

A REPLY

8

TO

A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL,

ON

SPIRITUALISM:

BY

R. HOUGHTON.

PRICE ONE PENNY

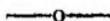
HUDDERSFIELD:

PRINTED BY GEO. WHITEHEAD, NEW STREET.

1870.

✓

A N S W E R .



SIR,

WHEN millions of people are charged with entertaining and propagating doctrines that tend to and result in such things as "falsehood," destruction of religion, faith in God, morality, teaching that the marriage vow imposes no obligation, &c., &c., it is the duty of the writers to put their name to such charges, and not to stab right and left in the dark, with the intention of doing all the mischief possible to the reputation and honest opinions of others, without exposing themselves to the least danger. Is this following the example of your founder? If your views of his doctrines are no clearer than those of his example appear to be, I am afraid your congregation will not be much benefited by your ministrations.

It appears that your pamphlet is the result of an investigation of what you "know of Spiritualism," not of Spiritualism; now, it is not likely that the public care very much about what you know of Spiritualism, if they take any interest in the subject, it is in Spiritualism, not your knowledge of it, which, judging from your statements is small indeed. There is no attempt at any description of it, it is simply calculated to frighten weak minded and superstitious people from examining the subject, as if you had a fear that if they see, and hear, and think on the facts brought before their notice, they may be too much for them to resist. Now, Sir, it is always desirable to have faith in the power of truth; nothing so powerful as truth, one little truth will successfully withstand a whole host of falsehoods. Surely, you have no misgivings about having the truth yourself, or about the Spiritualists being in the wrong, then, why rush to the attack before you have learnt the alphabet of the question? You would

have done more credit to your own religion by manifesting your faith in its truth, in silence, till you had learned more of the nature and character of what you are opposing. I will now proceed to an examination of a few of the statements made in your pamphlet.

You say that Spiritualism claims to be "religion with a divine origin." This is the first time that I have heard or seen the statement that Spiritualism is a religion; on the contrary, it simply means a belief in the power of departed spirits to communicate and converse in various ways, with those still on earth, but our view of religion is, that it consists in worshipping God in harmony with our honest convictions of what is right and true, or in other words, in "Spirit and in truth;" but, you speak of "various religions," as though something written in a book, or a Creed, or forms, or ceremonies of some kind were religion; we trust our view is higher, more noble and pure than that, and we are quite willing to take the risk, if there is one, of entering the eternal world with it.

You ask—"Is Spiritualism from God?" the question implies the state of mind of the questioner. What do you mean? Is there something in existence that is not from God, are there more Creators than one, does that myth you call the devil create, then who made the devil? If God made the devil did he not know what would be the result of his workmanship? You see where your teachings end when pushed out to their legitimate consequences. Are they calculated to give us an exalted view of Deity, or to land us in the mists and fogs of doubt, or the darkness and despair of Atheism?

The origin of evil has always been the puzzle of theologians, but with the principle of progression the mystery vanishes. An infinite being cannot make another infinite being, hence all created beings are more or less imperfect, and if so, more or less evil. It requires an infinitely pure moral nature to be perfectly free from moral evil, an infinitely perfect mind to have correct views of truth, and all errors lead to evil consequences, greater or less according to their magnitude. But, man is blest with the glorious privilege of eternal progress; however low in state or nature, the Father of all has made provision for his eternal welfare, the speed of his progress depending upon his

observance of nature's laws, as they pertain to the regions of body or mind; and no power in the universe can step in between us and the consequences of our actions, whether they be good or evil. Say then, Sir, is this calculated to produce immorality? Compare it with your own teachings, and let an enlightened conscience answer.

Your next objection is—"Spiritualism is useless." Suppose it true to the present, what then? Are there some useless truths? Can you measure the utility of a truth before it is understood? Ministers of the gospel have made mistakes of this kind before, sufficient I think, to have taught them a lesson. How many discoveries in science and philosophy have been made which have not met with their opposition, on the ground of their being unscriptural and useless or pernicious? What was the fate of Galileo, Jenner, Roger Bacon, and numbers of others? What is the reception given to the discoveries of geologists and anatomists of the present day? It never seems to occur to men of your class that, whatever is true must be in harmony with the will of Deity? Is he not the author of all truth? Your query always is—"Is it according to the Scriptures?"

Suppose it is not according to the Scriptures, what, then? Is the interpretation given to the Scriptures so uniform amongst mankind that there can be no doubt of their meaning, or is the infallibility of Scripture established beyond all doubt? Your assumptions on this subject are something marvellous, when the facts of the case are considered; it may be stated with safety that after nearly two thousand years of enormous expenditure of time, labour and money, there is not one in a hundred, if one in a thousand of the population of the earth that believes in their infallibility.

But are you quite sure that Spiritualism has not been useful already; I will not enter into particulars on this point at present, but as you challenge its teachers to "prove it has done any good," I will name one fact, that hundreds of thousands, nay, I may say millions have been satisfied that man lives after death through its instrumentality, when all your preaching and teaching had failed to do so. But, the question that naturally arises on the mind is,—Is the Bible to be depended upon in this respect, particularly if it is true, as you say, that none of the departed can

come back again to earth ; thus, stript of all means of proving the question in a satisfactory form, you have to fall back on the people living by faith without evidence. Did the early christians and apostles do so, had they no evidence to build their faith upon, or were they not surrounded with it daily ? I will now quote you one or two passages of Scripture, and ask you if you believe them.

Mark xvi. c 15th v., "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Again 17th and 18th v., "And these signs shall follow them that believe ; in my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." I John iv. 1 v., "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God : " 2 v., "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." Now, Sir, I never met with a spirit either in or out of the flesh that did not confess this, and yet this was John's mode of testing the point. You may take exception to my interpretation of these passages, but I shall not follow the example of ministers by explaining away anything that is contrary to my views : I know of no way of understanding what writers or speakers mean except by what they say, and I give them credit for meaning what they say ; it is no concern of ours whether they are consistent or not, except in weighing the worth of their testimony and belief.

It is clear from the first passages that marvellous things were to follow the preaching and reception of the gospel ; it is also clear these things were not to cease with the apostolic age, as in the few years they had to live they could not preach to every creature. If these signs were to follow them that believe, what about those professed believers where there are no such signs, are there any such signs attending your preaching ? if not, what evidence have we, that you are a Christian in any sense, saying nothing about a Christian minister ; are we to take this on faith without evidence too ? Ah ! Sir, this faith without evidence is dangerous work, the world has suffered a thousand times more by acting on this maxim than all others put together ; credulity, not scepticism, has been the leading error of mankind.

Your next objection is that "the characters of the mediums are, some of them, not good, and their statements as such are not reliable"

Spiritualism does not claim that the character of the mediums is either better or worse on that account, but that mediumship is simply a constitutional peculiarity with which they come into the world, and which may be improved by judicious culture. It is this that enables spirits to manifest themselves. What would you think of a person objecting to telegraphing because it cannot be done on a common hempen cord as well as iron wire? yet, this is just your position. Spirits can manifest themselves when the conditions are suitable, and at no other time. Your question of "Why dont they tell us of Dr. Livingstone?" I cannot answer, as I never asked them, but it may be that they do not know, or, that they do not think proper to tell us. I suppose you do not mean to infer that they either know everything or else they do not exist, or, at all events they cannot commune with man. Your statement that the revelations of spirits are always favorable, manifests a degree of ignorance or wilful perversion of the truth, that is unpardonable in one professing to enlighten the public on the question.

You ask "What doctrine that is essential to salvation is not fully revealed in the Bible?" I ask you, in return, how you know that your doctrine answers the purpose of salvation? Has any of the departed come back to tell you? You answer, that is impossible. Then, how do you know? I suppose you have faith; yes, faith again; but is it not possible that man may exercise faith and be disappointed, after all; your experience is different from mine if you have not proved this many times.

You deny that "Spiritualism can convert an infidel." In the sense that you understand that term, I do not know that he would be any better if it did; I have yet to learn that your conversion is the conversion that Christ spoke of, you certainly have not the fruits that he spoke of as the result.

But if Spiritualism can convince the skeptic of the existence of another world, and shew him how to live so as to make the best both of this and the next, by reasoning with him on the nature and effects of all sin, or violations of Nature's laws, if it

shews him that virtue and happiness are inseparable, so that sin and misery stand in the relation of cause and effect, that the same God rules in all worlds, that what is right here is right through the universe, and that what is wrong here is the same everywhere, that morality is the same the universe through, that God is unchangeable in all things, that what he is here he is in all worlds; thus teaching him that he is making his own future, that the conduct of to-day determines his destiny to-morrow, or, in a word, that acting with an intelligent mind from pure motives is the only cause of progress in happiness, love, and wisdom; then, I think, Sir, this will bear looking at quite as well as anything you have to offer.

I may say further, that those spirits that come back and give their experience, after trying your system of faith, say that it does not answer, that it leads to great disappointment, that they find the spirit-land a very different place from what you have represented, and, that your system of faith is worse than useless, it is pernicious, that man's future depends on what he is, and not on what he believes.

Your next charge is, that it "misrepresents the character of God, makes him partial to certain persons irrespective of character;" "visiting some circles composed of bad people, giving a preference to certain chairs, tables, bells, &c." This, Sir, is the result of writing on what you know of Spiritualism, or rather of what you think you know, not of Spiritualism itself. What Spiritualist ever claimed to have God visiting his circle?—it is the spirits of the departed ones, not God. Can you see no distinction between the two? It is the old story of the dark ages over again, copied from your predecessors: if the thunders peal, it is God that is angry; if the lightnings flash, it is God that is manifesting his wrath; if a rainbow is seen in the clouds, it is a token that he will not drown the world again; if an eclipse occurs, he has drawn a veil over his face on account of man's sins; if plagues, or famine, or war occur, it is God that is taking vengeance on mankind: but, as science makes her discoveries, and knowledge increases; we are able to rise above such superstition, and account for those phenomena from natural causes, and, thanks to science and philosophy, knowledge does increase, notwithstanding the cold-hearted indifference or positive opposition of theology.

I have no wish to enter into the subject of what you call the God of the Bible, or to say anything of his strict impartiality which you say so much about; but if the case could be referred to the ancient Philistines, or the various tribes that surrounded the Jews in their passage from Egypt to the promised land, you would have a different version of the story.

You say "were it not the unalterable law of heaven that no spirit should come back to earth, Dives's prayer would have been answered." In another passage you say that Moses and Elijah came on a special message to answer some good purpose;" thus, it appears, that notwithstanding an unalterable law of heaven, spirits can and do come sometimes; but, where did you get your information that this was a very special occasion? Now, if you will read your Bible you will find that these special occasions were often occurring; one appeared to John, another to Zacharias, another to Peter, another to the women at the sepulchre, another to the mother of Jesus, another to Joseph when they were about to depart into Egypt, numbers of others to those who were watching their flocks, and so I might go on in the New Testament, and the Old is full of such cases; rather numerous, considering it is an unalterable law of heaven that they should not come. There is no lack of spiritual visitation in the Bible, the lack is in the experience of professing Christians of the present day; spirits have left you till your prejudices get a little removed, they see no hope of doing any good with you in your present state of mind.

You also charge Spiritualism with "tending to immorality." In support of that charge you quote a writer named Grant, on "Spiritualism Unveiled," wherein he says "Spiritualism is an utter and total apostacy from the Christian faith," &c. I have no doubt there have been many Grants that have written against Spiritualism in America as well as in this country, besides ministers of the gospel, and perhaps the next time he writes, he may return you the compliment by quoting you as a proof of what Spiritualism is in England. But why go to America to see what the tendency of it is, when you have thousands of Spiritualists within a few miles of your own home,—do you want to get cases that we cannot deny through ignorance of the circumstances or persons? The fact is, that it is the old story again, they will not accept your creed.

You then charge us with making the "marriage vow of no obligation;" on what authority "it is also said." This is very fine from a Christian minister; how slender an authority will do when the statement pleases you. Suppose that some Spiritualists have left their wives and families and run off with other women, what then? did Christians never do it? need we go into America to find cases, or far back into the history of our own country? Why, Sir, we are never many months without having cases recorded in our papers of Christian ministers doing it. Have Spiritualists charged this upon Christian principles? For shame! Where is that charity that thinketh no evil? Save me from the charity of Christian ministers with whose creeds I do not agree.

You say that the great "progress Spiritualism has made, and the large number of its disciples, some of whom are high in society, is no proof of its truth." Where has it claimed any such thing? But, surely it is nothing against its truth, and will stand as well on this account as it would have done if it had made little progress, which I think would soon have been quoted against us, but it depends on neither numbers nor faith, but simply asks that its claims may be decided by the evidence of our senses and reason.

Then you refer to an exposure of the Davenport Brothers you went to see at Halifax, which was simply this—that some one from Liverpool went through the same feats, and this you call an exposure. Are you quite sure that they did the same things in the same way and under the same circumstances? The Davenport Brothers have been as closely examined by all classes of men as it is possible to be, and I now tell you that they have never been discovered in any trickery or deception to this day, although they have been at this sort of work before the public for a period of twenty years or more.

The question is not—Is Spiritualism in harmony with the Bible? Spiritualists believe it is; but this is the question—Is it true? Suppose you, or other ministers of the gospel, think it is not, what then, why so much worse for your views, and at the same time so much better for you, if you act the part of rational beings by correcting your erroneous views; if, on the other hand, you should be so foolish as to still persist in your error, why, then you must take the consequences, as truth will not change even to

accommodate you. Is it true? that is the question; and further, it is a fact, that it asks no man's faith, but calls upon all to judge of and decide in harmony with the facts that it has to present.

Now, Sir, this led me to examine the question at my own home, and in connection with the members of my own family only; and, although we held several sittings per week, yet we were three months before we had the slightest evidence that there was anything in it whatever; but we persevered, and the result was that we received evidence of its truth of the most convincing and satisfactory character: we had our tables tilted about (with the hands of the mediums softly placed upon them) with such power, that the strongest men in the neighbourhood—who have often been invited into the house to test it—could not hold them still for one moment; we have had tables thrown over while we have been looking at them, when no human being has been within some yards of them; we have had articles of clothing removed from one drawer to another when both have been locked and the keys in our possession. I have been wheeled to and fro in my own room when laid on the sofa; we have been freely handled by the spirits again and again when there was no individual in the room but the person so handled; we have heard them making various noises in the house many times when we were satisfied that it was them and nothing else; several members of my family have seen them again and again, in their normal condition; conversations have been held with them in the ordinary form, that is, without forming any circle or adopting any means to bring it about; we have been informed of circumstances occurring one hundred miles distant, that there was no possibility of our family knowing anything about, we have gone to the spot for the purpose of making the enquiry, and found that notwithstanding a great many particulars and details, it was strictly correct.

What is your explanation of all the above? "Magnetic and electric influence, with a little addition of human cunning, undoubtedly, is the sole cause of table-rapping." Do you think this is a satisfactory mode of accounting for our tables having been thrown over when there was no one near them nor anything upon them: if so, then who put up the electrical or magnetic machinery, or how did they do it without our knowledge, when no one but ourselves were in the house, or what answer do you

suppose your *seance* with the Liverpool gentlemen at Halifax can be to us as a family?

Perhaps I might have hesitated long before giving our experience as above, knowing how ready many of the public—amongst them ministers of the gospel—are to abuse the character and call in question the veracity of those that oppose them, when all other ground is taken away, had I not known that thousands (some of whom stand high in art, science, and literature, and whose moral character and mental attainments will not be questioned by those who know them) can corroborate my statement by relating similar experience as having occurred in their presence under similar circumstances.

But the physical phenomena is not the chief difficulty you have to contend with, you have the intelligence to deal with; can magnetism or electricity account for intelligence? can they by any means get from the individual's present information they do not possess? What strange conclusions men can come to when the evidence is against their foregone conclusions. But why, Sir, so ready to speak of the cunning and craft of Spiritualists—what have they to gain by it? I will tell you, Sir, some things they get by it,—they get the finger of scorn pointed at them, they are the butts of ridicule for ministers of the gospel, editors and correspondents of newspapers, by whom the howl of ignorance, bigotry, and superstition is directed and caused to explode upon their heads; but they have the satisfaction of knowing that if they suffer on the one hand, conscious integrity and love of the truth will support them on the other; but it will be a difficult matter for either you or any one else to shew how they can gain anything in a material or pecuniary sense: in this respect it is all against them, owing to the public feeling being in a contrary direction, all other things being equal, no favours are given to Spiritualists.

But will your side of the question bear examination in the same way? Have you no interest in supporting those views that are popular in the minds of your hearers and readers? Is there any doubt that a great number of our editors and correspondents write what they are paid for writing, and that they have a strange power of changing their opinions when a higher salary is offered? Is it an uncommon thing for a Radical to become a Tory or a

Tory a Radical under these circumstances? Are you, Sir, at liberty to preach any doctrine you may think proper—what security have we that your statements are always in strict harmony with your honest convictions? I am not going to call your honesty and sincerity in question, but

“When self the wavering balance shakes,
It's rarely right adjusted,”

at least, Sir, it is very foolish to start the game of throwing stones, when your own house is glass on all sides.

I think I have shewn that, whatever the power may be that we call Spiritualism, at least it manifests intelligence; if so would it not be wise to ask the questions of it—What is your nature? What is your source? What are your objects? &c.

Now, Sir, this has been done in every civilized as well as many of the barbarous nations of the earth, and what are the answers that we get? First, in reference to its nature, we are the spirits of your departed relations, friends, or other human beings that have inhabited bodies like yours. This, Sir, is the uniform answer in the pages of history, or the experience of living human beings all the world over. What have you to offer in opposition? Nothing worthy of one moment's notice.

To the question “What is your object?” the answer are various; sometimes to comfort the bereaved in their afflictions and loss, to tell them, that they still live, and will do so for ever, increasing in wisdom, love, knowledge, purity and happiness. Sometimes they will answer; their object is to instruct us how we may best prepare for the change that awaits us all, by teaching us of the nature, destiny, and needs of spirits, sometimes describing the spirit-land, shewing how it was formed, and speaking of its beautiful adaptation for supplying the wants and necessities of spirits in all stages of progress; and further, in always complaining of the great amount of trouble they have in removing the ignorance, prejudices, and bigotry of spirits leaving this our earth, and more particularly those that have been strong adherents to what you call the Christian faith.

I trust Spiritualists are as great admirers of the beauty of the moral teachings of Christ as you can be, and more particularly of the wonderful combination of the moral and religious elements, manifested in his life, that standing monument of the beauty of morality, the sweetness of love, and the elevating

power of pure religion. How marked was the indifference to public prejudices, how he probed the sores of sin and bigotry to the very core, what an utter contempt for the emoluments and honors, and dignities of the world, what a marked preference in the selection of his associates of the pure and good, irrespective of their wealth, or position, fishermen, tent makers, &c.; no wish to get his feet on fine carpets, to fare sumptuously at rich men's tables, no garbing himself in silken gowns, bands, &c., for the purpose of making himself conspicuous amongst mankind; but where are his followers? Alas! Echo answers—Where?

At the same time, we are not blind to the fact, that morality and religion did not originate with him; they have both been in the world ever since man appeared on its surface; our views of them will be higher or lower as man is elevated or degraded; the power of morality and religion is in love; the first, loving man; the second, in its exercise towards God; and depraved as man is supposed to be, yet, its power is patent to all observers of humanity, nay, the brute creation are not free from the fascinating power of love, its manifestation—kindness—will exercise an influence over them that is capable of imparting lessons of wisdom to all.

All religions teach morality, and many that make no professions of religion teach it, therefore it is simply folly for any sect to claim the originating of pure morality, yet this is just what you always boast of, when you are shewing what you are pleased to call the divinity of Christianity. Christianity is that which distinguishes it from all other creeds, morality pertains to all creeds in a greater or less degree, and therefore, is no more Christian than Mohammendan, Buddhist, or anything else; yet when this is taken from you what is there left, the Mosaic account of Creation, the fall of man, his salvation by punishing the innocent instead of the guilty, or that man may sin, and not have to bear the consequences, an eternal Hell fire from which none can escape for ever and ever, and all this to be taken on faith.

“How blest is the man that can't think!
 Or, at facts that are awkward will wink,
 Or will make you believe that they stink;
 In his nose so pure;
 Of joy and of bliss he shall drink
 Large doses secure.”