

TRIAL OF THE SPIRITS.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

QUINCY, MASSACHUSETTS, JUNE 25, 1854,

BY

WILLIAM P. LUNT,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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Quincy, June 26, 1854.

TO THE REV. W. P. LUNT, D. D.

Dear Sir, — The Subscribers, inhabitants of the town of Quincy, having heard with great satisfaction the Discourse delivered by you, last Sabbath forenoon, on the subject of Spiritual Manifestations, are desirous of a copy for the press, and respectfully solicit one for that purpose.

E. WOODWARD,
C. F. ADAMS,
LEMUEL BRACKETT,
I. W. MUNROE,
THOMAS J. NIGHTINGALE,
ADAM CURTIS,
SAMUEL CURTIS,
GEORGE CURTIS,
CHAS. E. MILLER,
W. F. WHITNEY,
NATHL. WHITE,
WILLIAM G. APPLETON.

DISCOURSE.

1 JOHN, IV. 1.

BELOVED, BELIEVE NOT EVERY SPIRIT, BUT TRY THE SPIRITS WHETHER THEY ARE OF GOD ; BECAUSE MANY FALSE PROPHETS ARE GONE OUT INTO THE WORLD.

It would seem from these words that even as early as in the time of the apostle who penned them, there were spirits — either unembodied, or the disembodied spirits of the dead speaking through human “mediums,” — who set themselves up as rivals against the apostles. These “mediums” claimed to be vested with authority from God. They boasted that they had received inspiration from the source of truth. They had the gift of second sight, and could penetrate the mysteries of the future. Puffed up with a vain conceit of their fancied knowledge, or else craftily reckoning that they had an equal right with others to the influence and profit of imposture, they ventured to criticise the accredited teachers of Christianity. They saw the evident and amazing revolution which these few Christian teachers, humble as they were in origin, were effect-

ing. They witnessed the gradual inroads which the fishermen of Galilee, — the followers of the Nazarene — were making in old ways of thought, in established usages, in the philosophy, the morals, and the worship of the times. And they would be likely in a spirit of vanity to reason with themselves, “Who are these Galileans, that they should turn the world and the world’s opinions upside down? They have no rank or social consideration. They sit not in Moses’ seat. They hold no Levitical offices. They can show no Rabbinical learning to inspire the respect of the ignorant. They are plain men like ourselves. We are their natural peers. What forbids that we should also be their spiritual peers? They rely upon the gifts of the spirit. Why cannot we share in those gifts, and so divide and appropriate to ourselves a portion of the influence which they are exerting? They are no more than seers. We are seers also. They profess to hold communication with the dead; why may we not do the same?”

Of so low a stamp were the views entertained by the pseudo-prophets of that early period. The chief error which they conceived, and this error vitiated all their subsequent conduct, lay in imagining that the influences of the spirit were gifts arbitrarily imparted, without respect to moral qualifications in those who received them, and without reference to the beneficent designs of the Giver,

which those selfish aspirants for distinction were wholly unable to comprehend. The idea had not entered into their minds that any moral preparation was needed for the reception of these wonderful powers which they saw the Christian apostles exercising. Like Simon the magician, an account of whom is preserved in the book of the Acts, they thought that "the gift of God" was a marketable property, transferable for a valuable consideration. Simon, as we read, "beholding the miracles and signs which were done, believed also, and wondered." In stating that he believed, the Record does not mean to imply that he appreciated and embraced the Christian doctrine, but only that he was greatly impressed by what he witnessed. He perceived and acknowledged that these men could do wonders far beyond his magical skill. He accordingly joined himself to them, that he might become a more accomplished expert than he was. That he had no higher motive or view than this is plain; because, when the apostles Peter and John were sent to Samaria to communicate to the new converts there the Holy Spirit, that is, to welcome them to the spiritual fellowship of the Christian church, which they did by laying their hands on the heads of the converts, and by affectionately praying for them, that they might prove faithful to their new relations and engagements as Christians, — Simon, seeing this act, thought he

had now detected the source of the power of the Christian leaders. "And when he saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money" for their secret, or rather for what his worldly, crafty mind regarded to be their secret. The apostle Peter replied to him with a severe but merited rebuke, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter." And why? observe the apostle's reason, which he gives in the significant words that follow: "for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

The reader cannot fail to notice the point which the apostle so distinctly and emphatically brings out in his rebuke to Simon the sorcerer. His heart was not right in the sight of God. He was inwardly corrupt. He was a compound of many vices; pride, avarice, hypocrisy. He had been a noted "medium," and had "bewitched the people of Samaria." He had pretended to hold intercourse with spirits, and by reason of his sorceries "all gave heed to him from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God." But now he feared that he should lose the profits hitherto accruing from his craft. There was a spiritual influence exerted by the Christian apostles greater than any thing he could command by his art. He saw and attended only to the outward

sign, the laying on of hands, which he regarded as one of the "mesmeric passes" by which the influence was communicated. He knew nothing, as Peter declared to him, of the moral qualifications, — the sincerity, faith, integrity, piety, truthfulness of heart and conscience, which were essential conditions of receiving the gift of God's spirit, and which would always be the test by which the reality of spiritual influence must be proved.

And the same test which the rebuke of Peter to Simon implies, is also signified in the language of John in the text: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." The chief point of the apostle's language is clear. It was not enough that a teacher pretended to intercourse with spirits. It was not enough that he could give very striking and confounding evidence of his knowledge of the secrets of Nature. He might prove himself to be a seer, a diviner, a necromancer. He might speak with tongues, and prophesy, and do wonders. But Christianity demanded something more and better. His heart must be right in the sight of God. He must publish, in connection with the marvels he performed, a rational and righteous doctrine, a doctrine worthy of God, and in accordance with the highest, purest, holiest sentiments of the human heart. If he came to his fellow men with a bad doctrine, a doctrine which degraded their

conceptions of God, sapped the foundations of morality, and brought into question the retributions of a future world, he might be as mighty a sorcerer as Simon, but he would deserve condemnation. "Try the spirits; believe not every spirit," merely because it is a spirit forsooth! "but try the spirits whether they are of God." And it is not unworthy of notice in this connection, that in the enumeration of the several spiritual gifts which were bestowed upon the primitive Christians, one was a power of "discerning of spirits;" which language implies evidently that there are various kinds of spirits, some good, some evil, some true, some false, some from above, some from below, and that it was a valuable and useful gift for the exercise of which there would be frequent occasions, to be able to discriminate one kind of spirits from another, and so to escape deception.

For it is plain, and as much is in fact implied in the language of the text, that, if we accept the belief in spirits with whom it is possible for human beings to hold communication, we must also, by parity of reason, admit that some of them are evil. There is no ground for concluding them all to be good and benignant. Some must be wicked, malignant, mischievous. And therefore if we undertake to conjure spirits, we cannot be sure that we do not call up those whose room is better than their presence.

Some persons seem to be ready to jump at once to the conclusion that, because they cannot understand certain phenomena, because they cannot explain, by any known principles of science, certain things that are witnessed by them, and which are really mysterious and amazing, therefore they must be wrought by the agency of *spirits*. I confess, my poor logic does not carry me so swiftly to such a conclusion, although I might come to it possibly, after travelling over some considerable space that intervenes between the premises and the inference. But granting that this theory of spirit-agency is alone sufficient to explain the extraordinary facts that may at any time be brought to our notice, what then? There is still something in the human mind to be more confided in than spirits, — even that reason which God has given to human beings to guide them in their search after truth. The text enjoins us to rely upon this inward guide, and, instead of crediting every spirit, to try the spirits whether they are of God.

Paul uses very strong language in one of his epistles. He says: “Though we or *an angel from heaven* (mark the words) preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be *accursed*.” These are pretty emphatic words. And it appears that the author of them did not affect to treat with any great respect a vendor of false doctrine, merely because he was a spirit, or was

dictated to by a spirit. It seems to be assumed by many at the present day, that because a communication is made by *spirits*, (granting the fact that it is so communicated,) it is, for that reason alone, without looking at the character of it, or scrutinizing it by the tests of reason and the highest consciousness of the soul, to be received and confided in. We are bound to no such deference. There is no obligation, when a spirit enters our presence, or dictates a message through a medium, making it proper for us to renounce our own judgment, and to accept whatever he may utter. On the contrary, unless he proves himself to be a well-principled spirit, and brings as part of his credentials a doctrine that harmonizes with our spirit's best conclusions, we ought to say, — Begone! You have not been bidden, and are not welcome. You belong to another place prepared for such as you. — Nay, this is a quite moderate and a very civil salutation compared with the language I have quoted from Paul: "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Let our minds, therefore, be rid of the vain notion that because a message is sent to us by a spirit (even granting the fact) nothing further is to be regarded, but we must receive it without demur. There is no good ground for such a notion. Of one spirit we have some real knowledge — the

intelligence that is in us. Before this bright-eyed reason, emanation from that Eternal Light, a measure of which is given to every man that cometh into the world, and which was given without measure to one who is our Guide, let all the phantoms that obtrude themselves upon the imagination, and weary the ear with their crazy oracles, slink away!

There is nothing new in modern spiritualism, although it advances large claims as a discovery now first made for the benefit of the world. It even dares to baptize itself a new Dispensation, that is destined to supersede Christianity. But there is really nothing new of this kind. If there is progress, as is pretended and claimed, it is "progress backwards." Old errors and follies are from time to time revived. Men return, after an interval, to former delusions. In every age the human mind, eager to solve the riddle of life, and to penetrate the secrets of fate, has yielded a too ready credence to those who have arrogated an acquaintance with the spiritual world. The pagans of antiquity had their oracles, their communications with the spirits of the dead, their sybils and impressible mediums, their omens and signs, their diviners and augurs. And it was hoped when the light of Christian truth shone upon the world, that all the old phantoms that had deluded men would flit away with the breaking dawn of a new day.

Among the Hebrews, also, there were soothsayers,

and those who had familiar spirits, and “wizards that peep and that mutter,” although the exercise of their arts was prohibited by law under severe penalties. A memorable instance of this weakness is furnished in the case of King Saul. It is recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, that on the eve of one of his battles he resorted to the woman of Endor, and sought through that ancient medium to put himself in communication with the spirit of Samuel, if thereby he might assure his failing heart concerning the fortune of the morrow. That the coward king knew in his conscience that he was doing wrong, that by taking this step he was degrading himself in his own eyes, as well as giving proof of irreverence toward, and lack of confidence in, the Divine Providence, is evident from the fact of his resorting to the familiar spirit by night.

Nor have there been wanting numerous modern instances of the same delusion. It deserves to be remarked, and ought to be carefully borne in mind, that the extravagances of witchcraft, which are deplored as such blots upon our history, are kindred to the pretensions of the spiritualism of our day. The one had as much ground in reason and fact to stand upon as the other has. For if it may be assumed that we can hold sensible intercourse with spirits, and can receive from them intelligence beyond the reach of our natural faculties, there is just as much

reason for believing that any who are mischievously inclined may enter into a compact with evil spirits, and avail themselves of their power and malicious subtlety to work harm to their fellow men. This was the prevalent belief when those persons were tried, condemned and punished, who were accused of witchcraft. And that the extravagances and crimes which were rife among our fathers are not repeated in our time, may be owing, in a greater degree than we are ready to suspect, to the materialism and the sceptical disposition that characterize the age in which we live. A large portion of our people are so entirely and culpably engrossed in the earthly aspects of life, — life is to so many only a mechanical routine, without the admission of any spiritual element, that a weight is here found more than sufficient to counterpoise any visionary tendency that may show itself in the public mind.

We have seen that there is nothing new in the modern necromancy. It only revives, under a change of form and words, what has always existed in the world. Moreover, it is the dictate of the highest consciousness of the human mind the world over, that we have no right to pry into the mysteries of the spiritual world. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children." These words from Hebrew Writ express a universal sentiment, which is responded to and repeated by the soundest minds of every period. What

heaven has concealed from the knowledge of mortals we ought to presume is wisely and mercifully hidden, and not seek to lift the veil. The dread secret will soon enough be disclosed to every individual. We may appeal, I repeat, to a perpetual sentiment of the human heart to prove that the attempt to reach what God has placed beyond the grasp of our natural faculties, by conjuring the spirits of the dead, by incantations, or by whatsoever arts, is a forbidden indulgence of curiosity. In obedience to this sentiment, laws have frequently been enacted against those who practise such arts. This was the case among the Hebrews. Saul, when he stole by night from the post of a true soldier, and betook himself clandestinely to a witch's cave, knew that he was violating one of the laws of the land, which he had imposed upon his subjects, and which he was solemnly bound to enforce. He was sinking himself, too, in his own esteem, which he would not have forfeited if he had trusted to his own man's heart and strong arm for good omens. But such omens were wanting, because his heart failed him and his arm had lost its vigor; and a guilty conscience could only suggest a substitute for these legitimate sources of courage.

The sentiment of aversion, which usually mingles with the fascination that draws mankind to those who practise superstitious arts, is confirmed by the fact that the adepts in such arts are chiefly the

decayed, the melancholic, the morbidly nervous, the ugly and neglected, those whose minds and bodies have been brought into an abnormal state either by disease or by undue excitements, those who by their misfortunes are unfit—or those who by their ill tempers have rendered themselves unfit—for the right use and enjoyment of the real world, those who

have eaten of the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner.

And it is by attributes borrowed from such that the character of the sorcerer or witch is drawn by the poets and painters of the race. It is true the Sybil is sometimes represented by the painter with comely visage and graceful form, every feature touched and brightened with blended beauty and inspiration. But this is to be regarded rather as a license of art. The great dramatic poet of England, who portrays every character, even the creatures of pure fancy, with truthful touch, has given the type of this species in the “weird sisters”

So wither'd and so wild in their attire ;
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on 't ;

(that) seem to understand (us)

By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips ;

to whom

Fair is foul, and foul is fair ;

who

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

The evidence for religion is addressed to faith and not to the senses. And the conviction of this fundamental truth, which is acknowledged by thinking persons in every age, has always caused a stigma to attach to those who have given out that they were able to draw from the stars above or from the dead in their graves the secrets of fate. They form ever a suspected class. Although many may be induced by curiosity, or credulity, or superstitious fear to consult them, they are little esteemed by any, and are shunned and loathed by the most.

And this brings us to the important inquiry, What relation does this subject of spiritual communications bear to religion, and in what light it is viewed by Christianity? Certainly religion treats of this class of subjects. In them the human mind has always felt a profound, enduring interest. And there must surely be some legitimate and edifying method of dealing with them. We may say in general that such subjects belong to the soul, and not to the senses. They are to be verified by doctrine, not by demonstration. The ever renewed curiosity felt by mankind to penetrate the mystery of the spiritual world, as well as their inclination to form some theory, through the imagination, if not by the help of reason, respecting their relations to that world, proves that there is a natural affinity between the mind and such subjects. In the pretensions of those

who from time to time assume to be wise above their fellows on such points, there is just enough of truth, or rather of verisimilitude, to invite and at the same time to mock credulity. But that the curiosity of the mind is not balked by the repeated impositions that have been practised upon it, is clear from the assurance with which, again and ever, the same programme of marvels is offered to the world, and from the pleasure which is derived from the stalest delusions. So persistent and ineradicable is this inclination in the human mind, that we are constrained to conclude that it was implanted in us by the Creator with the design to predispose all souls to seek for a safe gratification of the principle in a rational religious faith.

While therefore the human mind is always moved to crave some theory, to entertain some thoughts, and to feel a deep interest in regard to things invisible, supernatural, and spiritual, the great distinction between religion and superstition seems to be, that according to the former all our thoughts and convictions relating to such mysterious subjects must rest upon faith, and that we can obtain, and ought to seek, because we need — no more light and no higher assurance than faith can impart. In opposition to this rational and safe doctrine it is positively insisted by some, that it is possible and desirable to obtain ocular and audible evidence of spiritual truth.

And here we can easily trace the genius and method of the Christian religion. It exalts faith, appeals to it as an innate principle in the soul of man, relies upon it to verify the doctrines which are offered to men, and aims so to unfold the principle, and to give it such a wise training, by associating the soul's beliefs in the spiritual world with the actual interests and pursuits of the present world, that faith may have a practical value, and become the motive-power of a useful, virtuous, and rational life.

But while Christianity thus exalts the office and value of faith, and relies upon it so entirely in the theory which it publishes of a true human life, and in its idea of a perfect character, it also evinces its caution in the use which it makes of so powerful and dangerous a principle. Christ never aimed to mystify the minds of men by sublimated speculations upon matters too abstruse and too remote from us to allow of their being tested by reason and experience. On all such high questions there is a marked reserve in Christianity. The tendency which exists in most minds to go beyond their depth in religious inquiries, and to exhaust the strength of the soul's affections by straining after what is remote and obscure to the neglect of what is near at hand, receives a wholesome rebuke in the words of the apostle John: "He that loveth not his brother

whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen."

No system could be more distinct and unequivocal than Christianity in teaching a high spiritual doctrine. Nothing can be imagined more in contrast with materialism than the Christian religion. It ever keeps well defined the distinction between "the flesh and the spirit." The fact that it makes this distinction proves that one of its leading aims is to teach the existence in man's nature of a pure element, above the region of the senses and appetites which belong to the body, and that to this spiritual part of our nature belong the purest and holiest affections. That there is a spirit in man is a matter of faith; the consciousness of the mind is the only proof that can be appealed to on this point.

The Christian idea of God is that He is a spirit. God is not the universe of matter, as the Pantheist teaches, but an Infinite Spiritual Personality. This too is to be verified by faith. "No man hath seen God at any time."

Christianity teaches with emphatic distinctness that there is a Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father, influencing all minds, filling, enlightening, blessing all; that the soul's life is sustained by this breath of God like as the outward life of the body depends upon the air which fills the lungs.

The Christian idea of "the kingdom of God" is not of any visible hierarchy or outward establishment, of which a description may be given, but that it is within men, the reign in living souls of a living principle of truth and virtue.

The Christian representation of heaven is not made up from sensible images, leading its disciples to desire and expect a continuation of what eye hath seen, and ear heard, and appetite relished upon the earth; but it encourages the soul to aspire to a condition whose pleasures are beyond and above the conceptions of the religious imagination, and still farther removed from the pictures of a sensuous fancy.

Christianity teaches, and the highest consciousness of our moral nature responds to the doctrine, that man is not merely like any other material organized body, or as one of the inferior animals, subject to the laws of nature, or moved by blind instinct, and forced by irresistible attractions and repulsions to conform to those laws, or to follow those instincts; but that there is a conviction of spiritual responsibility which may be unfolded in every mind, and that this is the inward law which every human being ought consciously to accept and govern himself by.

Now in the particulars which have been named, as will be seen at once, are the elements of a high spiritual doctrine,—the highest and purest in fact that has ever been proposed to human beings. But

Christianity not only teaches such a high doctrine, but is always careful to give the doctrine a direct and practical bearing upon life. It does not seek, as the Master in his prayer did not ask, that its disciples should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept by the power of a holy principle from the evil that is in the world, and be enabled by that inward power to overcome that evil. It does not wish or attempt to draw men away from the earth, where the scene of probation, duty, struggle, and victory or defeat is laid, but to bring into this mixed earthly scene the idea of God, and the high visions of a spiritual state, and "the powers of the world to come," that by the aid of these the soul may be strengthened for its conflicts in time. While the belief so readily entertained, of spirits good and bad, above the grade of humanity and below it, is allowed to remain in the minds of men, Christianity recognizes the truth that there is a spirit in man, and that by this all the communications of superior or inferior spirits are to be judged. Its precept is, "Try the spirits whether they are of God." This authorizes the human mind to decide upon the claims of all spirits by the character of what they disclose.

It is clear, therefore, that Christianity does not rely solely upon the wonder raised by extra-natural or supernatural occurrences, but that it appeals to

the soul's moral judgments, its own consciousness of right and truth. These convictions of truth and right in the soul ought not to be overborne, and the mind should not be put beside itself, and robbed of its power of discernment by any marvels it may witness. The object of the Christian miracles was not to overawe and stupefy the reason, not to supersede the judgment and conscience, not to darken the inward vision through superstitious fears ; but rather and simply to supply the ground-work of a faith in the reality of a spiritual power above and distinct from the laws and mechanical arrangements of nature. This faith was rendered effective for practical purposes by being united with the active scrutinizing reason, and with the moral sentiments. If the miracles wrought by Christ were ever witnessed as any theatrical spectacle would be gazed at, their true and only purpose was lost sight of. They were amazing and impressive manifestations of Divine power exhibited with a view to break up the mind's slavish dependence upon the senses. They opened a door by which the believer might enter the spiritual world, and feel assured that above the sphere of the senses there is a boundless region of invisible realities. But we have been invited to enter that world of thought not with blind credulity, but with the open vision of reason. Though beyond the sphere of sense the mind is bound to maintain its

right to examine, judge and decide upon whatever should demand its belief. We are never called upon in the Bible to believe in marvels merely as marvels. Our Saviour always resisted the vulgar demand in his day for a "sign." Whenever he discovered that *faith* would not be promoted in any place by his miracles, the record informs us that "He did no more mighty works in that place." He did not seek to gratify a vain and selfish, or an idle and impertinent, or a morbid curiosity in regard to supernatural occurrences. He never catered for such a depraved appetite, but simply aimed to break up the habits of gross materialism into which men had fallen, and to convince them of their relations to an Invisible and Spiritual authority.

We have seen that in relation to whatever pertains to spirits and the spiritual world, Christianity holds out to men no delusive assurance that they are able to obtain the evidence of the senses. Of the existence of one spirit — the spirit that is in man — every human being has the evidence of consciousness. Of other spirits we have only the evidence of faith.

So in regard to a future life, the highest assurance which the soul can gain is not the certainty of knowledge or of sensible demonstration, but the confidence of a "hope full of immortality." The great boon is presented to the soul in Christianity

as a promise But in regard to that promised future life the Christian religion enters into no particulars. It gives no description of its scenes and employments, and does not attempt to fix its geography. It does not encourage, but rather rebukes all vain and presumptuous curiosity, and observes a marked reserve itself on such subjects. After awakening in the souls of its disciples the hope of a happiness in store for the good inconceivably great, and also the fear of a wo that awaits the sinner, beyond any experience of suffering which the present life furnishes, it draws the veil and bids us "wait the great teacher Death."

And finally, in regard to the affections, the Christian religion is equally guarded as in the direction it gives to the faith and hopes of its disciples. It is true that it says emphatically that love is the fulfilment of the whole law. But it guards the souls of men most carefully from excessive and morbid feeling. Piety has frequently so influenced its possessors as to abstract them not from the evils, but from the duties of the world. An indolent repose of the soul in the contemplation of God has frequently been substituted for an active virtue, that seeks occasions for serving God by conferring benefits on his children.

There is one aspect of the modern spiritualism

that entitles it to some favor, even with those who put no faith in its pretended marvels. Although to such persons it may appear to be only a delusion, it may have the effect to break up a bad habit of indifference and unbelief that possesses many minds, rendering them impenetrable to religious appeal. Upon minds of this class reason, argument, warning, entreaty — even the experience of real life, rough or smooth, bright or clouded — seem to be all lost. They are practical as well as theoretical infidels, believing in nothing spiritual in heaven above, or in hell beneath, or in themselves. In their vocabulary the words *spirit* and *spiritual* have no meaning. Now if such world-engrossed minds, such lumps, I should rather say, of soulless matter (for this is their undeveloped state) — who will credit nothing but what they see or fancy they see, and hear, and handle, who have been always flouting at the folly of religion, and railing against the fanaticism of the church, and whose mental digestion has been so weak, forsooth! that they have been unable to receive and change to nutriment the well-authenticated Christian miracles, but who now swallow, without a qualm, every extravagance which folly or knavery can administer; — if minds so unimpressible by ordinary methods can be made to feel and to acknowledge, that there is some truth after all in what clerk and book have so long been

repeating in their deaf ears, — that there is verily in life, and in human nature, and in the world more than they have dreamed of in their base, earthly philosophy, that there is a mystery in every subject of thought, — a mystery in themselves — in regard to their origin, their whereabouts, and their hereafter — which they cannot penetrate, but must yet ponder, — a mystery which demands and necessitates attention as much certainly as the wherewithal to feed and clothe the perishable body; — if, I say, such flesh-smothered minds can be brought to see and to confess that the first elements of religion — the existence of a spiritual world, and the relations which all human beings hold to that unseen world, and to disembodied or superhuman spirits — are not figments of a crazed fancy, but awful realities upon which momentous issues depend, — why then some actual, appreciable good is likely to be effected.

In the adjustment of forces, both in the physical and in the moral world, one kind of evil seems often left by Providence to be combatted, if not remedied, by an opposite evil. Excess in any direction creates an excessive tendency to the opposite point, and so the equipoise is effected. In the natural world, when the air in any quarter becomes rarefied and a vacuum is produced, another portion of the vast invisible ocean about us is set in motion, and rushes, with the violence and destructiveness of

the whirlwind, to fill up the empty spaces and to restore the equilibrium. So in the moral world, when the soul is void of faith, the gusty tempest of fanaticism and enthusiasm rushes through every obstacle that reason can interpose to restore the spiritual equilibrium. A bad spirit, taking to himself seven other spirits worse than himself, will gain forcible possession of the place which is "empty, swept and garnished." The mind becomes suddenly overcharged and agitated with that of which there had previously been a lack. And so between the opposite extremes — of materialism and unbelief on the one side, and excess and delusion on the other, the human mind is constantly swinging, to gain the safe mean between too much and too little, and to insure a healthy condition of thought.

It might be useful, if the limits of a discourse did not preclude so extended a discussion, to set forth and examine, with some particularity, the leading doctrines, theological and moral, which are connected with the modern marvels. It is a singular and noteworthy fact, that here is a system making the largest professions of pure spiritualism, and at the same time venting doctrines that bear the grossest form of materialism. Let it suffice to remark, that in regard to the three cardinal articles of all practical religion, the nature and character of God, the moral constitution of man, and the

destiny of the human soul, sentiments are openly taught of which many sensible and right-minded persons among those who have been impressed by the alleged miracles which they have witnessed, are not probably aware.

In regard to God, the teachers of the new school inculcate a gross Pantheism. Their language is, that "spirit is identical with matter;" that the universe is God, and God is the universe; that God exists as a principle; that "the material universe is the physical body of God;" that "the Eternal Mind does not any more control the harmonious performance of the legitimate functions of the countless organs of his body, than does man control the circulation of blood;" that "He did not create the laws and processes of nature,—hence he cannot suspend, alter, or control them." These are some of the notions broached by the doctors of the new philosophy concerning God.

With regard to the nature of man, it is taught that such a thing as *freewill* is inconceivable; that there can be no such thing as *sin*; that "man is a part of nature" in the same sense as the horse or the tree is a part of nature; that "moral death is a manufactured expression, meaning nothing;" that "spiritual death is only another form of the same expression, and that it never had and never can have the least particle of signification."

And lastly, in regard to the destiny of man — the teaching of the new philosophy is, that retributive justice is a fiction; that the idea of God being angry with the wicked, if there be such a class as *the wicked*, or punishing guilt, if the notion of guilt be admissible in such a system, is an unworthy and irrational idea; that every man develops his nature according to the circumstances in which he is placed in this world, and will be happy hereafter according to his own standard of happiness.

Such are some of the doctrines of the “New Dispensation,” as it is arrogantly styled, which is destined, according to the boast of its advocates, to introduce a new era in the moral history of man.

Now let us recur once more to the precept of the Apostle in the text: “Believe not every spirit; but try the spirits whether they are of God.” If an angel from heaven were to teach such doctrines as those which have been adverted to, and if he were to do all the marvels which the spiritualists of our day allege are done — in proof of the doctrines, I would not say, “Let him be accursed.” Those are Paul’s words, and they are too emphatic to be used by every one. But this any one might feel authorized to say, — that notwithstanding the wonders wrought, or supposed to be wrought, there is a *spirit* within us, — even the reason which God has inspired, and which we are bound to reverence, — that rises with indignation

against such a false-tongued messenger. And therefore, in conclusion, I cordially adopt the language of a vigorous Christian writer* of our day in reference to these and kindred errors.

“Let those for whom it is the highest conception, fancy to themselves a heaven which shall be as this world beatified, where the senses, the tastes, and the social affections shall find their fullest and most perfect enjoyment; for ourselves, let us be content if we may be found worthy to attain to that world where they “neither marry nor are given in marriage;” where the physiological and sensuous give place to higher relations. Let those who need and dare invite the presence and influence of familiar spirits, and take counsel of the souls of the dead; for us, it shall suffice if God take not *His* Holy Spirit from us. Let those to whose character he is correlative, or to whose wishes he corresponds, fancy to themselves, or find in Nature, a God, who in his moral attributes is far below the demands even of the half-unfolded

* A publication has recently issued from the press with the following quaint title. “The Apocatastasis; or Progress backwards. A new ‘Tract for the Times.’ By the Author.” The book is full of clear thought, pertinent learning, keen satire, and sound Christian sentiment. Whoever the author may be, he has done a good service to the community, by exposing the unblushing attempt made in our age to revive the follies and grossnesses of Heathenism under the name of “Spiritualism” — a word so full of deep and holy meaning to the Christian thinker.

religious consciousness of mankind — as if the stream should rise high above its source — a God, who “*nec bene promeritis capitur, neque tangitur ira,*” who cares not for our virtues, and takes no offence at our vices; we will still adhere to Him who is The Holy One, whose definition is also, indeed, *The Good*, but in whose goodness, along with a Divine Compassion unknown to those who have mistaken for it the moral imbecility of their Epicurean Deity, there is inherent and constitutive, transcendent Justice, which, in its relation to *Sin* is, and can only be “a consuming fire.” Let those to whom it is appropriate pay their Nature-worship to the Great Productive Principle; their aweless and irreverent homage to the unconscious Immutable Laws; and melt in sentimental emotion at *visible* beauty, or in poetic gratitude to beneficent Nature; as for us, still unto the King Eternal, (Invisible, the transcendently personal “I AM,” *we* will not cease to offer, through Christ Jesus, our love and our fear, become one in Adoration.