



22472

SPIRITUALISM THE LAST HOPE OF THE CHURCHES.

Reprinted from "*Harbinger of Light*," May 1st, 1902.

*The following paper was read by MR. JAMES SMITH
at the last Conversazione of the V.A.S.*

9

The decay of faith, the declining influence of the churches, the unwillingness of young men to enter the clerical profession, the misgivings which many conscientious ministers of religion entertain with respect to the truth of the dogmas and doctrines to which they have committed themselves, the ineffectiveness of the efforts which earnest preachers are making to repel the advancing tide of unbelief, materialism, and mammon worship, are among those portentous signs of the times to which no man or woman of average perspicacity can be altogether blind. And the question naturally arises, Why are agnosticism, scepticism and atheism so widely prevalent at the present time? For man is, naturally, a religious animal. He wishes to believe in a Supreme Ruler of the Universe; and the spirit within him revolts against the idea of annihilation, and cries out for some assurance of an after life. But what do the orthodox churches tell him with respect to the first? They caricature and defame the Eternal Author of all things, by depicting him as a magnified reflection of man, capricious, cruel, jealous, vindictive and outrageously unjust; and they do so, because He is so pourtrayed in a venerable book, written by men, whose conceptions of God were ludicrously puerile, barbarous and degrading. This distorted and exaggerated image of themselves, transmitted to us from a period about 4000 years distant from the days in which we live, has been accepted as authentic by modern Christians who tell us—at least their clerical leaders do—that this All-powerful Being rewards a certain number of His creatures with everlasting happiness, if they lead what are called religious lives, and at the same time believe that the noblest martyr who ever trod the earth shed oceans of blood when he was put to a violent death, and that their own sins can be washed out by bathing in it, in some mysterious way. On the other hand, the ecclesiastical exponents of "true religion" assure us that the great mass of mankind who have never heard of this atoning blood, as well as all those who have lived evilly in Christian countries for a few, or for many years, will be

doomed to suffer unspeakable anguish of soul and body, in a place of appalling tortures, agony and excruciating misery, for ever and ever without respite, cessation or prospect of diminution.

And can those who have been preaching these awful, these hideous doctrines, for centuries and centuries, wonder that the human mind should rebel against them—should declare “I cannot believe in such a God; I reject Him with my whole heart and soul; I prefer to take refuge in the absolute negation of a Divine Over-Soul, and in the conclusion—dreary and desolate, though it be—that death is the be-all and the end-all of our transitory life on earth?” Who is responsible for the agnosticism, the depressing doubts, and the blank atheism, which are casting their dark shadows over some of the most thoughtful minds in Christendom? Is it not the God-dishonouring religion which is being taught in the great majority of the churches and conventicles?

And when men have discarded all belief in an Infinite Creator, they not unnaturally dismiss any and every idea of a future life; and what follows? The general adoption of a philosophy of human life and conduct, which is summed up in a single maxim, “Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.” It is undoubtedly the philosophy of the pig-sty; and such as a hog might invent and promulgate, if it were endowed with the faculty of human speech. But the sty is gilded; the troughs flow with champagne; and the swill-tub is filled with every delicacy that can tempt the palate, stimulate the appetite, and disorder the digestions of the two-legged swine who fatten upon luxuries, fare sumptuously and are clothed with purple and fine linen. Yes, in place of the theological God, men have enthroned Bacchus, Silenus, Priapus, Pluto, and the obscener deities of the heathen mythology; and what is the object of universal worship! Is it not the golden calf? What is the word upon the lips of every other man you meet in the streets of Melbourne? What is the first, last, exclusive and all engrossing object of his thoughts, efforts and aspirations? Is it not, Money, money, money? Who is the idol of society, before whom men and women will prostrate themselves in abject homage, to whom Beauty will sell herself for the gift of a wedding ring, and for whom the best seats will be reserved in church, and the most assiduous attentions in every social circle? Is it not the man who is reputed to be “made of money?” Like kings in former times,

"he can do no wrong," or if he does, his purse will buy the best forensic eloquence in the market,

To prove, in reason and reason's despite,
That wrong is right, and black is white.

For were there ever truer words written than those of Shakespeare?—

"Plate sin with gold
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks ;
Arm it with rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it."

What can the pulpit say to materialists of this stamp,—and, in these days of millionaires and multi-millionaires, they are multiplying like microbes? Can it threaten them with retribution in an after life? They would laugh in the preacher's face, and challenge him to prove the existence of another world. And how could he answer such a challenge? This, indeed, is the crux of the position. The Bank of Faith, upon which the Churches used to draw so freely, has closed its doors. Its funds are exhausted ; and the plight of the ministers of religion is a truly deplorable one. They have reached a terrible crisis in the history of their order, and they must either renounce their calling, or embrace Spiritualism. Their position resembles that of the great family of mankind as described in the semi-fabulous narrative of the Deluge ; the waters of unbelief are rising everywhere around them, and threatening them with destruction ; and safety can only be sought for where the animals are alleged to have found it—namely, in the Ark ; and that Ark, in the present instance, bears the name of Spiritualism. For it can do what no other human agency can possibly effect. It can offer them "the substance of things hoped for,—the evidence of things unseen." It can supply proofs absolute, innumerable, overwhelming and undeniable, of the continuity of the soul's existence beyond the grave. It reveals—as it alone can and does—the tremendous fact that judgment follows death, as day follows night ; that our own consciences are our own accusers, our own justiciaries, sentencing us to make atonement for every evil thought, word or deed, of which each of us has been guilty during the life which has been just ended.

And therefore I say that Spiritualism is the only thing which can save not merely the churches but society from moral and spiritual bankruptcy ; and possibly from dissolution and despair. For just contemplate what will follow the recognition by religionists of a power which will substitute convincing knowledge for impotent belief.

The priesthood of the future will be composed of highly educated, scientifically prepared, and carefully developed mediums, trained, as their predecessors among the Hebrews were—in colleges which will resemble the ancient School of the Prophets. Now imagine such a preacher ascending the pulpit of a cathedral at the close of a musical service, expressly arranged to harmonise the conditions and to bring the minds of the congregation into a state of passive receptivity. He is surrounded by controls of an elevated character, and he is impressed to select, as the text of his inspirational discourse, the words “Verily I say unto you—‘A rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of heaven.’” Well, his guides and guardians throw him into a trance, and they permit him to be taken possession of by the spirit of a man who was in affluent circumstances on the earth, and formerly occupied a prominent seat in that very cathedral; but is now a shivering pauper in the lowest sphere of the other world. He has longed, like Dives, to return to the earth so that he might warn his brethren, “lest they also come into this place of torment;” but, more fortunate than Dives, he has been allowed to do so. If you have read—as I hope every one here present has done so—the “Christmas Carol” of Charles Dickens, which he has assured me was written under powerful spirit direction, you can easily imagine the nature of the discourse which would be delivered from the pulpit of that cathedral by the unhappy spirit of the rich man.

Let me recall, however, what passed between the ghost of Jacob Marley and his old partner, Ebenezer Scrooge, on that memorable Christmas Eve; when the former appeared before him with a chain wound around his body, to which was attached a heavy appendage, composed of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds and ponderous purses wrought in steel. Scrooge asked him why he walked the earth, and Marley replied:—“It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad, among his fellow men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh! woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness.”

“You are fettered,” exclaimed Scrooge, “tell me why.”

“I wear the chain I forged in life,” the Ghost replied. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it

on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you* ? ”

Scrooge, in awe and fear, asks the spirit to speak comfort to him.

“ I have none to give,” is the reply. “ It comes from other regions, and is conveyed by other ministers to other kinds of men. . . . I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole ; and weary journeys lie before me ! . . . ”

“ Seven years dead,” mused Scrooge, “ And travelling all the time ? ”

“ The whole time,” said the Ghost, “ No rest, no peace. In constant torture of remorse.”

Scrooge interjected a jocular remark, and the spirit reprovingly rejoined :—

“ Oh ! captive, bound, and double-ironed ! not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures (are required), for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed ;—not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness ;—not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunities misused ! Yet such was I ! Such was I ! ”

“ But you were always a good man of business,” faltered Scrooge.

“ Business ! ” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands, “ Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business, charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence, were, all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business ! ”

Now, imagine the spirit of a Melbourne Marley, speaking through the lips of a gifted medium from the pulpit of St. Paul’s, or St. Patrick’s Cathedral. He may have been a strictly religious, and an undeniably moral man, who went to church twice every Sunday, had family prayers morning and evening, and was looked up to as a model citizen, and quoted as a signal example of a successful man of business both in the Chamber of Commerce, and on the Stock Exchange. But, for all that, the aim and end of his life, was the accumulation of wealth ; and when he crossed the

boundary line which separates this world of shadows from the realm of realities, he discovered that his earthly life had been a dismal failure ; that instead of living for others, he had lived for himself ; and that for years and years to come his efforts must be continuously directed to undo the past ; to retrieve the errors of an entire existence ; and to strive, amidst incessant difficulties and disappointments, to influence for good human beings who were still in the flesh, but who refused to be impressed by him, just as he had shown himself to be unamenable to the impressions of his own guardian angels. And this had become one of his heaviest punishments,—to meet with rebuffs in every direction ; and to move about among his fellow men, and in his old home, passionately longing to do good and to restrain those who were still near and dear to him, from repeating his own faults and follies, and from following his own untoward example ; and yet to find them all so unresponsive to his spiritual influence. Talk of Hell !—there is no Hell like the unavailing remorse of such an one. He speaks in accents of entreaty, remonstrance, pathetic pleading and earnest supplication, but his spiritual voice is inaudible to mortal ears. He looks with eyes that are blinded by tears, into the eyes of those whom he has left behind him, but there is no token of recognition from theirs. He touches them with his spiritual hands, and there is no consciousness, on their part, of any such contact. He sees his sons becoming as sordid as himself ; and he remembers, with a spasm of anguish, that *he* taught them to be so. He sees his daughters leading a life of frivolous self-indulgence and chiefly intent upon the pursuit of a phantom which they call pleasure ; and he reflects that it was *he* who provided them with the means of thus frittering away an existence which might have been turned to such noble and beneficent uses. He perceives with frightful clearness the opportunities which he neglected, and the duties which he left unfulfilled and there probably recurs to his memory, with painful vividness, the mournful lament of the quaker-poet :—

“Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these:—‘It might have been.’”

Imagine, let me beg of you, the spirit of such a man as Marley bewailing the errors of his earthly life, and describing the intolerable remorse and unspeakable mental suffering which these have entailed upon him in the other world, in the presence of a thousand people,

to numbers of whom, he was perfectly well known, and to whom his voice and manner and the very incidents of his narrative, combine to demonstrate his identity beyond all doubt; and then picture to yourselves the effect of such a confession and of such a revelation upon the minds of all who listen to it! Would the most eloquent sermon ever preached by the greatest of clerical mediums—and there have been many such, reach the hearts of a congregation as this voice from beyond the grave, would do? How many of his hearers would dare to go on “laying up treasure on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal,” after listening to such a spirit’s remorseful wail over his own wasted life? At present numbers of externally devout men, who sit under this or that popular preacher, will hear him expound the words of the parable which speaks of a certain rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully; and who said to himself, “This will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods: and I will say to my soul, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry.” But God said unto him, Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided?”

Our good church-goer listens to the parable, nods his head approvingly, and whispers to himself:—“Very good, indeed, as applied to the people of Palestine, but quite obsolete in relation to the men and women of our more enlightened times.” And so he goes home to his mid-day meal, with a feeling of thankfulness in his heart that his own good fortune has placed him in a totally different state of society in which money making has been reduced to a science.

But let such a man be brought into touch with the spirit of a departed magnate of commerce, or finance, and listen to him as he dilates upon the agonies of remorse which he is suffering because he lived for himself and not for others; and hear him exclaim, like Jacob Marley:—“Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business. Charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence were all my business”: and I sacrificed them all to the accursed greed for gain;—let these revelations from the Beyond, become of continual occurrence in all the principal places of worship; and how long would it be before an entirely new and

7.2.2

spiritual ideal of human life would be set up in every part of Christendom? The churches have been preaching against selfishness for nearly seventeen hundred years; and to-day it is more absolute and more universal than at any period since the Crucifixion. And therefore they must acknowledge their utter and irredeemable failure. They have proved themselves to be blind leaders of the blind; and but one hope remains to them. That is Spiritualism.

They have hitherto refused to receive it, just as the chief priests and Levites, refused to receive the greatest Medium that ever walked the earth; notwithstanding the remarkable manifestations of his—to them—mysterious and seemingly miraculous power. "He is beside himself," was the verdict pronounced upon him by the Huxleys and the Faradays of Jerusalem. And the same cry is taken up, against ourselves, to-day. Let them rail, as they did then. At the present time there are 400 millions of human beings who call themselves by the name of One who was reviled during his life time as an impostor and a madman; and who will venture to calculate the number of Spiritualists there will be before the end of the present century? For Spiritualism must and will supersede or absorb the whole of the Churches, just as Christianity superseded and absorbed every form of so-called Paganism which then prevailed in Europe. For what chance have religions that rest upon faith only, against a science, a philosophy, and a system of divinity which is based upon the adamantine foundation of evidential proof, and on the living testimony of those who have actually passed into the higher, or the lower, life, as the case may be?

Is it not as plain to the eye of reason, as the sun at noonday is to our organs of physical vision, that

SPIRITUALISM IS THE LAST HOPE OF THE CHURCHES?

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF VICTORIA