

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

WILLIMANTIC SPIRITUALIST SOCIETY,

BY JOHN HOOKER.

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Willimantic Spiritualist Society,

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BY JOHN HOOKER,
HARTFORD, CONN.

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.—*Psalm lxxiii. 25.*

I HAVE some serious and earnest words that I wish to speak to Spiritualists, and in coming before you at this time as such, and with the message that I wish to bring, I am sure that you will listen to me with a patience and confidence that I should not meet if I had no sympathy with you in your spiritualistic views. I have, therefore, a certain vantage ground in addressing you, and the fact that I can go before Spiritualists sure of this patient hearing makes me feel that I have a special duty to address them wherever I have the opportunity, and speak the earnest word that they might take in a more kindly way from me than from some others. And I thank God for the privilege and opportunity.

I have spoken of myself as agreeing substantially with you in your spiritualistic views. There may be a variety of views that would be called by that name. Let me say, then, that I believe in the reality of communication between the spirits of the departed and those of us who are still in earth life. There have undoubtedly been frauds, which all Spiritualists condemn, and honest delusions, which all must deplore. But allowing for all these, there is left a great mass of phenomena that not only must be regarded as genuine, but, it seems to me, can

not be explained upon any other theory than that of actual communication between human beings that have departed this life and those who are still in it. The subject was brought to my reluctant attention, some ten years ago, in a way that compelled me to consider and finally examine it, or give up all pretense of honest-mindedness and respect for truth; and from that time, as I have had opportunity, I have most critically studied and tested its phenomena. For a long time I held tenaciously to the theory that they might be explained by what is known as "mind-reading," or by some reflex influence from the mind of the person receiving the supposed communication; but I found that there were facts that this theory could not explain. My whole life has been spent in the practice of the legal profession, where it has been my constant employment to study and apply the laws of evidence, and to determine whether certain facts would warrant and establish a certain conclusion, and with this training I could not well doubt the correctness of my own mental operations in applying the phenomena of Spiritualism to the theory to be deduced from them. Actual facts are *God's facts*, and have a place in the divine economy; and God cannot respect, and we ought not to respect, the man who sneers at them, or thinks them unworthy of his serious consideration.

One of the most eminent naturalists of the day is Alfred Russell Wallace of England. One of our leading religious papers says of him that he is "an acute and accurate observer, and a man in whom the candor of the scientific method is conspicuously illustrated." Mr. Wallace gave the subject of Spiritualism a candid and thorough investigation, and became, and has continued to be, a Spiritualist, and has written an able work in its defence. In a recent article in an English journal he speaks of the subject as follows:

"The fact that Spiritualism has firmly established itself in our skeptical and materialistic age; that it has continuously grown and developed for nearly forty years; that by mere weight of evidence, and in spite of the most powerful prepossessions, it has compelled recognition by an ever-increasing body of men in all classes of society, and has gained adherents in the highest ranks of science and philosophy; and, finally, that despite abuse and misrepresentation, the folly of enthusiasts and the knavery of impostors, it has rarely failed to convince those who have made a thorough and pains-taking investigation, and

has never lost a convert thus made — all this affords a conclusive answer to the objections so commonly urged against it.”

To the Christian investigator it comes with a peculiar claim to respect. The culture of the world is very much running to materialism — to the old Sadduceeism which said there is no spirit, and Spiritualism comes in to antagonize this deadliest foe to Christianity. Many is the man who has been converted to a belief in immortality by it; many a man has been brought by it within the Christian fold. Lord Brougham said: “Even in the most cloudless skies of skepticism I see a rain-cloud, if it be no bigger than a man’s hand. It is modern Spiritualism.” Joseph Cook said, in one of his public lectures, that he was not sure but Christianity, in its struggle with prevailing unbelief, would have to appeal to it for help. Then again, the Bible is full of Spiritualism. The argument against Spiritualism is an argument against the Bible. Thus a leading scientist, in writing against Spiritualism, declares that there never has been, in all time, a manifestation that has appeared to come from the spiritual world that could not be explained upon natural principles. To his clear mind there was no use in denying a part unless the whole was denied. Then again, we are told in the New Testament that there will be a great spiritual outpouring and experience — in other words, great spiritual phenomena — in the last days. I refer to all these considerations in support of my statement that this subject has a special claim on the Christian investigator.

Some of the opponents of Spiritualism, unable to deny the genuineness of the phenomena, take the ground that the communications come from *evil spirits*. But what sort of a father is God, if, with all the disadvantages that we labor under, he lets loose evil spirits upon us, and keeps back the good? I can hardly conceive a greater libel upon God. It is as if a father should send his son to a distant school, and direct the master to give evil companions free access to him, but to keep away all the good. Such a father would be a monster. And what less would be such a God? The preaching of such a doctrine could only make infidels. I verily believe that the enemy of all good delights in having it preached. It will not do to say that God’s ear is ever open to those who seek his protection and

guidance. Alas! how many of the children whom God has created never heard of him! How many who have heard his name, yet have never learned to pray to him! To how many, to what a vast majority of the people of the earth, is he not a far-away, unknown, unreal being, clothed with a certain terror, but without anything to attract their love? It is as if, in the case I was supposing, the father who placed his boy in a distant school, had never disclosed himself to his son, but had communicated with him only through an agent, and was known to the boy only as some mysterious personage who supplied his wants. Against this horrible impeachment of the fatherliness of God, I, as one who loves him, and desires to bring others to the knowledge and love of him, protest, with all the emphasis of which my nature is capable.

But I did not come before you to convince you of the truth of Spiritualism, or of its claims on honest minds. You believe all this already. I came to make an earnest appeal to you, as Spiritualists, on certain points, as to which I have strong convictions and feel strongly, but as to which it is very likely that some of you, perhaps many, will differ from me.

1. And first, I wish to say to you that, in becoming a Spiritualist, there is no need that a man should give up his religious faith, if he has any. I have many times heard it objected to Spiritualism that it leads religious men, good orthodox Christian men and church members, to abandon their churches and religious associations, and apparently their religious faith. I not only cannot see the need of this, but it seems to me that all that is truly religious in a man's character would only be quickened and elevated and intensified by it. Look at the matter for a moment. The question whether spiritualistic phenomena are genuine is wholly a question of fact, as much so as any question of fact that was ever tried in a court of justice. The question of fact being settled in favor of their genuineness, then comes the question how they are to be explained; that is, by what theory. This is purely an intellectual operation. There is nothing religious in it. It is not even a moral question. It is a question for the honest exercise of one's best judgment. Now all these inquiries can be carried on by an earnest Christian man, or by a man of no religious belief; by a Roman

Catholic, an Episcopalian, a Congregationalist, a Baptist, a Unitarian, a Universalist, or a Jew. And when, after full investigation, each arrives at the conclusion that the spiritualistic theory is the true one, the whole being a mere intellectual inquiry, why should either be any less of a Christian, or of any particular kind of Christian, or any more of one, than he was before? And why should even the total disbeliever, by this mere intellectual exercise, be made a different man from what he was before? It is true that all may get impressions from communications which they suppose they receive that may modify the religious or non-religious views which they had previously held. I will speak of these by and by; but I am now speaking of the effect on their general religious views or character, of their arrival at the intellectual conclusion that there are communications from disembodied spirits. I am sure that I found no such effect upon my own religious character. I had been for nearly forty years a member of a Congregational church, and for over twenty a deacon. I have not only found no reason or desire to withdraw from the church, but I have never, in all my life, been so fond of attending upon its religious services; never so fond of the weekly prayer-meeting, in which I almost always take a part; never, I am sure, did I have a stronger hold upon divine things; never did the life and teachings, and death and resurrection, and present help of Christ, seem more to me; never did I live more as "seeing Him who is invisible." I hope you will pardon me for thus referring to my own experience. It is too serious a matter for one to let his delicacy stand in the way of his making the most effective possible appeal. But this is not alone my experience. I could fill pages with like testimony from earnest Christian men, who have examined the claims of Spiritualism, and been compelled to accept them. They have declared themselves made better Christians by their belief in it. And why should it not be so? Is not everything a spiritual benefit that makes the spiritual world real and near to us? Is it not morally wholesome to be brought under "the power of the world to come"? Is it not well to be lifted above this evil and transitory world into a higher atmosphere?

Thus, Prof. Barrett, a British scientist and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, says: "I know, and rejoice in,

the blessing Spiritualism has been to my own faith, and that of several dear friends of mine." An American clergyman, in a recent letter which I have seen, says: "To this subject [Spiritualism] I have devoted much study for several years, and in as candid and teachable a spirit as I could attain; and I am satisfied that I have obtained from this study the most valuable knowledge, and especially an aid to my religious faith, of which I would not, on any account, be destitute." Another Christian writer speaks of it as "shedding a new and glorious light upon his pathway, and opening his eyes to clearer and higher perceptions of God's truth, his wisdom, and his wonder-working providence." The well-known English writer, S. C. Hall, the founder and editor of the *Art Journal*, says: "As to the use of Spiritualism, it has made me a Christian. I humbly and reverently thank God that it has removed all my doubts. I could quote abundant instances of conversion from unbelief to belief—of some to perfect faith from total infidelity. I am permitted to give one name, that of Dr. Elliotson, who expresses his deep gratitude to Almighty God for the blessed change that has been wrought in his heart and mind by Spiritualism." Pages of like citations might be given.

It may be said that it is impossible for one who believes in Spiritualism to hold to all the dogmas that he has been taught in the churches, and that so a departure from his old beliefs becomes unavoidable. Well, there are dogmas that commanded the general Christian belief a century ago that the best religious sentiment of the day has discarded, and some are still professed and perhaps largely held that are losing their hold upon thoughtful Christian men; but I hardly know a doctrine now fully adhered to which a thorough Spiritualist may not hold. My own belief had been considerably modified before I gave any attention to Spiritualism, and I have had no occasion to modify it further since I became a Spiritualist. I ought, in candor, to go into particulars a little. I had long been settled in the belief of a future probation. Spiritualism confirmed me in that belief, but did not give it to me. I meet few intelligent Christian men, outside of the theological schools, and perhaps I should say (qualifiedly) outside of the ministry, who do not hold the same view. The doctrine of a final and unending

punishment of all who die impenitent has lost its hold on the Christian mind. If this be an error, Spiritualism is not the originator of it. But you will say: You cannot still hold the doctrine that Christ was divine, and that by his death he appeased an angry God, who would otherwise have consigned the whole human race to perdition. I think, my friends, that the life and death and resurrection of Christ are the greatest factors in rescuing the world from the power of sin, and in the salvation of men, but I think he came to reconcile the world to God, rather than to reconcile God; and I am not able to make him merely a man. Such communications as I have had, or supposed I had, from friends in the other world, have told me, in reply to my earnest inquiry about what they could say as to Christ, that he is at the head of the spirit world, not wearing a crown or royal robes, but known only by the radiance of his countenance, and working, working, as here on earth, among the low and wretched spirits of that world, to raise them up and bring them to the light; — a most entrancing conception of him, far beyond any that puts him upon a gorgeous throne, with myriads prostrating themselves before him; a conception of him that seems most in accordance with what we know of his character, preserving still the human nature and aspect which he bore on earth, and with which he ascended. I verily believe that it will be in that form that we shall see our Lord, and engaged in that saving work; and it is the constant comfort of my heart that I shall, before long, be permitted to engage in that same loving and rescuing work with and under him.

I say then that we can accept Spiritualism and yet retain, in our belief and in our affections, all that is vital, all that the Christian intelligence of the age will continue to accept, of what has been taught as Christian truth. Our hold must still be on God; our trust must still be in him; and for him our love. We must still be able to say, in the words of our text, "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

2. My second word of caution and counsel to Spiritualists is this:

Do not accept communications from spirits in the other world as coming with anything more than *human authority*. I believe

that there is often a feeling among Spiritualists that everything said from the other side has about it a certain superhuman, almost divine quality. It seems reasonable to suppose that our friends over there have a higher wisdom than ours; or, at least, that, with their larger knowledge, they are better able to advise us wisely; but many Spiritualists go far beyond this, and forget entirely that they are merely human, with limited knowledge, knowing perhaps no more than we of the mysteries of God, and certainly having nothing of his foreknowledge, and nothing of the power of prophecy. They have larger data to act upon and to judge of, but this is all. It is only human judgment after all. Their talk about the future is little more than human conjecture, or, if more than that, it is only a more enlightened human wisdom, dealing with probabilities.

In this view, it will never do for us to build up a system of theology on what they say to us. They only tell us what they think about it. And what one thinks about it often differs from what another does. Their idiosyncracies, even their old prejudices, affect their views. They have not got beyond the region of human imperfection. Especially is this so of those who have been but a little time in that world. Truth, in its fullness, does not burst upon them. They learn it gradually. It is one of the delights of that world that we shall always be exploring and learning there. There must be a vast difference in the mere matter of knowledge between the childhood of spirit life and its mature age. I have no doubt that many a spirit who went over with little spiritual experience is often, even after months and years, behind some people in earth life in spiritual experience and attainment.

There is perhaps nothing that persons holding communication with departed spirits more often seek to obtain than advice as to their action in some matter of practical importance. Perhaps there is no serious objection to this, if we accept it only as the advice of a friend, and exercise our own best judgment in the matter. But I believe that God never meant that we should relax at all our hold on him for guidance. The true way to obtain guidance is still the old way. Go to God, in prayer, and trust, and he will, in some way, impress his will upon us. And it is *his will* that we want, even if it leads us into disaster,

or what we call disaster. If he leads us into disappointment and trial and sorrow, it is because disappointment and trial and sorrow are what we need, and anything else would be a real calamity to us. It may be that the very way he adopts for reaching our minds is through the spirits of our departed friends.

Let us, then, go to him with our wants. Even if our friends advise us, let us still carry their advice to him for confirmation or rejection. With the spirit world full of friends, with whom we have the most loving communion, let us still be able to say: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee."

3. And thirdly. Do not let us get the impression that we may lead irreligious lives and all will go well with us. I have never had the direful effect of sin impressed upon me so strongly as it has been by what I have learned through Spiritualism. I have never had the transcendent importance of character so impressed upon me. The old view, put before a wicked man, of a hell that was inevitable, whose tortures were inconceivable, and whose duration was endless, used to fill me as a boy with a vague horror, but as I emerged from childhood it grew more and more vague and unreal to me, and long before I began to confess even to myself any doubt about it, I can see that it was not making the impression of an actual truth upon me. But Spiritualism teaches that if a man descends into the pit of sin here, he has got to work his way out of it over there, by slow and most painful struggles upward, perhaps for long years. The hell is in the man's own soul. And no picture of a material hell has ever overdrawn the horrors of that inward hell. And one of the agonies of that world will be, over work here left undone—opportunities neglected—wealth used only for selfishness—a life of indolence and uselessness where the world needed so much done. A few years ago I had a long conversation with a very wealthy man about the duty of using his wealth for good. I saw that I made no impression upon him. Not long after the conversation he died. After his death I was in another city and was asked by a friend living there to go with him and see a medium in whom he had great confidence. I did so, and to my surprise the spirit of the man of whom I

have spoken announced himself and addressed me. It was indeed an entire surprise to me, as I had not thought of him. I at once welcomed him, and soon after alluded to my conversation with him. "Yes (said he), I remember it well. You was right and I was wrong. Yes, you was right and I was *wrong*—WRONG—WRONG. To be happy here we must be good on earth." Early in life I knew intimately a young man of rare talent, who was brought up in a christian home, but who had become irreligious and profane in the last degree. In the hope of rescuing him I repeatedly remonstrated with him, and in his last illness labored by his bedside to bring him to a change of feeling. He died after a few years, and died as he had lived. More than fifteen years after his death I was sitting in a room with the wife of a clergyman in Boston, who (the wife) had remarkable mediumistic gifts, which she used occasionally for her friends, and wholly without compensation. She was a sweet, motherly, christian woman. She had been talking with a lady who sat near (we three being the only persons present), when suddenly she seized my hand in a most convulsive manner, and in an almost shrieking voice, called out "Help me! help me! You did help me in life. You can help me." I at once knew who it was and I said, "A——, is it you?" He said, "Yes—Help me, help me." I began to say something, when with a failing voice he said "All gone—all gone"—and that was all I ever heard from him.

I could give other recitals, equally dreadful, but I intended to give only illustrations of the fact that our sins will find us out. Spiritualism teaches us this, and that there is no evasion of them. The Scripture still holds true, and awfully true, which saith: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." There is no law more sure than this law of retribution.

Let us not forget this in the hymns which we sing of "The sweet By and By." Those hymns are well enough in their place and full of comforting power. But let us sing also some of those grand and heroic hymns that have given strength to our fathers in their conflicts with temptation and the powers of darkness. Such hymns as

My soul be on thy guard,
 Ten thousand foes arise;
 The hosts of sin are pressing hard
 To draw thee from the skies.

Oh, watch and fight and pray!
 The battle ne'er give o'er;
 Renew it boldly every day,
 And help divine implore.

The wages of sin are death; not necessarily death eternal, but with all the horrors of such a death while it lasts. It may be escaped from by repentance and reformation, and I fully believe that Christ labors for the repentance and reformation of such lost souls. No words of doom were ever uttered more terrible than those uttered by the loving and compassionate Christ. He saw what this terrible penalty was, and his words, I verily believe, were in no way words of exaggeration. To an unrepentant sinner there is an endless hell. When he repents his hell ceases; but not till then. He never reaches the point where repentance will not save him. Christ came "to seek and save the *lost*;" and he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and *forever*." And God's mercy, the Psalmist tells us, is "*everlasting*."

Now in this world of temptation, where it is so easy for one to go astray, Spiritualism, while it leaves us all the divine help that we ever had, teaches us this great lesson, really taught in the Gospel, but so emphasized by Spiritualism as to make a new impression upon us, that if we open our hearts to good spirits, they come in and help us, and if to evil spirits that they come in their demoniacal power and possess and curse us. We must keep ourselves pure if we would have the help of pure spirits. We must be unselfish, and upright, and truthful, if we would make our hearts a castle that devils cannot enter. And if we open the door and let in devils, the good spirits cannot abide there and we become the prey of the evil ones. I cannot conceive how the lesson of virtue and godliness can be better taught than it is by Spiritualism.

Spiritualists therefore, who seriously and earnestly accept its true teachings, should be better men and women than others around them who do not share their belief. I say they *should be*. Are they so? I believe there is a common impression that

they are not. I must say that among those whom I know are some of the most truly christian people in the sweetness and unselfishness of their lives, in what I may even call a consecration to all that is good, that I have ever known. Yet my knowledge of the mass of Spiritualists is very limited. Whatever they are in fact, they are most utterly failing to apply their own principles, if they are allowing themselves to live below the highest standard of virtue.

We must remember that God reigns—that all power rests with Him—that to Him we must give account. But we may comfort ourselves with the thought that He is our Father—ever ready to help us—asking for our trust and our love. And after we have wandered in imagination over the whole universe, we ought not only to be able to say, but to love to say, “Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.”

NOTE.—I wish to add a few words upon a point that I had not time to dwell upon in the foregoing address. I have repeatedly heard it charged against Spiritualism that the believers in it are often immoral men. I think there may be a basis of fact for the charge. But it is no more of an argument against Spiritualism than it would be against Christianity that many men believe in it and are yet immoral in their lives. In neither case has the thing believed in wrought its legitimate work. It is obvious that a man may have an intellectual belief in either without its affecting his moral character. It ought to do so, but it does not. The belief in spirit communication is wholly an intellectual belief, founded on evidence—on an investigation of facts. One may reach that point and be wholly unmoved by the great truth that it teaches him. It does not discredit the cause that he has come to believe in, that the belief has failed to do its proper moral work on him. It is to his own personal discredit, and that is all. Look at Paul's description of the Corinthian church, especially in the 5th chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians. Their conduct was a disgrace to themselves, but it did not prove Christianity false.

A singular argument against Spiritualism was addressed to me by a clergyman in a recent conversation. He said there were a great many more non-religious people, than religious, that believed in it. I said to him that, in the first place, a fact could not be any more or less a fact from the character of the persons who believed or disbelieved it. In the next place, that with the clergy condemning it, and the constant assertion that it was a demoralizing belief, it could not be expected that church members would very largely look into it, or be ready to accept it, and where they had come to believe in it that they would make proclamation of the fact, though I believed there were

a great many more than he suspected who were really believers in it. And finally, that it would naturally be so with any new truth that was not acceptable to the churches. I adduced the case of the discovery by science early in this century that the world was not created in six days, by so many successive fiat's of God, as we had been taught to understand the Bible as teaching. The church was shocked at this attack upon the Bible, and threw itself into antagonism to it. In thirty years from that time it could probably be truthfully said, that there were ten believers in the new theory outside of the churches where there was one within them. Yet these outsiders had the truth with them and the insiders had the delusion. And this truth that the "infidels," as they were regarded, were championing, was God's truth, and is now accepted as such by all the Christian world.

The church I believe is making a great mistake in denouncing Spiritualism, and doing what it can to bring into discredit and odium those of its members who come to believe in it. It made the same mistake in its treatment of the early anti-slavery movement. The writer came upon the stage soon after Garrison had begun to strike his first blows at the system of slavery. No one much younger than he can have a conception of the position of the churches at that time towards him and his followers. It has been well said by a writer on the subject that "it was a few fanatics on one side and all the churches and society on the other." Yet these hated and ostracised abolitionists were in the right, and the churches and society in the wrong. If the churches as a body had stood by the abolitionists instead of denouncing them, they would never have become a hostile organization, denouncing the unfaithfulness of the churches. They did many extravagant and offensive things. But so do all reformers. The world would never move if there were not some men so zealous as to go too far. It is the more the duty of men who have some leaven of conservatism in their constitutions, to join in the reform, that they may secure a better average of decorousness in the conduct of its advocates. Benjamin Du Plan, the "Gentleman of Alais," who lived in the South of France a hundred and fifty years ago, was a noble specimen of a true reformer in the highest social position joining with extravagant zealots because he knew they were on the Lord's side. The *Hartford Courant*, in an editorial notice of his life, recently published, says: "To be a Protestant was to be an outcast in every way. It was this lot that young Du Plan chose for his worldly portion. The reader will not be surprised to learn that there was Protestant fanaticism as well as Catholic bigotry, and that there were abnormal developments of religious zeal. Many women and girls took up the character of prophetesses and preachers, fell down in ecstasies, and went through all the scandals of fantastic demeanor and imposture. Du Plan was deterred from his choice neither by the extravagance of some of the sect nor by the persecutions. *It is largely owing to his labors that the French Protestant Church is alive to day.*"

Truth almost always makes its first appearance in a despised form. Christ was born in a stable. When he began to preach he was called a glutton and wine-bibber. The old prophets with their long hair, their heads covered with

ashes, their garments of sack-cloth, and their denunciatory proclamations in the market-places, were the "cranks" of their time, and very repulsive ones, too; yet God made them his mouth-piece. What more uncouth than John the Baptist, wearing a goat skin and living on locusts and wild honey as he wandered about, and yet he was the forerunner and herald of Christ. So it is through all history. The question with every soul is, shall I espouse the cause of God's truth in its poverty and shame, or shall I wait till it has made its way to public recognition and "society" has put its stamp of approval upon it? Christ was willing for the sake of truth to become "of no reputation." Are we? I believe no soul is dearer to God than the one which, whatever religious or non-religious name it bears, stands fearlessly for God's despised truth, and that our Lord's warmest welcome is given to such a soul as it enters the spirit world.

"In that world Truth clasps her adorer to her breast,
Saying—Remember that on earth I was thy guest."

"Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world that He might put to shame them that are wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world that He might put to shame the things that are strong; and the base things of the world and the things that are despised, that He might put to naught the things that are." 1 Cor. i. 26, 27, 28.

What more humble instruments were ever employed than those whom Christ chose for his apostles!

Shall we stand with those whom the world counts wise and mighty and noble, or with God and those despised ones who, perhaps in a very imperfect way, perhaps half blindly, are yet the bearers of his truth, and his commissioned messengers to men?

