no means abating yet.

The rappings which henceforth attended the Fox girls, were made the subject of scientific inquiry; and the most absurd and nonsensical theories were launched to account for them and disprove their real origin, Old Clouty of course coming in for his share of blame and the girls themselves for a good deal of rancour and bitter persecution. But nothing in the shape of human opposition could stem the rising tide that swept over all parts of the Union within the following two years. All phases of mediumship, from the purely physical to the highest trance condition were developed, and the movement was by no means confined to the masses, but early counted amongst its staunchest supporters such men as Brittan, Hare, Cooper, Hallock, etc. In fact, it is not too much to assert, that out of the vast crowd of scientific and literary men who have ever honestly entered into an investigation of the spiritual phenomena, though frequently with the object of proving the fallacy of the spiritual theory, there has not been one that did not become a Spiritualist, though many allowed worldly considerations to deter them from actively taking up the cause.

Years after my own attention had been called to the movement, and after I had read a good deal of the abundant literature of Spiritualism, I looked upon the facts on which the very attractive and beautiful system of the so-called harmonial philosophy is founded, as illusory; for I had from my earliest childhood been taught that the spirit-world was only a poetical fancy, and the belief in spirits a degrading superstition. A strange fascination, however, prompted me to investigate for myself, and I embraced most eagerly every opportunity I could get for doing so. It is not my intention this evening to enlarge on my own experiences. Suffice it to say, that I went through

the course of all other investigators in finding among a mass of what appears contradictory, and is at times the outcome of actual deceit and trickery, those genuine facts on which, as on rocks of eternal truth, this great regenerating movement of the 19th century, this new dispensation rests. I have seen forces at work, guided by intelligence not emanating from a human brain; I have conversed with intelligent, invisible beings, insisting upon having once dwelled in human frames; I have received messages satisfying me of the truth of this assertion by unmistakable proofs of identity; I have felt the grasps of their hands, once more, though only for the time being, clothed with earthly matter; and I have heard their voice in sounds of human speech, though issuing apparently from empty space. To all these astounding facts I readily and joyfully bear witness. In their importance and far-reaching influence on every department of human thought and human knowledge they absolutely stand alone, unreachable, teaching us that our so-called sciences are but surface gropings, our creeds but exterior expressions of truths we have lost the meaning of. The whole domain of physical science assumes a different aspect when viewed in the light of facts, which, though appearing so contradictory, not only to our ordinary experience, but also to certain deductions we call laws of nature, still are the result of higher laws we have yet to learn, and teach us the wholesome lesson, that, with all our boasted knowledge, we have scarcely entered the vestibule of the great temple of nature and nature's secrets. And whilst thus enlarging our sphere of the knowable, and actually extending it into what our ignorance has hitherto called the supernatural, Spiritualism reconciles science with religion and establishes harmony where hitherto there was discord. In proving the existence of spirit and of the human soul after death, in revealing to us the great order of the spiritual universe, it places religion on a scientific basis and makes the faith in a Supreme Being a logical necessity.

The question is often asked "Is Spiritualism a creed?" and generally answered by those who know nothing about it in the affirmative. Were it so, the invidious position of an advocate of creed against creed would be the last I should seek. You might as well confine the mighty breeze that sweeps over the land within a channel made by man, as force the deductions to be drawn from the facts of Spiritualism—the freest religious system the world ever saw—into one narrow, cramping creed. A creed is a certain set of dogmas and formulas of faith, presented to its votaries authoritatively, and to be accepted by them as the only condition of present and future happiness. Spiritualism has no dogmas, acknowledges no authority but one—the

guide, namely, which God has given to every individual, though not every individual accepts its guidance, and this guide is our own reason. To our reason alone even the highest spirits that have of late communicated with man, constantly and emphatically appeal. They claim no infallibility, far less worship; profess to be but fellow creatures, liable to err, but standing on a higher plane of existence and development; they lay just claim to higher wisdom, and proclaiming the object of their mission to be the regeneration and elevation of mankind, they offer this wisdom for our acceptance, *but subject only to our own reason approving of it.* All revelation of God to man, no matter whether it is supposed to come direct from God or in the usual way through the medium of the spirit-world, must necessarily whilst answering to man's requirements, be adapted to his understanding to the degree of mental growth and development he has reached.

It came to him in past ages, when both his reasoning faculties and his moral sense were on a lower plane, with authoritative force, threatening and fear-awaking, imparting truths under symbols that alone could render them intelligible, and demanding blind faith instead of giving knowledge and appealing to reason. The human race received an education analogous to that each individual should pass through. For if the man is to acquire that strength of will which he requires to conquer his passions, to love virtue for its own sake and to practice it, not only as an absolute condition of his own happiness, but also as a sacred duty he owes to society, and without the fulfilment of which on the part of the individual, society cannot exist and prosper; if the man in short is to be a man, the child has to bend under the iron rule of authority and the naturally strong impulse of selfishness has to be appealed to by the promise of rewards and the fear of punishment.

Out of this age of childhood, of authoritative faith, the human race is now slowly emerging. The spirit-world speaks no longer to children, it speaks to men and women; it tells them that there is no death, that once launched into conscious existence out of the unfathomable abyss of eternity, the individual must live, must develope. But this is no longer merely to be believed in; it is demonstrated by palpable, incontestable facts. Doubtful, wavering faith is made certain glorious knowledge, and religion, the golden chain that connects the seen with the unseen, that binds the creature to the Creator, henceforth is attached to a rock the wild billows of scepticism can no longer shake.

But the spirit-world also tells us that our destiny, both here and hereafter, is governed by fixed, unalterable laws, that every action, every thought of our lives, leave their indelible impres-

sion for good or for evil on the spiritual being as it emerges by that new birth which men call death from its cast-off earthly shell; that therefore no act of faith, no death-bed repentance can save us from the consequences of our own actions.

The law of continuity that governs physical development throughout the domain of nature, thus foreshadows spiritual growth. We simply gravitate at death, as R. D. Owen says, into the condition for which we have fitted ourselves during life.

Yet, though years and centuries of wretchedness and misery will have to atone for lost opportunities and a misspent life, they are not inflictions imposed by a revengeful and angry God, but the means to induce repentance, and through it progress and grow into higher conditions, ceasing as a matter of course as soon as their object is attained.

You will no doubt agree with me that this is more in accordance with divine justice and benevolence than that horrible doctrine of eternal damnation, with its frightful accessories of flames unquenchable and seas of burning sulphur, on which theologians have feasted their morbid imaginations so long; depicting a God of love, who only chastises because he loves, as continually causing millions of human beings to issue from his creative will into conscious existence, though he knows all the time that they are only born to be tortured through all eternity. Instead of a doctrine so revolting, I might almost say blasphemous, the spirit-world now teaches us that the law of love, by means of which God draws all men up towards Himself, determines our future destiny.

The principle of love is self-renunciation and abnegation. True love forgets its own self, with all its interests and desires, in the beloved object. As God is the ideal of such love, though inconceivable to us, so his wisdom has ordained that we can rise and get nearer to Him only by approaching this ideal by manifesting the love principle, not in empty professions, but in living deeds of love towards others. It is thus that we have all to work out our own salvation. Good and bad are but relative conceptions, signifying higher and lower degrees of spiritual development and growth. In the worst of criminals are found some good traits of character, and the most perfect of human beings are not free from faults. Work, therefore, is the order of the day in the spirit-world, as it is here. All have to assist each other in their ascent on the Jacob's ladder that connects this earth with the highest celestial spheres. Even the most exalted of spirits are ministering angels, ever bent on missions of love. It would appear from these revelations that celestial bliss is not within such easy reach as some good people imagine,

its final attainment depending on something more than the acceptance in blind faith of a few dogmas, nor does playing on harps and singing hallelujah appear to be the sole occupation of those who have attained it. On the contrary, few indeed, if any, pass away into spirit-life who are at once fit to enter its higher spheres, though all who have done their best on earth appear to attain at once greater happiness than earth can give.

This, then, is the order of the spiritual universe as revealed to us by the facts of Spiritualism and direct spirit-teachings given through inspirational and trance mediums. I ask you, can you see in these beautiful and grand revelations anything antagonistic to the true spirit of Christianity and the teachings of its sublime Founder, before whose inspired gaze the spirit-world—his Father's many mansions—was revealed, and who immediately on entering it after scaling his boundless love for humanity with a martyr's death, at once engaged in another mission of love by preaching as a ministering angel to the spirits in prison, to what we now call earth-bound, undeveloped spirits, still dwelling in the sphere of darkness close to the earth, the valley of the shadow of death, through which the spiritually more developed pass at once after death into brighter spheres? What other object but to enlighten their dark prison and their dark minds, and thus to raise them, to assist them to rise into a higher sphere, could the great Redeemer have had in preaching to them? Do you think that the heart that throbbed with such responsive sympathy with every human pain and human woe was capable of such cruel mockery as to preach to these spirits if their prison had been that hell from the endless tortures of which there is said to be no escape? Only the dyspeptic monk, who imagined one of the chief delights of the blessed in heaven to consist in their viewing the tortures of their friends in hell, could have harboured that thought.

Notwithstanding, however, that the spirit of Christ's teachings is identical with the most essential spiritualistic doctrines, and that the Bible records hundreds of incidents of precisely the same nature as the facts of Spiritualism, the attitude of the churches towards the latter is one of uncompromising hostility. The reason is not far to seek. The churches are thoroughly conservative and unprogressive. They have fixed certain boundaries to religious thought, beyond which their devotees are not allowed to move, and they appeal to authoritative faith as the final arbiter, however incomprehensible the dogmas may be which it offers for acceptance.

Spiritualism is exactly the reverse of all this. Free as the air we breathe, liberal, progressive, scorning all limits by man imposed to human thought, and appealing to reason and scien-

tific induction as our only safe guides in matters temporal and spiritual ; it appears to be thoroughly subversive of all authority, no matter how well established and time-honoured, that cannot stand its crucial tests.

To the student of history the actual conflict now being enacted under his very eyes between the two forces that have ever been active in the origin and growth of religions, must be of surpassing interest. Born as you are into creeds, and from earliest childhood taught to accept them as finalities, most of you will find it difficult to understand that all creeds are the result of two antagonistic forces, one representing in its institutions and dogmas, phases of growth that belong to the past and have become obsolete, clinging with desperate pertinacity to forms that once were beautiful, but from which the life-giving spirit has departed and left them heinous with age and decrepitude ; the other one, bright herald from the spirit-world, sent to inaugurate a new era, a new phase of development, to clothe celestial truths in garments less symbolical, and permitting a fuller and more extended view of their heaven-born forms, rushing with youthful impetuosity forward on its mission, unmindful of the obstacles with which its opponent is continually trying to arrest its progress.

Both these forces appear necessary : one, to prevent precipitate and premature growth ; the other, to prevent stagnation and retrogression, which would be equivalent to death itself. The victory always lies in the end with the cause of progress ; yet, the result of the mutual interaction of these two forces invariably partakes of the elements of both. In every religion the old and the new are strangely mixed ; the old remaining from previous forms of worship which the new religion, embodying higher truths, is intended to supersede.

We can thus trace the gradual growth of religions in the same manner as we can trace that of languages, and it would not be difficult for me to show you, did time permit, how many of the dogmas of the churches—blind faith in the truth of which they allege to be indispensably necessary to salvation, can be so traced ; how the sublime truths embodied in the sermons on the mount and by the seaside, were engrafted on the various religions that existed in a state of decadence when the grand Teacher appeared on earth ; how his alleged miraculous birth as a God-man finds a precedent in more than one of the great seers and heroes of antiquity ; and how, finally, a martyr's death for truth's sake was converted by a sacerdotal age into a sacrifice necessary to appease the supposed wrath of an angry God, after hecatombs of animals slaughtered for the same purpose were supposed to have failed.

But to enter into this subject at length, lies beyond the scope of this discourse, and might give offence to those who look upon certain dogmas as essentials, whilst in the reality they are only most nonessential accretions.

Historical Christianity as represented by the various churches is the joint result of the two forces above detailed, and very different indeed from the simple faith of the early Christians, with the image of the beloved Master and the living faith in his presence ever before them, with the burning words of divine love and wisdom ever in their minds.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Compare with this simple, but grand and comprehensive code of morals and religion, the Augsburg Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles, or any other orthodox catechism, and you have primitive and historical Christianity placed side by side. To the latter Spiritualism stands in most decided antagonism; with the former it is identical.

Both have emanated from a special and direct spiritual influx; and their identity could not be greater if Christ had once more appeared among us.

Spiritualism, therefore, with its antagonism to the churches, with its deep and ever increasing hold on humanity, and the certainty of its facts, with all their immense importance, being universally accepted, as all facts ultimately must of necessity be, will never supersede Christianity nor increase the number of its sects; but its mission is to spiritualise it, to free it from those historical accretions, that have defaced its fair virgin form, and all but neutralised its efficiency to guide and control human action, as the great motive power it ought to be, both in our social and political relations. And this mission Spiritualism pursues with that slow and steady progress which is characteristic of all changes in religious thought. It is the silent undercurrent that has shaped and fashioned this thought for the last thirty years, and millions of happy men and women already send up their fervent thanksgivings for the light which it has thrown along their path of life, and even beyond this path, across that dark chasm called death, to them no longer the king of terrors. Without lofty spires, without churches, without altars, it has invaded the very churches themselves, and is now preached from pulpits whence it was before denounced.

The Bible thoroughly supports Spiritualism, and Spiritualism alone makes the Bible clear, and shows its marvellous facts to

be identical in character with the experiences of the prophets and apostles. The Bible also contains many warnings against the abuse of the great God-given power once more granted to us of communing with the spirit-world; warnings which all who enter on an investigation of the spiritual phenomena will do well to bear in mind. For, unless they commence their task with a reverent and pious spirit, and strictly exclude every approach to frivolity from their circle, low, undeveloped spirits, still bound to the earth sphere, will be attracted, and untruthful communications be the result. "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."

That at a time when spirit communion was so well established, many of the biblical writers were inspired by *higher spirits*, nobody is more ready to grant than the intelligent Spiritualist; but nobody is more opposed to the dogma that the letter of the Bible, as handed down to us, with every dot of the I's, and every dash of the T's, must be unconditionally and unreasoningly accepted as the word of God. This is originally a dogma of the Catholic Church, which Luther and the other reformers of his time, whilst rejecting all other dogmas and traditions of this Church, arbitrarily maintained to be the only true one, and which in the subsequent struggles between Catholics and Protestants, by degrees assumed with the latter its present authoritative form, subjecting judgment and reason to the dead letter, and far exceeding the intentions of its original framers. For the Catholic Church, be it understood, holds this dogma only conditionally; that is, subject to the interpretation which her united wisdom, as represented by the supreme pontiff and the bishops in council assembled, may give to doubtful, contradictory passages of the Scriptures.

To show you how untenable it is in the form now held by the orthodox Protestant Churches, let me give you a glance at the origin of this dogma and the conditions under which it was framed. In the fourth century, when controversial quarrels in the church ran high, and when among a number of manuscripts (books were not printed in those days), all purporting to be genuine and correct accounts of Christ's life and teachings, though often very contradictory, it was found necessary to make a selection, this task was entrusted by Pope Damascus to Jerome, a learned church dignitary, who translated our present canon from Hebrew and Greek into Latin. The œcumenical councils of Hippo, Carthage, and finally of Trident, decreed these Latin translations, the so-called vulgate, to be the word of God.

Reflect for a moment only on the many chances there were of this alleged word of God becoming contaminated with human

error. Manuscripts, or probably copies of the originals, of doubtful authenticity, both with regard to their authors and writers, selected and translated by a fallible man, whose judgment with regard to the selection, whose conscientiousness and ability with regard to the difficult task of translation we are asked to take for granted, whilst errors innumerable, and actual interpolations evidently made for doctrinal purposes, prove him to have been deficient in two at least of the above qualities. It will then not be difficult for you to understand why Spiritualists, who act up to the precept "to prove all things and to hold fast to that which is true," justly object to bow down to the dead letter, but prefer the living spirit of the Bible, and why they cannot accept certain incomprehensible dogmas that have been framed in accordance with the letter that killeth.

The Bible is a grand old book, and I am the last to deride it, feeling convinced that many of its authors were inspired, and that it contains priceless revelations. It is the only record the Western world can call its own that shows the intercommunion between the human ~~and~~ spirit world to have commenced with the dawn of history; and more than this, it is the only record we possess of that great life and mind in whom the Divine predominated over the purely human elements of our nature to a degree that raises Christ above the ordinary standard of humanity, the highest realisation of God in man.

But more than any other book it must be read between the lines, and not literally; otherwise it involves the most irreconcilable contradictions, and can be made to justify doctrines even more preposterous than some of those that have been derived from the literal interpretation of single passages; it can be made to justify actions against which our moral sense revolts, but that stand recorded on the pages of history as indelible blots against historical Christianity. Sectarian divisions, sectarian bigotry and intolerance, persecutions, culminating in the massacre of the innocents and the horrors and tortures of the Inquisition, may all be traced back to this source—this Pandora box of evils. Through more than 1000 years of the Christian era, from the high-minded, philosophical Hypatia, whom a fanatical Christian mob, instigated by a Christian bishop, first stoned to death, in the very streets of Alexandria, and then literally tore her fair body to pieces, to the noble Servetus whom Calvin caused to be roasted alive at Geneva, thousands upon thousands have suffered deaths as cruel at the hands of the would-be followers of the gentle Jesus, through the fanaticism engendered by a literal interpretation of the Bible. For if it be true, as the orthodox creeds maintain, that he who believeth not their

special panacea shall be damned, then it is not so very illogical, and may even appear very necessary on the part of certain soul-custodians to torture and kill the body in order to save the soul, or at least to prevent other souls from being led into damnation. Many, in fact, of these custodians would even now revert most joyfully to this method of saving souls, if the power had not been wrenched from them. Spiritualism has most effectually slain this Moloch; a cloud of witnesses has been sent to us from the other world to proclaim once more the joyful evangel which Christ was never weary of reiterating, that it is not faith nor creed, mere accidents of birth, that determine our destiny hereafter, but the contrite heart and the use we have made of the fleeting opportunities of doing good whilst on earth. To break down the absurd barriers of sect and creed, to unite, not Christians only, but the whole human race in one universal brotherhood under the fatherhood of God; that is the grand aim and object of Spiritualism. Judging from its unparalleled progress within the short period of thirty years, we may venture to hope that its noble mission will be achieved. Search ye ever; you will throughout the civilised world, from the palaces of Europe's crowned heads to the log huts of the American backwoodsmen, or the Australian miners, you will find everywhere the earnest, devoted Spiritualist. Years ago, in the United States alone, their number was computed at ten millions, and it has been steadily increasing ever since, both in Europe and America; whilst to those who have been watching the movement in Australia, the gratifying fact that it is making steady headway, must be patent. And to be a Spiritualist once, is to be one for ever. It is impossible to witness these marvellous facts—to be convinced of their reality and their spiritual origin, to surrender to their irrefutable logic—and afterwards to forget or to ignore them. The movement has had its Peters, who, fearing to incur the world's sneers or injury to material prospects and interests, have repudiated and denied it. It has even had its Judases, who for filthy lucre have sold their cause by entertaining the public with so-called exposures of Spiritualism—clumsy substitutions of the spurious for the real; but even these backsliders and traitors—what cause was ever without them?—all had their own private convictions of the reality of the phenomena.

You all know the story of Gamaliel, the Jewish doctor of law, who when the Saducees were cruelly persecuting the apostles, cautioned them with the words, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this council or this work be of men it will come to nought, but if it be of God you cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God." Even

so it is with Spiritualism, and Spiritualists are content to abide by this test, confident that their cause is founded on truth, that as such it must be of God, and cannot be arrested in its progress by human indifference and human opposition.

