
UNCERTAINTY OF
SPIRITUAL INTERCOURSE.

BY J. W. EDMONDS.

INTERESTING CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN HON. J. W. EDMONDS AND A DISTINGUISHED LEGAL GENTLEMAN.

— — — September, 22, 1856.

To JUDGE EDMONDS :

Sir—You will, I doubt not, pardon the liberty of this letter from a stranger. I have your book on Spiritualism, which has impressed me very strongly. I am, however, no Spiritualist, but a candid investigator of these marvelous developments. Without being convinced that they are the manifestations of Spirits, I am persuaded that there is something wonderful and true in all these exhibitions, and that whatever it be, it is well worthy of—nay, it demands—the calm and profound attention and examination of the philosopher, and of all those who are, or profess to be, the votaries of science and knowledge. I can not resist the conviction that some grand result and discoveries will grow out of these mysterious, wonderful and much contemned manifestations. I have said that I am not a Spiritualist; I repeat it, but at the same time if I had your personal experience on the subject, I could not resist your conclusions, unless I, at the same time, doubted the sanity of my mental faculties.

But these things are so strange and so contrary to all my pre-conceptions, that nothing short of the evidence of my own senses could possibly carry conviction home to my understanding. Whilst, therefore, the experience of others may be sufficient to put me upon the inquiry, I must see and observe for myself before I surrender my convictions to such extraordinary, and to appearance, preternatural occurrences.

I have been, all my life, in the habit of sifting evidence and weighing it in search of the truth, and I have always found the

truth hard to get at. In this world the naked truth is scarcely ever known; and the most unsatisfactory revealing of spiritual intercourse is that *the truth*, the real truth, is uncertain and unknown in the spheres. But I did not mean to pursue this idea, but to say that in my forensic researches after truth, nothing has been found more embarrassing or more calculated to produce unbelief than discrepancies among the witnesses. In all the statements that I have seen as coming from the Spirits, this objection stands out in bold relief. Though there be a general concurrence in some things, in many others, and those of great moment, there is irreconcilable discord. And some of the latter are not abstruse and metaphysical, like those questions that embarrass the doctrine of fallen angels, providence, fore-knowledge, fixed fate, free will, etc.; but of which any intelligent mind in the flesh or disembodied, would be competent to testify even if not understood; for instance, whether the Scriptures are a revelation from God! On this subject there seems to be as many shades of opinion in the spheres (to use one of the phrases) as on earth. Then, again, upon mere questions of physical science, as for example, the locality of Heaven or the spheres. While your informants give the locality at inconceivable distances, Dr. Hare's place the spheres on sublunar concentric globes. How are these discrepancies to be reconciled? Both can not be true, and seemingly we have the same authority for each side of the question. I can not expect a reply, as your time is so much occupied. If you find leisure, a brief notice of this will be acceptable. If you should do so, you will direct to * * Or if you could find leisure to write an article for the SPIRITUAL TELEGRAPH (of which I am a reader), it will reach my eye and that of many others, probably, who have the same difficulties.

Yours, very respectfully,

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REPLY OF JUDGE EDMONDS.

NEW YORK, September 27, 1856.

Dear Sir—I have but one thing to complain of in your letter—that of your speaking of our being strangers to each other. I have not forgotten our former correspondence, and am quite familiar with your handwriting, as I am with your character and the condition of your mind on the subject of spiritual intercourse.

It is quite a coincidence that in my lectures in Philadelphia last Sunday, and in this city on the previous Sunday, I should have dwelt on the very topic to which you refer. I did so dwell, because it was after long investigation that I had arrived at the solution of a difficulty which often embarrassed me also.

Led by the education and religious teaching which we have, both in youth and manhood—from the pulpit as well as in school—we are apt to attach to the idea of Spirit existence, that of great if not omniscient knowledge; and if we imbibe the belief that Spirits speak to us, we naturally expect from them the display of knowledge far superior to ours. This is a great error; for we pass into the Spirit world just as we are here, in respect to knowledge, and have no more there than we had here until we learn it. When, therefore, a Spirit speaks to us, it is not with omniscience, but with such knowledge only as he has been able to acquire. There is, therefore, infinite variety in this respect among Spirits, depending upon education while on earth, opportunities for learning in the Spirit world, intellectual capacity, and many other things, which there, as well as here, affect the training of the mind.

So far as Spirits speak of their existence or mode of life there, each must naturally speak only of what he has observed, unless perchance he has been taught more by others who have beheld what he has not. At all events most of the incongruous teachings referred to, are in reference to what the Spirits have beheld.

Now, there as here, no two behold precisely the same thing. Each views the scene around each, and there must, therefore, of necessity be the same discrepancies which we behold here, when we are taking human testimony respecting human events, or even inanimate scenery. Each beholds from a different stand-point from the other, and there must therefore be different accounts.

So, too, there is great difference in the power of observation and of the faculty of expression. We behold around us here men who can see nothing clearly—others, again, who see clearly, but have a bungling and obscure mode of expressing themselves. These peculiarities accompany the Spirit into his Spirit-life, and must mark his intercourse with us until he shall have so far advanced as to have eradicated those defects. But until he shall so advance, it will be in vain to expect from him communications marked by a clearness of perception and expression which we are so fain to suppose ought to characterize all spiritual intercourse.

The very fact of its absence tends to show us the great truth, what is the change which death works in us, namely, that though we leave our physical nature behind, intellectually and morally we are the same, and Spirit-life is but a continuation of mortal life; that the real or inner man is the same, with all his improvements and perversions, just as they were when he laid aside his outer garment, but with the advantage of greater means of obtaining knowledge, and less obstacles to its acquisition.

Then there is another difficulty for which the Spirit-world is not responsible, and that is, that the mind of the medium does and must more or less, affect the communications.

Suppose you here on earth desire to avail yourself of the mediumship of any person to convey your thoughts to a third person, e. g., sending a clerk or a servant with a message: unless your agent writes down the message from your lips, or commits your words to memory, it is inevitable that the messages which he delivers shall bear marks of his mental characteristics. He will convey the idea as he understands it, and not otherwise and he will stamp on it also his peculiarities of language. If he is an Irishman, he will give birth in the brogue

to a message conceived in pure English, or if a foreigner he will give it in broken English, or perchance translate it into his own language and subject it to all the hazards of an art which requires much practice to perform well—I mean the art of translating from one language to another.

Occasionally there are instances where it would seem as if the medium were giving the precise words of the Spirit. But this is rare, because it involves a state of things in the medium, both physically and mentally, that is very difficult to attain, namely, an exclusion of the medium's selfhood—a suspension of his own will and spirit control, that is very unnatural, very difficult and very dangerous, and therefore necessarily very rare.

The most favored instances of this character which I have witnessed, are those where the medium speaks a language unknown to him, and he all the time, though conscious he is speaking, is unconscious what idea he is conveying. It is to the medium as if he were uttering an unmeaning gibberish. Yet even there, it is *his* organs of language which are used ; and as those organs can not be used without a mental effort, it is difficult for me to conceive how even in such case the communication can be exempt from the taint of the medium, though I confess it is difficult, if not impossible, to discover its presence.

But the generality of communications—far the greatest amount of them, and those which are most valuable—are given in such a mode that they are liable to be affected by the mind of the medium, because they are given through the use, in some measure, of the medium's mental powers. Even the physical manifestations of the rapping and table tipping, are not exempt from this remark.

To you who have been engaged for years on the Chancery bench, in seeking the truth through the mazes of human testimony, I need not dilate on the difficulties and dangers arising from this cause. A positive intention to fabricate testimony has caused you less embarrassment often, than the perversion of the truth which arises from the misconceptions of a strictly honest witness, or his incapacity to embrace the truth when presented to his view. I have often felt that embarrassment in my judicial

labors, and sometimes the additional one arising from a conjunction of moral and mental incapacity, in the same witness.

And what are mediums but witnesses bearing their testimony to the Gospel of Truth, or interpreters to such witnesses, and to be tried and tested by all the rules which wisdom and long experience have declared necessary to the proper reception of human testimony? Their mediumship is the result chiefly of physical organization, and does not, *ex mero motu*, work any mental and moral change to exempt them from those rules.

There are other considerations affecting the Spirit that is communing with us, which must not be overlooked. By what light does the Spirit see? In what manner and by what organs does he hear? And how does he convey his thoughts to or through the medium?

He does not see by the physical light which we use, neither by the light of our sun, nor our lamps or our fires. (This is true as a general thing, though I am not prepared to say that there may not be exceptions in the case of those who yet retain much material grossness.) Each, as I understand it, engenders his own light, which is greater or less according to his condition morally and intellectually, and they are frequently aided by each other's light. But how much this enables them to behold of the mortal or spirit-life which surrounds them, it is difficult to say. This, however, I have discovered, that there are things immediately around and before them, in both states of existence, which they do not behold, and of whose presence they are entirely unconscious. For instance: Bacon, who has been nearly three hundred years in the Spirit-world, with all his intellectual powers and culture, has been, while communing with me, ignorant that another Spirit was at the same instant doing so, and ignorant even that that other Spirit was present. One of my brother Judges, shortly after his death, came to me, and in his communion with me was ignorant of the presence of another Spirit who stood by his side, and who was as visible to me as he was. And without entering too much into detail, I remark that I have had very many evidences of this.

Then, as to hearing; they evidently do not hear as we do. I

have known them frequently to be ignorant of sounds audible to us, and occurring in their presence. Thus, I have known a Spirit who was communing, to be unconscious of a severe clap of thunder until he discovered the effect in our minds, and I have often observed that they "hear" my thought as well when I do not utter it aloud as when I do.

Then, again, how do they convey their thought to us—I mean how convey it to the medium through whom we get it! It is not by the sound of a voice audible to the medium; it is not by a picture visible to his sight; but it is in a manner which it is difficult to understand, and still more difficult to describe. The Quakers have an expression which is pretty accurate as to some instances. "It is bornein on the mind." Yet it is not always so; for I have often myself beheld a Spirit and held conversation with him without the utterance of a sound, yet have "perceived" with facility and accuracy the idea he meant to convey.

I have command of no language which will enable me to describe this any more accurately. I have said enough, perhaps, to show you how liable the intercourse must be to error, and how much the accuracy of it must depend on the intellectual training and habit of the mortal vehicle through whose instrumentality the Spirit-thought is frequently conveyed.

Now, putting all these things together, do you wonder that there are inaccuracies in spiritual intercourse? So long as the instruments used both in the Spirit existence and in the mortal life are imperfect, the intercourse must be imperfect. What would we do with a perfect revelation? We would either crucify it like the Jew, or reject it like the Greek, as foolishness.

Revelation from on high must come to us through man. It comes to us from those who have not yet attained perfection, through mediums who are not yet perfect even as such, and comes to men who are far short of perfection. It must then be commensurate with the minds through which it comes, and adapted to the capacity of those to whom it is addressed. Can you force the falls of Niagara through a goose-quill? And of what avail would it be to reason with the savage on the Rocky

Mountains, of a problem in conic sections, or the fourty-seventh proposition of Euclid ?

To me there is evidence of marvelous wisdom in the adaptation of the revelations of to-day to the present mental capacity of mankind.

Man has advanced much in capacity and knowledge in two thousand years, and the revelations now coming to us are far beyond those of that day, in magnitude and interest. Yet many of those already given the world do not receive, and many have been given of which as yet the world is ignorant, and which they would at once reject like him who persisted in denying the revolution of the earth, because, as he said, "We would all fall off."

In the mean time, it comes in such a manner as not to destroy or impair our own individuality, and not to interfere with the cardinal rule, that each must work out his own salvation.

We must therefore take the evidence as it is given to us, and out of its incongruities we must for ourselves sift the truth as you and I have been doing, when exercising the divine attribute of administering justice among men. We must for ourselves follow the truth through all its devious windings to its most concealed recesses, remembering that it is our condition which throws obstacles in the way of its straight and onward path.

So, too, we must judge for ourselves. It is our reason which is the image of the Divinity within us, and we must exercise it. A perfect revelation would come to us "with authority," and we should be required to render obedience and not judgment.

That is the evil which has so long haunted humanity ; that is the error against which the revelations of to-day are anxiously seeking to guard us. How could this task be so well performed as by the very incongruities to which you allude ? We are compelled from sheer necessity to reason for ourselves, and are driven to resist the temptation of letting others think for us.

You are as well aware as I am, that our trouble begins when we begin to think for ourselves, and that the temptation is almost irresistible to fly for refuge from our anxiety, to something which shall speak "by authority."