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THEODORE PARKER

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Theodore Parker in spirit life :



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SPIRIT LIFE.

A NARRATION OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

INSPIRATIONALLY GIVEN TO

FRED. L. H. WILLIS, M. D.

BOSTON:

WILLIAM WHITE & CO., 158 WASHINGTON STREET.

NEW YORK:

BANNER OF LIGHT BRANCH OFFICE, 544 BROADWAY.

1868.

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P R E F A C E.

Is it not true that all that educates the spirit is a means of progress?

Surely, as we better understand our spiritual natures and their destiny, we shall be better fitted to live true and noble lives.

It was with great reluctance, and only at the urgent solicitation of numerous friends, that I consented to give the following narrative to the world. It seemed to me a sacred thing, given for private perusal by a limited circle of friends. But those to whom it was read in private, struck by the revelations it contains of the other life, begged that it might be given in public. In compliance with their request, I have read it before delighted thousands in several of our large cities, and in every instance have been urged to print it.

And now, in putting it into a form in which it can be read by other thousands, I do so with confidence, judg-

ing of its effect upon myself, and upon many far wiser than myself, intellectually and spiritually.

It is a beautiful revelation of the spirit home. It reveals many laws of spiritual intercourse. It makes plain and simply natural the life that we all desire to know about.

It came unsought and unpremeditated. It flamed like living thought from the thought of the inspirer. Whether more shall be given me I know not. I thankfully received this, and as I read it, rejoiced more and more in a philosophy and religion that touches the heart, and leads the aspirations higher towards the All-perfect and All-loving.

It seems important that I should state something of the manner in which this manuscript came to me. But I find it exceedingly difficult to explain the method of inspirational or mediumistic writing to those who have had no experience in it. It must be experienced to be comprehended.

One of the very earliest phases of my own remarkable mediumship was that of writing, sometimes mechanically, not knowing one word that I was penning; and again, from an influx of illuminating power pouring through my own mentality, and giving expression to itself in words with lightning-like rapidity. I have many times tested the entire independence of many of these writings of my own mentality. I have written in

darkness, or with my eyes closely blindfolded. I have held a book in my left hand and read aloud to friends page after page, while my right hand went on writing page after page of manuscript.

I have repeatedly written entire lectures when I did not know one word I was writing, save as my eye glanced occasionally upon the page, and received the impression of a word or sentence.

It was in this strange inspirational or mediumistic manner the following narrative was written.

It purports to be the experience of Theodore Parker on his first entrance into the purely spiritual life.

Theodore Parker was my friend. He gave me counsel and advice in those trying days when with blighted hopes, and wounded, outraged sensibilities, I was sent forth from Harvard College with the brand of imposture upon me, placed there by ecclesiastical hands, because I was the unwilling recipient of influences they could not understand.

From his rostrum, where he gave utterance to so many terrific philippics against injustice and wrong, and plead so tenderly, and yet so powerfully, the cause of the down-trodden and oppressed, he spoke noble words for me, and characterized the action of the faculty as "an ecclesiastical persecution of the nineteenth century, in the name of Christianity."

Possessing myself an organization most wonderfully

susceptible to spiritual influences, it was natural that he should, after having entered the other life, finding a return possible, come to me to tell me of the reality of those things concerning which he had often expressed to me his doubts.

That he did so, I have not a shadow of doubt. That this narrative came directly from his inspiring spirit, I most earnestly and devoutly believe. I saw him distinctly at the time the manuscript was being written, as did also my wife. He has always been present with me whenever I have read it to an audience, and it was at his most urgent and persistent request that I read it before an audience in Boston that filled to overflowing the Melodeon, numbering many of his personal friends and parishioners.

Cavillers may say that this production, claiming to have come from so distinguished a source, is not marked with the intellectual vigor that characterized the efforts of the same mind when embodied in the flesh.

But it must be remembered that it has come through a humble channel, and that the law of inspiration, through all the ages, has ever been the same. It necessarily adapts itself to, and takes on the characteristics of the mind through which it flows. The inspirations of Jeremiah expressed themselves in lamentations, of David in poetry and song, of Solómon in pithy sayings or proverbs, and so on.

It may also be suggested that a simple narration of personal experiences in a strange country does not call for any great display of intellectual power.

With these few explanatory remarks, I send forth this message from the other life, with the earnest prayer that it may prove to all who read it what it has proved to the writer and to many who have listened to it, a revelation of beauty and life from the radiant home of the spirit.

FRED. L. H. WILLIS, M. D.

NEW YORK, February 22, 1868.

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THEODORE PARKER IN SPIRIT LIFE.

"I know that if I unfold here the attributes and faculties of my diviner nature, I shall hereafter find all I need of God."

WHAT a beautiful day it was when my spirit, freed from a suffering body, stood revealed in its strength and individual life! I know no feeling of earth that can express in fullness that sense of interior satisfaction. I was. I am. I shall be. Yes, forever. I live. God is. My very soul seemed palpable unto me. I felt its divine throbs of joy.

I stood in a lovely valley. Sloping on all sides towards it were undulating hills, verdant, and crowned with trees. Something such a spot I had seen in an engraving of one of Turner's pictures; but no picture could represent the whole view my eye held. In the distance, I beheld villas and terraced gardens. Near me was a stream of crystal water, and tender flowers were growing, and beautiful shrubs. The air about me was like a dewy summer's morning when the flowers give their most delicate fragrance to the coming sunbeams, and win their life by gifts of sweetness. I knew that a few hours before I was conscious of a faint suffocating sense, as if life were languishing, and that I lay in a room that to my closing, external senses, seemed cold and dark, with only one loving hand

grasping mine; and yet now, I was free and exultant in life and vigor. With that consciousness came a desire to move. What ecstasy of motion was this that made my will operative, so that I knew no effort save that of desire? I moved up the valley to a spot where I had seen children at play. It was then I discovered that something beside my own will had led me hither; for there was a feeling that some one had called me. It was such a sense as in my childhood days I had felt when my mother bade me come that she might put her hand upon me and smooth my hair and win a kiss. The same sense of restful love was with me. In my heart I was a child again, and my wish was to feel myself encircled in that same tender care, and to know myself the recipient of the same loving thoughts. With that wish, I moved forward to a vine-covered grotto, and beheld— who? Could it indeed be that loving being I had known so long ago— my mother? She had no touch of age upon her. Her body was as lithe and beautiful as those of the maidens who danced over the grave of Adonis. But my heart dared not go out to this being; it held itself back in doubt. I watched the face. A smile as tender as a young mother gives her first-born passed over it. A hand moved out in beckoning wish, and from it seemed to flow an attractive power. In a moment I rested my head upon her shoulder and wept; yes, wept tears refreshing and restful. I knew no doubt or fears henceforth. I lived, and I was with the being I had so longed to see. All else must surely be right and best in the end.

When I had become calm again, I wished to speak, and to ask how this all was. When I had come, and how? Who guided me to this safe home? But before my mouth uttered the words, the thought seemed to be

revealed to my mother. She said, in musical accents that fell on my ear like the beautiful song of love I had been soothed by in my childhood, "You have left the earth through the weary way of sickness and pain, as almost all do. I bore you hither with the aid of others, before you had awakened to consciousness, and left you alone, that you might first know that you existed, and that your individuality was subject to your will. I know all you have suffered, and why you have thus suffered. I am only now too glad to have you near my own beautiful home."

"Then this is a part of heaven?"

"This is a part of the spirit world. But come, for others are waiting to see you."

I followed her through a pathway up a gentle slope until I came in sight of a dwelling. It was of cottage form, not low, or small, but with wide doorways and high windows, if such the openings can be called. I entered the dwelling by the side entrance, which was covered with a beautiful vine whose foliage hung in tassel-like tufts of leaves, as soft and pliable as the fringed moss. The entrance was a sort of vestibule with columns, and was of semi-circular form; and in it were seats; and I saw signs of life there—a fallen flower, a book, and a curtain of most delicate texture, half drawn back. From this entrance I followed into a room that I find it difficult to describe to you. The light in it was soft and mellow, as if it came through translucent walls. This room was circular in front, and none of its walls had angles, but turned in graceful lines. The whole front of the room was supported by pillars that seemed like vine-covered trees, so perfect was their form in grace and beauty. Masses of most delicate drapery fell in front of these like gossamer in lightness. Thus was

formed in front of the room, between the columns and drapery, a sort of alcove. On one side of the room I saw a musical instrument, resembling more an organ than anything else, but in form like a five-stringed harp. The couches and seats were simple and chaste, resembling in grace of design some flowers that I had known in the earth life. There was a stand with flowers, and in the centre of the room a large hanging basket, with long, pendent clusters of green, and most exquisite flowers.

A sense of exultant thankfulness filled my heart that I had found in the spirit world my ideal of beauty and of rest in a real habitation. "O, how glad I am to have you here!" said my mother. "I have been waiting for this day so long; and yet I have only just got ready for you. I twined up that vine only yesterday, across the arch there, just as I thought you would best like it. This is your room — not your study — that is here;" and she gathered back the drapery from the side furthest from me, and a flood of white light entered. I started forward with a thrill of inexpressible delight. All I had coveted of art and beauty was before me. Statues, and paintings, and books, and everything that a student or an artist could desire was there. As my eye took in all, I could not resist the impulse that came upon me. I kneeled and lifted my eyes, and exclaimed, "O God, thou hast heard my prayer, and hast done this." My mother came forward and laid her hand gently on my head. She did not speak, but I felt her joy flow down into my whole being, and I knew that she rejoiced in my aspirations of thanksgiving.

I know of no feeling more exquisite than that of restful protection which came with my mother's touch. I seemed a child again in that feeling, and feared nothing,

needed nothing. Where was all the space between my boyhood and this moment? For a time it was annihilated. The fresh life of youth was on me. The unquestioning trust that I felt when the mother's arms encircled me then was with me now, and in the out-breathed thanksgiving of my heart, I expressed the fullness of my joy. I moved towards that part of the room which opened to the valley, and drew back the long, delicate curtains that fell across the side of the room. A balcony was there, and I stepped out upon it. What a scene met my gaze! The beautiful valley stretched out before me, and a soft light fell on it, such as can only be found in the fading light of day, when the sun sends its rays through some open space and illumines the misty air. It was a soft, yet glorified light, and in it every object seemed to have an ethereal beauty that I had never conceived of before. The trees and shrubs that grew on the sloping side of the valley were luxuriant, and yet so delicate that I could scarcely trace their foliage. I heard the sweet sounds of singing birds, and somewhere the murmur of voices. There seemed an intensity of life in everything, and yet it was a life so restful that I almost thought I dreamed. "Tell me where I am," I said at last; "for already I begin to think that I am dreaming, and shall awake to my life of pain again." "This is my home," my mother said; "and this beautiful scene you look upon is Nature's own. You see yonder, just over those trees, there is a town, or city; you can even feel the influence of it here; but I love the quiet of this home better: do not you? That beautiful dwelling there is Channing's. You see how simply grand it is, like himself; but come, you must tell me if all pleases you;" and we moved into the study again. I could not speak, but my thought must have expressed

itself, for I saw a light of pleased thankfulness pass over my mother's face. "I see," she said, "that you did not expect to find things so real here. Neither did I; and at first I was hardly pleased, because of ideas that had become so fixed in my mind during the earth life. But you will soon feel that everything that your instincts of beauty and of taste require is necessary to your real pleasure." I looked towards a beautiful picture; it was a scene of children at play; and among them I thought one resembled myself. "It delights us," said my mother, "to preserve every beautiful experience of our earth life in clear and distinct form. This is a transcript from my memory of a scene of your childhood; you will soon understand how I was able to gain it."

She threw open a door, or rather it seemed to open at her will, or by some unseen power, and we entered a room through which a soft, white light seemed flowing. There was a bed on one side so delicately white that only summer clouds can express it. Long, silken, white curtains fell about like delicate tissue. A couch carved of a material like translucent ivory, with cushions violet colored, and with small figures of white resembling embossed silk more than aught else, stood near. This room was in form like the quarter of a circle; yet the drapery was so arranged that no angle was noticeable. Delicate vines were trained across what in earthly habitations are represented by windows, but which seemed like open spaces that closed by letting down transparent screens, or by drawing curtains. "You do not feel weary," my mother said, "but quiet will refresh you. I will leave you here, but will come again when you desire me." The perfect quiet and rest of this room was a realization of the heaven of rest. My very soul seemed to gather its life within itself, and soon I lost the consciousness of

being, and my spirit slept. It was the soft, sweet sleep of entire peace. When I awoke, it was to feel myself stronger and calmer than I had remembered being for a long time. My desire for activity roused itself, and I wished also to really understand where I was. Was this really the spirit's home? I stood and looked at the beautiful landscape before me. Much as I had loved nature in her pure and beautiful life, she seemed dearer to me now. I had been thankful for every beautiful gift of the earth, but now I was thankful for the fulfilment of a higher joy. All that I had seen in my earth life was here more perfectly expressed. It was, indeed, nature spiritualized. My heart felt kindled into a divine joy, and I exclaimed, "O God, thou art indeed infinite perfection!" I went down winding steps, and stood again on the ground, for it seemed to me palpable soil, covered with luxuriant grass. My sensations were those of boyhood. I felt the enthusiasm, the fresh delight of my boyhood days; there was no weariness or anxiety in my frame, but a trustful sense of joy. But I longed to see some one, and as I heard voices not far off, I moved towards them. My coming was recognized, and my mother advanced again towards me. "Come," she said; "I have gathered together many of your friends who have been anxious to greet you." I followed her into a part of the grounds where fine trees grew, under which were seats. Here I saw — O, delight of reunion! — here I saw the many I had known, whom I had missed from my earth life. The joy of meeting, it seemed to me, was a recompense for the long and wearisome separation. We grasped each other's hands; we felt the thrills of friendship and of love, and I exclaimed to myself, *There is no death!* They seemed familiar with my life on earth, and conversed of events connected with it as if they had

mingled with it, and I could recognize in myself their spiritual connection with me through the years of our seeming separation. Time seemed of no account. I could not only trace my connection with them, but in my spirit I also recognized our spiritual communings. This I especially felt towards those I had loved. The feeling that we had been separated was lost. My experiences seemed familiar to them, and I could feel the bonds of love that had bound us. There were children I had loved who had left the earth in their early childhood. They had grown and matured. Yet I felt no separation of my life from theirs. In my spirit I recognized their spiritual growth, and we were not strangers. My heart took them in now, and understood at least one of the laws of love;—that the spirit consciousness far outstretches the earthly intellectual consciousness, and that we retain by our love bonds that cannot be broken, uniting us to every soul, so that the spirit shall recognize the spiritual intercourse it has held with those it loved, though it had seemed unconscious of all such intercourse during the wearisome years of separation. Perceiving this, my thoughts turned more directly than before to those I loved on earth. I longed to know of them, and to tell them of the joy that was mine. But I waited until I should be alone with my mother, for it seemed pleasanter to accept her as a guide and instructor than any one else. I cannot repeat to you the words of love and kindness there spoken, more than you can tell of the thrills of affection and gushes of love that flow through your being as your spirit communes with kindred spirits. The feeling uppermost in my being was of thankfulness. To find myself living and active in the presence of those I loved, and the recipient of so much life, seemed to me the proof of the ultimate fruition of every desire I had

ever cherished. I found my friends familiar with what had passed on earth since their departure from its active scenes. I found that they possessed a clearer insight into coming events than myself, yet they gladly questioned and conferred with me concerning public events, and the spread of religious ideas. Finally, Channing said, at the close of some doubt of mine as to the immediate triumph of right, "Well, we must do what we can; but we shall miss you as our instrument through whom to work." That one sentence, with the thoughts that seemed to flow with it from his mind, opened for me a wonderful revelation. What! had I been a worker with these men? Had my life been acted upon by them? Already I began to trace to them some of the thoughts that had filled my better hours. I recognized the source of those inspirations that had fallen upon my spirit as sunlight falls upon the sea, and given health and beauty to my soul. I felt united to them, and as if I had never been separated from them. Their experiences and aspirations were a part of my own experience; and thus, as my spirit consciousness recognized them and their nearness unto me, I learned how impossible it is for sympathetic souls to be ever disunited. There is a plane of sympathy on which they dwell, so that thoughts, and feelings, and aspirations, correspond; and although the intellect fail to receive into its consciousness the individual influences, yet the spirit recognizes them, and when the spiritual senses are fully opened, then it is that the spiritual consciousness reveals to the intellectual the laws that operated, and the causes that have produced many of the impulses and desires that have led to active accomplishment. Thus it was that I then perceived how these friends and others had been my supporters and advisers on earth. My heart went out to them now with the full-

ness of gratitude and love, and I said within myself, "O, had I but have known this, could earth have given me a trial too severe to have been borne?"

I believe my thoughts revealed themselves, for some one said, "These things are not all plain to men, for it is not yet time to reveal the ladder too clearly on which angels ascend and descend."

As if moved by a common impulse the company dispersed; yet the place where they had been seemed radiant with their presence. I now felt myself relieved from their strong attractive power, and a sense of weariness came over me; it was akin to pain, and as I had not felt it before, I wondered at it. I began to long for earth. I thought no more of the delights that surrounded me, but only of those I had left on earth. I became troubled and anxious, and sought some one to speak to. When my mother returned she perceived this, and said, "Your spirit is drawn to earth by the earnest thought of those that love you, and who are not wise in spiritual things, and mourn for you. By the presence of these friends with you, you have thrown out your affections, and your spirit has become sympathetic, so that you perceive all that is connected with it. Do you feel strong enough to return into nearer sympathy with earth, and perhaps try to comfort by your presence those that refuse to be comforted otherwise?" I said, "I am strong enough to bless others if I have the means; but where must we go? Is there to be separation and distance to the spirit? If so, I prefer to give up the joys of this life, and be nearer those whom I still wish to serve." "There is no separation, such as you call it, by time or distance, to the spirit. You will soon be able to live near those you love while dwelling here; but at present you are a comparative stranger to the country you have entered, and although every spirit

possesses instincts sufficiently pure and true to guide it in time towards that which it desires, yet you can be aided to a speedier accomplishment of those desires by others." I felt reproached for my haste and self-assumption; but there was something urging me forward stronger than my will. All the delights of the spirit home could not hold me; there was an active power drawing me elsewhere. I learned afterwards that it was the ardent and unwise grief and longing of my earthly companion. My mother shared somewhat in my feeling, and together we passed down the valley until we stood beside what seemed to be a stream of water, but whose currents were alike in the atmosphere as in the stream. It seemed like a magnetic atmosphere whose currents flowed outward towards what seemed like a sea of light. I scarcely know whether my spirit was borne on without will, or whether my desire became will; but before I had time to even wonder, I felt a warm atmosphere of life, and the bonds that seemed drawing me back to earth were strengthened and intensified, and my spirit went forth with longing and love to bless others.

That which I term my spirit-body was outstripped by my spirit, by my love and affection, and the *innermost*, *the very me*, the indwelling power of my life, was instantly beside the being who now could not stay her grief, but felt all the desolation of a separation that to her was *death*. Now that I perceived this, I was strong and calm, for I knew that I could be strength and calmness to her who had always turned to me for them. I recognized her every thought, and I answered them back. My spirit met hers, and communed with it as of old, until she grew strong, and calm, and patient. It was *then* that I first recognized my power as a spiritual being. I exulted in it. I blessed God for it. I knew that my work for the

world was not done; no, hardly begun, for I felt the divine consciousness of power and desire. I could, I saw, be strength to the weak, calmness to the disturbed, and could draw the thought of man upward towards a higher and holier life. For the first time I perceived the truth of the words, "and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." I perceived, as my spirit by its love gave forth its life to others, how the redeeming power of love was to bless the world. And yet never did I feel so humble and child-like as now. I seemed but to be acting and living by means of a life that flowed into me, and while I gave, yet I received. My wishes still turned heavenward, and I lifted my aspirations to the Father of spirits, and exclaimed, "Still am I one of thy children! O, guide me still nearer unto thee!" As this prayer flowed from me, there descended about me such a radiance of light that it was like the shining of the sun, and with it such strength flowed into the spirits of all those near me that grief and lamentation seemed silenced, and a sense of the beauty, truth, and justice of the universe was recognized and rejoiced in. At first I felt some regret that no one seemed to recognize me; but that feeling passed away when I saw the effect of my spirit upon theirs.

I lingered with delight near earth. It seemed each moment to become a more sacred place to me, since I perceived that I still shared in its active duties. But I felt the need of spiritual rest myself, for I was not yet accustomed to those new emotions, and I felt a return of those earthly longings and desires that were accustomed to exhaust my body with too great labor, and I willingly yielded to the suggestion of my mother and other friends that had been attracted by her wish. I cannot say that we left earth — for from this time it seemed linked to my life with ever-living bands of life — but we returned nearer

to the spirit home, and from thence I sent back my tenderest thoughts and wishes.

This experience contained much for me to reflect upon. I wished no interpreter. I asked for no explanation. I desired to reflect on what had passed, and in my own spirit to consider this new revelation of my interior powers. How beautiful seemed the serenity of the home I entered! How restful its peace! There lingered in my spirit only the regret that I could not transfer this peace to earth. And now I began to realize how intimately my earth life was connected with the present. I could recall at one glance every event of my life. I felt its connection with my spirit. All that I had done for humanity's good seemed linked to me in bands of light. All that I had failed to do, filled my heart with a great desire. I saw, as my greatest means of happiness, the purification and elevation of the human spirit. Yet how best to accomplish my work I did not perceive. But more than ever before, a sublime trust in the ever-present, ever-active Good of the universe filled my being. With these feelings, I again consecrated myself to the highest work I could accomplish. I felt that to attune my spirit to the harmony of the universe was the great work of my life; for in that harmony I could find all the means possible to be used for the best good of myself and others. Entire confidence took possession of me; supreme thankfulness filled my soul. Beautiful as was the external world of the spirits' home, the internal world of peace, rest, and joy far surpassed it all. All the trials of my earth life seemed as nothing. I wondered how any could dwell upon them, when the heart could feel the ultimate of them, even the strength and purity that they had given. I saw how each event had brought its lesson to my spirit; how each experience had better fitted me for my present

life. All my disappointments and seeming failures were but so many blessed proofs of my strength. I saw in them my means of progress. With the rapidity of sight I reviewed my life, and traced its connection with the present. I resolved to be, first of all, calm and resolute, and to rest in no present pleasure that should not be my own or another's means of progress. As this resolve filled me, beauty seemed flowing to me, and I was blessed by everything about me.

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