

SPIRITUAL TRACTS, No. 1.

AN

APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC

ON

S P I R I T U A L I S M .

BY JUDGE EDMONDS.

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JUDGE EDMONDS ON SPIRITUALISM.

TO THE PUBLIC :

On my recent return from an excursion into the country, I found that during my absence a decision lately pronounced by me, had been seized upon as an occasion for an attack, in several quarters, on my religious belief. I was fully aware that that judgment, running counter as it would to popular sentiment, would subject my action to severe criticism, but I confess I did not anticipate that thence would flow an assault on my religious opinions. Were I a private citizen, I should content myself with merely claiming the right which belongs to every one in this country, of entertaining such faith on this—the most important of all topics—as my conscience might dictate. And as it is, I might perhaps rest satisfied with challenging those who assail me to point out a single article in my creed that aims at aught else than exalted private worth and public virtue. But as the position which I occupy renders the soundness as well as the integrity of my judgment a matter of public interest, I am bound to acknowledge the right of others to question my faith, and my own obligation to defend it.

I acknowledge a still further obligation. And inasmuch as I accepted my present position under the implied understanding, at least, that I believed in the Christian religion, and would administer our civil law according to the principles of the Divine law as it had been revealed to us, on which all our institutions were based, so I am bound to certify to those who have intrusted me with the Divine attribute of administering justice among men, that my reverence for that revelation has not been shaken, nor my obedience to that moral law impaired.

I have not, however, waited for these assaults, to be impressed with these obligations, but have already so far felt them, that I have prepared to publish a volume on the subject, which, but for my other avocations, would ere this have been in the printer's hands. To that I must refer for much in elucidation and proof of my belief, which the limits of this article will not now allow me to dwell upon, and content myself on this occasion with such general statements as may tend to give a correct idea of what it is that I believe or have done. Even this would not have been necessary, if those who assailed me had but done me the justice themselves to have published anything I have said or written on the subject. But hitherto I have been able to reach the public only through publications of very limited circulation; and the wildest and most erroneous notions have therefore been imbibed as to my belief, and the mischief has been increased by the recklessness with which erroneous statements have been fabricated by those who could not know them to be true, but who could easily have ascertained them to be false.

Thus one writer,* with a want of feeling not perhaps surprising, speaks of my consulting my dead wife in making up my decisions. Another says, that it is "rumored" that I have consulted Spirit Manifestations in regard to my decisions. Another, that my belief is "at irreconcilable variance with all divine revelation, and is fit for no other system than devil-worship;" and still another, that "it constitutes an abandonment of all self-control, and a surrender of the supremacy of reason, as informed and enlightened by the senses, to the most nonsensical jugglery."

All these statements are as wide as they can be of truth, and I might with some justice complain at being subjected to such grievous imputations, merely because I had made a decision which was unacceptable to a portion of the community. But it is not for the purpose of complaining that I sit down to write. I am aware that it is not so much me as it is the faith which I profess, which is the object of attack. It is "the mighty theme, and not the inconsiderable advocate," which offends. I am also aware why it is that so much error exists in the public mind on

* *Daily Chronicle*, of New London.

that subject, and my whole purpose is, so far as I am concerned, to correct that error—to state truly, as far as I can in this connection, what it is that I do believe, and generally the grounds on which my belief is founded—that all who take interest enough in the matter to read what I may say, may have the means of judging for themselves as to what I really do believe, rather than what others erroneously impute to me as a belief.

I am sincerely grateful to my assailants for not imputing to me any unworthy or selfish motives, for conceding that as a private citizen I “stand exempt from public criticism,” and that I am “not a fool,” and for confining themselves to the mere imputation that I am laboring under a delusion. It is, therefore, to that point I shall confine myself in what I have now to say.

It was in January, 1851, that my attention was first called to the subject of “Spiritual Intercourse.” I was at the time withdrawn from general society; I was laboring under great depression of spirits. I was occupying all my leisure in reading on the subject of death, and man’s existence afterward. I had in the course of my life read and heard from the pulpit so many contradictory and conflicting doctrines on the subject, that I hardly knew what to believe. I could not, if I would, believe what I did not understand, and was anxiously seeking to know, if after death we should again meet with those whom we had loved here, and under what circumstances. I was invited by a friend to witness the “Rochester Knockings.” I complied, more to oblige her and to while away a tedious hour. I thought a good deal on what I witnessed, and I determined to investigate the matter and find out what it was. If it was a deception, or a delusion, I thought I could detect it. For about four months, I devoted at least two evenings in a week, and sometimes more, to witnessing the phenomenon in all its phases. I kept careful records of all I witnessed, and from time to time compared them with each other, to detect inconsistencies and contradictions. I read all I could lay my hands on, on the subject, and especially all the professed “exposures of the humbug.” I went from place to place, seeing different mediums, meeting with different parties of persons, often with persons

whom I had never seen before, and sometimes where I was myself entirely unknown—sometimes in the dark and sometimes in the light—often with inveterate unbelievers, and more frequently with zealous believers. In fine, I availed myself of every opportunity that was afforded, thoroughly to sift the matter to the bottom. I was all this time an unbeliever, and tried the patience of believers sorely by my skepticism, my captiousness, and my obdurate refusal to yield my belief. I saw around me some who yielded a ready faith on one or two sittings only; others again, under the same circumstances, avowing a determined unbelief; and some who refused to witness it at all, and yet were confirmed unbelievers. I could not imitate either of these parties, and refused to yield unless upon most irrefragable testimony. At length the evidence came, and in such force that no sane man could withhold his faith.

Thus far the question I was investigating was, whether what I saw was produced by mere mortal means, or by some invisible, unknown agency; in other words, whether it was a deception, an imposition, or what it professed to be, the product of some unknown, unseen cause. To detail what I witnessed would far exceed the limits of this communication, for my records of it for those four months alone, fill at least one hundred and thirty closely-written pages. I will, however, mention a few things, which will give a general idea of that which characterized interviews, now numbering several hundred. Most of them have occurred in the presence of others besides myself. I have preserved their names in my records, but do not give them to the world, because I do not desire to subject them to the obloquy which seems, most strangely, to be visited upon all who look into the matter with any other feeling than a resolute and obstinate incredulity, whatever the evidence. But these considerations grow out of this fact: 1st, That I have thus very many witnesses whom I can invoke to establish the truth of my statements; and, 2d, That if I have been deluded, and have not seen and heard what I think I have, my delusion has been shared by many as shrewd, as intelligent, as honest, and as enlightened people as are to be found anywhere among us.

My attention was first drawn to the intercourse by the rappings, then the most common, but now the most inconsiderable, mode of communing. Of course I was on the look out for deception, and at first relied upon my senses and the conclusions which my reason might draw from their evidence. But I was at a loss to tell how the mediums could cause what I witnessed under these circumstances: the mediums walking the length of a suite of parlors, forty or fifty feet, and the rappings being distinctly heard five or six feet behind them, the whole distance, backward and forward several times; being heard near the top of a mahogany door, above where the medium could reach, and as if struck hard with a fist; being heard on the bottom of a car when traveling, on a railroad, and on the floor and the table, when seated at lunch, at an eating-house by the side of the road; being heard at different parts of the room, sometimes several feet distant from the medium, and where she could not reach—sometimes on the table and immediately after on the floor, and then at different parts of the table, in rapid succession, enabling us to feel the vibration as well as hear the sounds; sometimes when the hands and feet of the medium were both firmly and carefully held by some one of the party, and sometimes on a table when no one touched it.

After depending upon my senses, as to these various phases of the phenomenon, I invoked the aid of science, and with the assistance of an accomplished electrician and his machinery, and of eight or ten intelligent, educated, shrewd persons, examined the matter. We pursued our inquiries many days, and established to our satisfaction two things: first, that the sounds were not produced by the agency of any person present or near us; and, second, that they were not forthcoming at our will and pleasure.

In the mean time, another feature attracted my attention, and that was "physical manifestations," as they are termed. Thus, I have known a pine table with four legs, lifted bodily up from the floor, in the center of a circle of six or eight persons, turned upside down and laid upon its top at our feet, then lifted up over our heads, and put leaning against the back of the sofa on which we sat. I have known that same table to be tilted up on

two legs, its top at an angle with the floor of forty-five degrees, when it neither fell over of itself, nor could any person present put it back on its four legs. I have seen a mahogany table, having only a center leg, and with a lamp burning upon it, lifted from the floor at least a foot, in spite of the efforts of those present, and shaken backward and forward as one would shake a goblet in his hand, and the lamp retain its place, though its glass pendants rang again. I have seen the same table tipped up with the lamp upon it, so far that the lamp must have fallen off unless retained there by something else than its own gravity, yet it fell not, moved not. I have known a dinner-bell taken from a high shelf in a closet, rung over the heads of four or five persons in that closet, then rung around the room over the heads of twelve or fifteen persons in the back parlor, and then borne through the folding doors to the farther end of the front parlor, and there dropped on the floor. I have frequently known persons pulled about with a force which it was impossible for them to resist, and once, when all my own strength was added in vain to that of the one thus affected. I have known a mahogany chair thrown on its side and moved swiftly back and forth on the floor, no one touching it, through a room where there were at least a dozen people sitting, yet no one was touched, and it was repeatedly stopped within a few inches of me, when it was coming with a violence which, if not arrested, must have broken my legs.

This is not a tithe—nay ! not a hundredth part of what I have witnessed of the same character, but it is enough to show the general nature of what was before me.

At the same time, I have heard from others, whose testimony would be credited in any human transaction, and which I could not permit myself to disregard, accounts of still more extraordinary transactions, for I have been by no means as much favored in this respect as some.

While these things were going on, there appeared in the newspapers various explanations and "exposures of the humbug," as they were termed. I read them with care, in the expectation of being assisted in my researches, and I could not but smile at

once at the rashness and the futility of the explanations. For instance, while certain learned professors in Buffalo were congratulating themselves on having detected it in the toe and knee joints, the manifestations in this city, changed to ringing a bell placed under the table. They were like the solution lately given by a learned professor in England, who attributes the tipping of tables to a force in the hands which are laid upon it, overlooking the material fact that tables quite as frequently move when there is no hand upon them.

What I have thus mentioned has happened in the presence of others as well as myself. I have not alluded to any of the things that have occurred to me when I have been alone, for as that would depend upon my testimony only, I have preferred not to subject my veracity to the rash and reckless contradictions of those who venture to denounce as an "atrocious imposture" that of which they are profoundly ignorant, and which has been examined and is believed in by thousands and tens of thousands of their fellow-citizens, who are, to say the least, every whit as honest and as intelligent as they are. Nor am I very anxious to submit my faith to the judgment of those who would have persecuted Galileo nigh unto death for discovering our planetary system, and have united in the cry of "folly" at Fulton's steamboat, "humbug" at Morse's telegraph, and "insanity" at Gray's iron road.

Having thus, by a long series of patient inquiries, satisfied myself on this point, my next inquiry was, Whence comes the intelligence there is behind it all? For that intelligence was a remarkable feature of the phenomenon.

Thus I have frequently known mental questions answered that is, questions merely framed in the mind of the interrogator, and not revealed by him or known to others. Preparatory to meeting a circle, I have sat down alone in my room and carefully prepared a series of questions to be propounded, and I have been surprised to find my questions answered, and in the precise order in which I wrote them, without my even taking my memorandum out of my pocket, and when I knew that not a person present even knew that I had prepared questions, much less

what they were. My most secret thoughts, those which I have never uttered to mortal man or woman, have been freely spoken to, as if I had uttered them. Purposes which I have privily entertained have been publicly revealed ; and I have once and again been admonished that my every thought was known to, and could be disclosed by, the intelligence which was thus manifesting itself.

I have heard the mediums use Greek, Latin, Spanish, and French words, when I knew they had no knowledge of any language but their own ; and it is a fact that can be attested by many, that often there has been speaking and writing in foreign languages and unknown tongues by those who were unacquainted with either.

Still the question occurred, May not all this have been, by some mysterious operation, the mere reflex of the mind of some one present ? The answer was, that facts were communicated which were unknown then, but afterward found to be true ; like this, for instance : When I was absent last winter in Central America, my friends in town heard of my whereabouts and of the state of my health, seven times ; and on my return, by comparing their information with the entries in my journal, it was found to be invariably correct. So in my recent visit to the West, my whereabouts and my condition were told to a medium in this city while I was traveling on the railroad between Cleveland and Toledo. So thoughts have been uttered on subjects not then in my mind, and utterly at variance with my own notions. This has often happened to me and to others, so as fully to establish the fact that it was not our minds that gave forth or affected the communication.

Kindred to this are two well authenticated cases of persons who can read the thoughts of others in their minds. One is an artist of this city of high reputation, and the other the editor of a newspaper in a neighboring city. The latter wrote me, that in company with three friends he had tried the experiment, and for over forty successive attempts found he could read the secret thoughts of his companions as soon as they were formed, and without their being uttered. So, too, there is the instance of

two persons, one of them also resident in this city, who can give a faithful delineation of the character, and even the prevailing mood of mind, of any person, however unknown to them, upon whom they fix their attention.

These are not apocryphal cases. The parties are at hand, and in our very midst, and any person that pleases may make the investigation, as I have, and satisfy himself.

But all this, and much, very much more of a cognate nature, went to show me that there was a high order of intelligence involved in this new phenomenon—an intelligence outside of, and beyond, mere mortal agency ; for there was no other hypothesis which I could devise or hear of that could at all explain that, whose reality is established by the testimony of tens of thousands, and can easily be ascertained by any one who will take the trouble to inquire.

If these two points were established—and there are now in these United States hundreds of thousands of sentient beings who have investigated and believe they are—then came this important question, *Cui bono* ? To what end is it all ? For what purpose ? With what object ?

To that inquiry I have directed my earnest attention, devoting to the task for over two years all the leisure I could command, and increasing that leisure as far as I could by withdrawing myself from all my former recreations. I have gone from circle to circle, from medium to medium, seeking knowledge on the subject wherever I could attain it, either from books or from observation, and bringing to bear upon it whatever of intelligence I have been gifted with by nature, sharpened and improved by over thirty years' practice at the bar, in the legislature, and on the bench.

I found there were very many ways in which this unseen intelligence communed with us, besides the rappings and table tipplings, and that through those other modes there came very many communications distinguished for their eloquence, their high order of intellect, and their pure and lofty moral tone ; at the same time I discovered many inconsistencies and contradictions that were calculated to mislead. I saw many puerile and some very

absurd statements, and many that were admirably calculated to make man better and happier; and I set to work to see if I could not, out of this chaos, gather something that might be valuable.

I was satisfied that something more was intended than the gratification of an idle curiosity; something more than pandering to a diseased appetite for the marvelous; something more than the promulgation of oracular platitudes; something more than upsetting material objects to the admiration of the wonder lover; something more than telling the age of the living or the dead, etc.

For that something I have industriously searched. I thought that was wiser than to condemn without investigation, and denounce without knowledge. What I have discovered in that regard I have intended to give to the world, that all may judge for themselves whether there is anything in it worthy the attention of intelligent beings. It would have been done ere this if my leisure would have allowed me time to prepare my manuscript for the press. Now I expect that my book will be published by the first of September, and to that I refer, as I have already said, for particulars.

In the mean time, it is due to myself and to others to say, that our faith, as growing out of these researches, is not "at irreconcilable variance with revelation." How little do they, who make such charges, know of this matter! Misled by the crudities which alone are seen in the newspapers of the day, because the graver matters can not find admission there, the idea is, I am aware, entertained by some, that this new philosophy is at variance with the revelation through Christ, the Redeemer. This is indeed a sad mistake, and one that believers would be too happy to correct, if only the opportunity could be afforded them.

So, too, is it a grievous error to suppose that it "constitutes an abandonment of all self-control, and a surrender of the supremacy of reason, as informed and enlightened by the senses." There was never yet, I venture to say, a religious creed promulgated among men, which so entirely eschewed blind faith, and

so fully and always demanded the exercise of judgment and the supremacy of the reason.

Hence it is that we are taught that none of these extraordinary things which are witnessed by so many, are miraculous, or flow from any suspension of nature's laws, but are, on the other hand, in conformity with, and in execution of, those laws ; that like the steam-engine and the magnetic telegraph, they are marvelous only to those who do not understand them, or are not familiar with them ; that those laws, and the means by which they produce such results, are as capable of being found out by human research ; that the knowledge is not confined to a few, but is open to all, rich or poor, high or low, wise or ignorant, who will wisely and patiently search for it, and that when it is attained, it can not but work in the heart " a closer walk with God," and an intercourse with our fellow-men of a more elevated character, void of selfishness, and devoted to their absolute advancement in all knowledge and goodness, both in this world and in the world to come.

This is a part of the something which I have found in my researches. But there is more yet. There is that which comforts the mourner and binds up the broken-hearted ; that which smoothes the passage to the grave, and robs death of its terrors ; that which enlightens the Atheist, and can not but reform the vicious ; that which cheers and encourages the virtuous amid all the trials and vicissitudes of life, and that which demonstrates to man his duty and his destiny, leaving it no longer vague and uncertain. What this is, I can not in the limits of this letter explain, but in due time it will be forthcoming, and each one can judge for himself.

But now may I not ask if I overrate the importance of the subject of my inquiries ? Scarcely more than four years have elapsed since the " Rochester Knockings " were first known among us. Then mediums could be counted by units, but now by thousands—then believers could be numbered by hundreds, now by tens of thousands. It is believed by the best informed, that the whole number in the United States must be several hundred thousands, and that in this city and its vicinity there

must be from twenty-five to thirty thousand. There are ten or twelve newspapers and periodicals devoted to the cause, and the Spiritual Library embraces more than one hundred different publications, some of which have already attained a circulation of more than ten thousand copies. Besides the undistinguished multitude, there are many men of high standing and talent ranked among them—doctors, lawyers and clergymen in great numbers, a Protestant bishop, the learned and reverend president of a college, judges of our higher courts, members of Congress, foreign ambassadors, and ex-members of the National Senate.

That which has thus spread with such marvelous celerity in spite of the ridicule which has deterred so many from an open avowal, that which has attracted the attention of so many of the best minds among us, can not be unworthy of my investigation, or that of persons far wiser and more reliable than I am.

It is now more than a year that my peculiar faith has been the subject of public comment. During it all I have been silent as to those attacks, content steadily to pursue my investigations until I could arrive at satisfactory results. Perhaps I have been silent too long, for, in the mean time, very erroneous notions, as to that faith, have been allowed to spring up. But I was unwilling to speak until I was as sure as I could be that I was right, lest I might utter some crudity which, by-and-by, I might regret—or commit some error which I might find it difficult to correct, or, in fine, unhappily mislead in my ignorance, rather than wisely guide by my knowledge.

I went into the investigation, originally thinking it a deception, and intending to make public my exposure of it. Having from my researches, come to a different conclusion, I feel that the obligation to make known the result is just as strong. Therefore it is, mainly, that I give the result to the world. I say mainly, because there is another consideration which influences me, and that is the desire to extend to others a knowledge which I am conscious can not but make them happier and better.

If those who doubt this could but spend a few days with me in my library, and witness the calls I have from strangers from all parts of the country; if they could but look over my portfo-

lio, and read the letters which pour in upon me from all sections and from persons whom I have never seen and never may see, they would be able, from the evidence thus furnished of the good that has been done, to form some idea of what may yet be accomplished, and they would not wonder that I find a compensation for the obloquy that is so freely heaped upon me by the ignorant, in the grateful outpourings of hearts which have, by my means, been relieved. One of them says (and it is a fair specimen of the whole) "You have acted the part of the good Samaritan, and poured oil into the wound of one like to die, and you will have rendered a death-bed, sooner or later, calm and hopeful, which might have been disturbed by doubts."

This, then, is the offense for which I have been arraigned at the bar of the public with so unsparing a condemnation, declared unworthy of my high office, falsely accused of consulting aught else than the law of the land, and my own reason, in the judgments which I officially pronounce, and have had invoked against me "the fires of Smithfield and the hangings of Salem." From such a condemnation it is that I appeal to the calm, unbiassed judgment of my countrymen, with a firm reliance upon its justice.

NEW YORK, *August 1, 1853.*

J. W. EDMONDS.