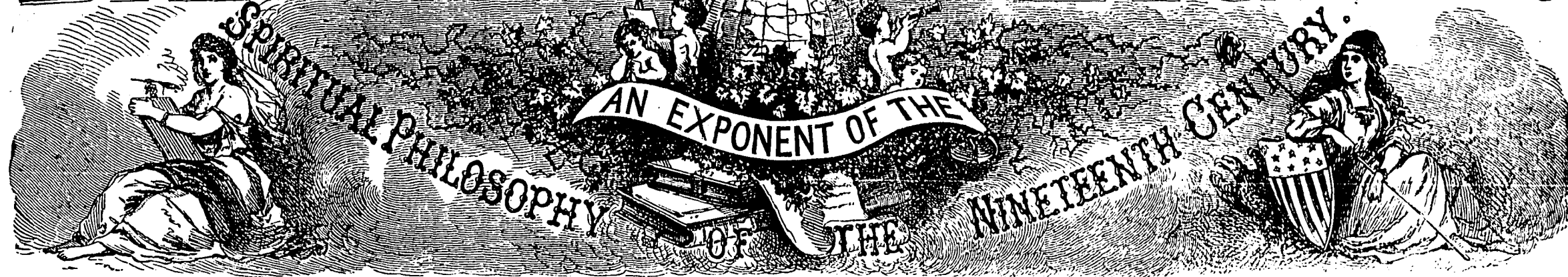


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The Rostrum.

THE FRATERNITIES OF DISEMBODIED SOULS. BY SPIRIT WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING.

A Lecture Delivered through the Trance Mediumship of
Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond, at Chicago, Ill.
[Special Report for the Banner of Light.]

My theme this evening, friends, relates to the Fraternity of Associated Spirits in Spirit-Life. The text is: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."

The perception of spiritual existence is one thing; the existence of life beyond death is quite another.

There are many persons who exist after the decease of the body; there are many who do not perceive spiritual existence, even though they live after the death of the body. If I come to Chicago and am intent upon works of art, I visit those places where works of art are to be found, and know very little of what the superficial world may have to offer; I perceive only such things as I am in pursuit of, and I could not for the life of me tell the records of what is passing upon 'Change, nor could I determine in any manner the latest scandal in fashionable society. If a man in love with mere diversion visits Florence or Rome, he would scarcely be interested in those wonderful works of art that form the basis of pursuit of the student and scholar, and he very likely would find the cities both insipid and dull, merely because he could see nothing in a tower or dome or in certain pictured walls to suit his advanced (!) tastes.

We see with our minds and the condition of our spirits; certainly not in any high sense with our external vision or the perceptions of our bodies. And therefore the spiritual world being more nearly a world of the condition of the mind, is entirely one of perception. The condition of every spirit depends upon the degree of that perception. The surroundings being less arbitrary than those of material substance, the external substance itself being amenable to other laws than those that govern matter upon earth, you will find that each spirit describes the spirit-world into which he or she enters as being precisely in accordance with his or her highest idea of heaven, or rather perception.

I once had occasion to ask a countryman in Massachusetts what his idea of heaven might be. He said he had a dream once—that he died and went to heaven; and approaching a large red house, which seemed to him the perfection of architecture and taste, he inquired for the master. Everything about the house was spacious, and arranged in strict accordance with an ancient country farmer's mansion. He was informed that the master was away in the fields. He saw broadly cultivated acres and fruits growing in profusion, grain and all kinds of productions in the height of their growth. Presently he saw a man of immense dimensions (who would have appeared gigantic if he had not been so well proportioned) coming toward him; from his own feelings he interpreted this to be God. He, therefore, in abject fear, bowed down before this gigantic man, without making known what his errand might be, and awoke with the full consciousness that he had visited heaven and seen God.

I have seen other men, with larger culture and higher ideas, who had their image of heaven derived from their own minds as much as this man. Whether it be a throne of alabaster with walls of brass and gates of pearl, streets paved with gold and flowing with milk and honey, or whether heaven be, according to the Mahometan, a garden of paradise, where the Pearl-dwell and where Houris lavish all kinds of blandishments upon the happy and disenthralled Mussulman, it matters not; the ideal heaven is according to a man's spiritual perception, and he undoubtedly enters the state for which he is best qualified. Albeit there is a heaven for the dog-fancier; very likely he will enter a condition of spiritual existence where his mind will still be in sympathy with his previous joys and pursuits. Albeit there is a heaven for the loftiest devotee, who enshrines his images in outward form and worships through sacerdotal rites and around altars emblazoned with emblems of external worship.

The heaven into which I entered was that which was latest upon my lips as a human being, the love of my fellow-man. I believe I can say that I have never cherished—at least I have no recollection of cherishing a feeling of ill-will toward any human being. I believe that my effort in life was, so far as possible, to express that good will; and if ever I was indignant, it was at a lack of the expression of good will among men, not toward the individuals who failed in that expression. If I ever cried out against wrong, it was the wrong, not the wrong-doer; if I ever considered human beings worthy of chastisement, it was only the gentle chastisement of that love which burneth greater than fire, and scourgeth more than a fine scourge of coils.

In spiritual life, therefore, I was prepared to enter an abode of love. I had never the fear of God in my mind; I had no thought of wrath, nor vindictive punishment; I had no terror beyond that of my own shortcomings. I well knew that there were imperfections and faults in the spiritual nature; that surrounded with matter and with dust, the spirit had not been so active as it should have been, but I had striven to keep alive so far as possible the spirit instead of the letter of the Word of God. I had striven, so far as possible, to find out what that spirit might be, and instead of the external form of salvation, I had chosen to receive the spiritual meaning of Christ's mission on earth, his love for man instead of the wrath of God; and I believed that this love was equivalent to the uplifting of all human beings.

With this feeling I entered spiritual life. I did not expect the heaven of the Orthodox Christian; I did not expect a ma-

terial heaven at all. I was quite prepared to enter a state of existence entirely different from my earthly state, and hoped that I would do so for this reason: That I found the earthly body, its surroundings and its needs, sometimes an impediment to the spirit; and while quite necessary for earthly uses, I had imagined a condition of life where the body itself might be dispensed with, as any useless incumbrance may be when we have outgrown it, and I quite well remember that in my last moments I became aware of the uplifting of the spirit beyond the senses, that the body was falling off as husks or shackles might fall from the slave, that an external covering was being removed that admitted my spirit into its native element; and I can realize no greater change that could come to a human being under these circumstances than release from the physical body itself. The bird bursting the calcareous covering, and soaring at once into upper air; the butterfly bursting the chrysalis, and feeding on dew instead of groveling in the dust; the flame mounting out of the darkness in which it has been imprisoned for years, could scarcely be more sudden or a greater transformation than that which comes to the spirit of man willing to be disenthralled from the dust.

I do not say that this comes to every spirit. I do not say that the feeling of release is so sudden and so conscious in all human beings, but I do believe—and in this I may perhaps judge somewhat from what I desire more than from what is really the case—I do believe that every human being feels in a measure disenthralled by the change called death. I believe that the worst conditions, spiritually, are in some measure benefited by that change. I do believe that the outward body, which is the scene of passion, is in some measure a release to the spirit, while the condition of that spirit may be.

In my own case it was as I have described it. It was not that I was particularly glad to be away from earth; I found many things to employ me here. I found still the great field of social, religious and political life to be, as I thought, renovated. I found that the actual shrine of existence might remain in the external life for some time, and find ample work for the hands to do; but when once it was shown me that I was to go, and when I saw that my necessary career was in the direction of spiritual existence, I was gladly sprung to that atmosphere as the caged bird would spring to his native heather; I as gladly entered that condition as I would have entered any place of intellectual, social or religious enjoyment that I had long aspired to, but never attained when upon earth.

We enter a drawing-room upon earth, and we find ourselves either at once in our own atmosphere, or in a strange element; if in a strange element we are obliged and endeavor to assimilate with it, and to find some one with whom we may converse in sympathy, or at least observe something that will interest. If we find ourselves at home, we can at once enter into the spirit of whatever conversation, amusement or recreation is passing around.

These external states are, as we say, arbitrary; we are obliged to adapt ourselves to them on earth; in spirit-life we take our state with us. We enter that company and companionship for which we are best fitted. Our thoughts on entering are immediately known; we are recognized, and recognize one another without the formality of external introduction, or social inquisition. We are really among our spirit kindred, whether we have ever known each other on earth or not.

It is the blessing of spiritual existence that it removes external fetters; family lineage is not questioned. The spirit-record only forms the lineage that is to be considered. We are not questioned as to our individual beliefs on any given subject, since life itself is taken as a criterion of belief, and we are supposed to worship the gods we follow. I have known things, to be different upon earth. I have seen men worshipping at the shrine of Mammon in every external action, and yet professing to worship another deity. I have known it to occur in human life that the profession was Christian, while the practice was largely Moslem. It may be that these conditions on earth are only attempts at growth; but they certainly fail to express the profession of life, and make very much of human existence an outward mask, in which men strive to appear what they are not.

In spiritual life this mask is necessarily removed; if we are highway robbers, we enter the heaven of that kith; if we belong to the more respectable class of robbers—those that in human life are considered respectable, because under the guise of society and law—we enter the condition of our kindred; if we belong to a class of human beings that, reverent principles, and in our imperfect way strive to express those principles in outward life, we are also known and recognized as we are; there is no disguise, since each one knows his or her own record, and is quite aware that one can be admitted to no company other than that for which one's spiritual state is fitted.

I therefore felt no discomfort on being admitted among the kindred and friends that surrounded me, among the minds that seemed to sympathize with the thoughts that I had held dearest upon earth, and among those whose thoughts had in some manner formed the basis of my external life and dreams.

I found social states entirely different from those on earth. By this I do not mean the actual social states which proceed from the affection of the mind and heart, but the laws governing society were from the very outset different. We begin at the external covering on earth, we attack society as you would a burr; that is, a very rough exterior must be taken by main force. In some instances we attack it as a general does a fortress, and approach by parallel lines, and a series of tactics, that the ingenious man if he understands will well employ; and that even discourages many honest men from attempting to enter the fort at all. Beginning on the outside of human beings, we necessarily in human life discover that which is worst in them; they wear this upon the outside, whether they think they do or not, for if it be a mask that apparently is good, we still must probe that mask before we find the actual individual.

In spiritual existence we begin the other way. We find the heart and mind first, which saves much trouble and misunderstanding. We are one with each other at once, or strangers. The chord of sympathy is at once struck, or is dumb. We understand that there is a common ground between us, or we know that there is nothing in sympathy. I have seen men of equal intelligence and learning sit in a company of earthly people who were enlightened and intelligent for three or four hours, and conversing together with never a thought in common, and with no more knowledge of each other than at the beginning.

If, as Talleyrand said, "words are given as a disguise for human thought," surely much of human society in earthly

life is given as a shroud for human existence, and men and women are buried in the things that they vainly call pleasure, and social life is a mere masquerade in which they assume a guise that they vainly would have their neighbors perceive to be true; and each of them despises the other for wearing it.

The thought of being recognized, the consciousness of being loved, and the fact that the spirit could not be mistaken, with an abiding trust and lofty hope, the endearing sentiment and power, made me aware that I had survived death, was alive, and drew to me the consciousness of those friends that had preceded me into spiritual existence. And now let me just here, in passing, say to those who pursue Spiritualism, who search for the hidden truth in Spiritual Philosophy: Do not seek for your friends in their outward garb merely; do not seek for father, mother, brother and sister as they were in their earthly estate, but only seek for them in the love which bound them to you, because all lesser things than this will have been swallowed up in their spiritual state; and in striving to join them do not strive to bring them down to your comprehension of external things, but rather to raise your comprehension to their new found state. You will find it much more convenient; you will find it much more useful; you will find it much more truthful as far as spiritual life is concerned. The parent who passes from earthly life in a feeble state of health, and with a form decreasing in strength, vigor and activity, will not meet you, in spiritual life, in a decrepit form or with enfeebled countenance, but as in the full prime of manhood or womanhood. The parents who are to you, even in old age, the representation of all that is sacred and dear, will come to you in the full vigor of middle life, as perfect in form and feature as though no finger of time had ever touched them here. If rounded in spirit and completed in those social qualities which adorn human social life here, they will meet you with the full radiance of that social life expressed in visage and in form, and at outward sight you would certainly not know them, but with inward perception you would feel them at once as your own. It is so in degree with every friend that passes into spiritual life; the external imperfection, if it be a physical one merely, passing away with the body, the spiritual perfection only remaining, and that, if their natures be more aspiring than groveling, soon wears away in the new atmosphere of spiritual life.

I was struck immediately with the consciousness of being in a world or sphere devoid of mere personality, of self-interest. Now what I mean by this is, that necessarily, owing to the external requirements of the body, you are selfish here, even the most unselfish of men. The house that you live in you consider yours; the property that you aggregate around yourself is yours; the possession of things individually belonging to the individual, creates a sphere of selfishness, and the protection of this property produces in all social life a kind of self-interest in which each human being and each family are hidden from the social observation and intercourse of their fellow-beings in some measure.

Now, you can imagine that in entering a life where you have no dwellings to provide to keep you from the elements; where your clothing is the work of far other hands than of those that are employed to toll day and night to clothe you here; where your food consists of far other substances than those that must be won either by work of the hand or the speculation of the brain, and where, in reality, the outward is usurped by the inner nature—you must imagine that there is an entire reversal of the social methods; that whatever individually a human being may possess he is not afraid of being robbed of that which is really himself. You are not afraid, when you lock your doors at night, that the burglar is coming to carry yourself away; you do not imagine that individually he would care to become possessed of such an incumbrance; but it is something that you are surrounded with—your goods, your chattels, your diamonds, your plate, your pictures—something that is extraneous to yourself which the burglar does not, perhaps, with a clear moral perception recognize as yours, and thinks he is entitled to it if he can only slip away with it. But in spirit-life everything that surrounds the spirit is as much a part of yourself as your body is here. While, then, you are removed from all necessity for protection against robbery and plunder, or innovation of any kind, there are consequently no inducements to that superficial and external kind of selfishness which constitutes the seeming necessity of outward life. If you could enter earthly society where the houses were all open, where there was perpetual summer, where children were playing to and fro among the flowers, where everything of adornment and beauty was visible, and not concealed, where all objects that met the eye were those of grace and comeliness, where kindly greetings, exchange of fraternal regard, ready sympathy and quick comprehension, were in every mind and heart, where every man who met every other man was as a brother, and all women sisters; where each and all conspire to make the others feel happy, where, if a source of knowledge or wisdom or joy came to one, he was not content without imparting it to all the rest, and where, like a steady breeze that blows in summer time, filling the air with odors of flowers from whence you know not, joy pervades the entire atmosphere, it would give you some idea of the harmonious social state of spiritual existences.

Each family, indeed, is isolated; there is, indeed, an individuality, but it is so sacredly regarded and so heeded that it is not even perceived. No person can invade the individuality of another. In fact, the spirit is its own protection, and you can be as isolated in the midst of a million as though you were upon a mountain top, or a hermit in a cave. If there be something in your mind or spirit that requires solitude, there is no spirit among all your friends who would or could intrude upon that solitude.

The sanctuary is within the soul! The surroundings indicate that solitude is there. No invading hand or voice ever approaches until you desire it. But where there is nothing to conceal, where solitude is only for self-retrospection, self-benefit, where the thought of others is uppermost in the mind, and where ideas flow forever continually toward the benefit of one's kind, there can be little room for misanthropic meditations, little desire for loneliness, since prayer in this state of existence consists of activity, and the working of the mind toward others is found to be the chiefest instrument for aspiration and ascension.

The hermit who prays in soul, the recluse who seeks solitude, the misanthrope who separates himself from his fellow-beings, is an illustration of a kind of selfishness; but he who only seeks solitude that he may gain strength, he who desires to be alone that he may commune with the highest—with the Infinite—he that strives simply to benefit others by his communion and meditation, does not even find it necessary to separate himself from his spiritual associates and surround-

While, as I say, the charm of the family is still preserved, and the nearest and dearest are nearest and dearest still; while the mother folds her child, and the father embraces the darling that comes to him from earthly life; while the brother and sister, who are linked in spirit as well as with the ties of consanguinity, are still brother and sister, there is not only this family, but a larger family of all kindred minds and souls.

You meet in society, or in the world of contact with matter, occasionally human beings, and you will say to them, "I surely have met you before; you seem as near to me as a friend or brother." The kindred nature of your spirits flows together, and you know one another without the formality of long social intercourse. After this manner you become associated in spiritual life—poets, philosophers, friends, artists, those who have loved a single truth, or been associated in the same effort; those who in different parts of the world have dreamed the same dreams, and looked out for the same glorious future for humanity; these are drawn into fraternities and associative bodies. They resemble, in a loftier degree, some of those friendly associations in Germany where every man seems to have the interest of every other man at heart more than his own selfish interest. I have seen some such associations in colleges. I have known of such friendly intercourse among those of some craft, or ilk, or art, upon earth. I have known it to exist even among the orders of secret societies, but the trouble is that upon earth it is the external interest that binds them together, and not the flowing together of the spirit. It is like the membership of the church, that has the external form too often of brotherhood, but within is discord. And I know of no bond in church, in Freemasonry, in Odd-Fellowship, in any outward order created by man, that can take the place of this sublime spiritual recognition that determines the order of spiritual relationship, and determines the fact of spiritual kindred by the nearness of spiritual perception and likeness to one another.

Having found my heaven, having determined it to be a condition of mind more than of place; having perceived that I could make my own surroundings, and that my spirit was indeed amenable only to the laws of its own growth, having such outward adornment only as was necessary for the spirit, not limited to time and space, and only such associations as I could take with me wherever I desired to go—I said, "I long to know more of the mysteries of this spiritual state, wherein the brotherhood of man is more clearly recognized, and wherein I can in some degree see the foreshadowing of what I hope may come upon earth."

I beheld one whom on earth was called a dreamer; who gave incendiary thoughts to his time and age, and was denounced as infidel and atheist because he believed in the brotherhood of man, and the love more than in the hatred of God and the condemnation of his fellow-men. I mean Rousseau. I beheld him in a fraternity of associated minds, surrounded by those who had either possessed kindred thoughts for humanity, or stimulated by his words and works, had followed him as his idol and teacher. He seemed to me as a flame. He seemed as inspiring as an eagle. He seemed prone to fly into regions where no other being dared to follow, and yet return again to the conscious work of outward life. Oh, how his spirit flashed! How the air around him seemed to glimmer with transcendent light! How I knew that he had been shunned, vilified, ostracized upon earth! And I beheld there one who loved his kind and hated only tyranny, only those institutions of men that serve the ambition of tyrants and kings by blotting out human life and human liberty. There he was, and could you have seen the minds who surrounded him there; could you have seen how willingly they worked in accordance with his directions; could you have beheld that even as machinery, intricate and complicated, yet all fitted together turns the great motor power of the world, you would have seen that there in that one sphere is a social state equivalent to moving the whole planet of man, stronger than the strongest armies of united Europe, or of the whole world; stronger than the strongest physical force of every masked battery, of every invention of torture that man has ever dreamed of—the one moral power of a single mind round whom other kindred minds are centred, for the purpose of breaking down upon earth physical power and social wrongs.

I did not find him alone great among these minds: I found there many great and risen ones—philanthropists, poets, those who have shed their light upon earth; and linked with them, even far away into the classical periods of time, I beheld other souls whom the world has worshipped as great. I need not say that I found that there were even more modern exponents of the associative effort of man upon earth, attempting to make in external life the semblance of spiritual fraternities. I need not say that in one of the more recent groups I found Robert Owen, the English philanthropist, and he who, perhaps more than any other man of this period, engrafted upon the English working-men's minds the necessity of associative effort.

I said: "In what consists the seeming failure on earth of associative bodies of men for fraternal purposes?" I remember the benign visage and hesitancy, as though he felt unequal to answering the question, when Mr. Owen said, "I am at a loss for any explanation other than that which met me in the face when I first attempted this experiment in my native land."

He said: "I mean the selfishness of humanity. I am at a loss for any other explanation than that the moment external matters of business are considered, human beings forget that they are brothers."

"But," I said, "there surely must be a deeper reason than this?" And with this there came out of the sphere in which Rousseau dwelt, one who seemed competent to answer the question. I did not know him, but some one said, "This is Fourier, the French socialist, the leader of a large class who in following or striving to know that which Plato grasped in his time, fell into the revolution of a period of thought that was not ripe for his plan upon earth."

He said: "I know the reason. It is that the external alone has been sought for in associative efforts. Men begin at the wrong beginning. They make property, education, external things, the basis of associative effort. The only fraternity is that of spiritual kinship. Let any class of beings associate together from the love of one idea, and while that idea binds them they are harmonious. Take the religious ideas and orders of the world: when pervaded by them, those who associate together are harmonious. It is only when external matters intervene that they cease to work together. Take all associative efforts based upon religion, and for zeal and bigotry men will do more than they will for their kind. Now," he said, "if we can only have a religion that embraces humanity, and teaches the worth of human life at the very foundation, we shall have associative efforts enough upon earth."

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