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SPIRITUALISM AND THE CHURCHES.

Dr. Sprecher, while pastor of the First Presbyterian church in Oakland, Cal., preached against Spiritualism, or at least in such a manner that Spiritualists could not claim him as one of their fraternity. But a sermon of his on Sunday evening, February 24th, in Calvary church, San Francisco, of which he is pastor, presents him in quite another aspect. It is true that in this sermon, or lecture, as it was called, he speaks against spirit mediums and materializations; but Spiritualists will care little for that while he endorses and pleads for all that is essential to the existence and growth of Spiritualism. That we are correct in this statement every reader must admit who has any knowledge of Spiritualism and of the claims upon which it is based, when he reads the following, which we clip from the Chronicle's report of his lecture:

"The subject of Dr. Sprecher's lecture last evening was, 'Do the spirits of the departed revisit this world, and do they manifest themselves to men at this day?' There was, he said, an almost universal belief in an intermediate state of spiritual existence between death and the day of resurrection, during which period the soul was conscious, but in a different state from that upon which it would enter after the final judgment. This caused some doubt, but it was difficult to see the reason why. The Scriptures speak of angels and ministering spirits, and there are also instances mentioned therein of the spirits of the departed reappearing, while there is not a word which prevents a belief in the power of a spirit to revisit the earth if it so desired. The probabilities were all one way, and it was not at all unreasonable that if in the spirit world we retain the affection for those we leave behind, which we entertained while on earth, that we should desire to see them again. The speaker believed that the affections did not die with the body, and that our friends,

either as disembodied spirits or as spirit bodies, may visit and minister to us. This belief was not Spiritualism, as the term is generally understood, and was not incompatible with Christianity, and a Christian who held such a belief should not fall into the error that he had [R617 : page 6] forsaken his faith and must therefore seek refuge in Spiritualism."

We record our emphatic denial of the assertion that the Scriptures give any instances of "the spirits of the departed reappearing," and we invite any one to point out to us the texts wherein such reappearing is supposed to be given. We will examine them in our columns for the benefit of our readers.

But, aside from this, we remark that the doctor is right in saying that the belief he announces is "not incompatible with Christianity" – as he and his associates understand Christianity. But we insist that it comprises all that is vital to the existence of Spiritualism. And Spiritualists would no doubt rather have the doctor remain in his church and bring up the members to a recognition of spirit intercourse and spirit ministration, than to leave the church and professedly "seek refuge in Spiritualism," where his influence in favor of the assumed facts of that belief would not be so great as it now is, as pastor of a popular orthodox church.

And Spiritualists will not care much for his avowed disbelief in the reliability of mediums. They are always ready to admit that there are impostors among the mediums, and this admission robs the doctor's indictment of its force. But when he claims that his statements will apply to all mediums, then they will confront him with some millions who oppose their observation and experience to his, many of whom have put the mediums to the severest tests, and are fully convinced that there was no collusion or trickery in the

manifestations. We give the doctor's position on this point as reported:

"He then turned to the second head of his discourse, and said that whether or not spirits did manifest themselves at the present day, was a question of fact which could be put to the proof. The modern Spiritualists assert that they can materialize spirits, and volumes on the subject have been written by men of science and of no science. If such a thing were true, it was the most stupendous subject of the age. It was a subject to which the speaker had paid a great deal of attention, and after carefully following up the records of all the most celebrated mediums of the world, he was unable to recall one who had not, sooner or later, been proven a fraud. Whenever any one was bold enough to seize the materialized spirit, it had turned out to be either the medium or an accomplice. This had occurred so often that there was no room for doubt in the mind of any one that the whole thing was an imposture. Again, if a medium could call up the spirits of the mighty dead they could tell us something new; but, although the spirits of the great masters of poetry and prose, great scientists and inventors, have been time and again materialized, they seemed to have left all their genius behind them, and know no more than the least gifted of mortals. And this could not be laid to any lack of expression or want of education on the part of the medium, for a great as well as a small thought could be expressed in defective language."

Thousands upon thousands have with him concluded that "if such a thing were true, it was the most stupendous subject of the age." And the great majority, having a greater love for popular error than for unpopular Bible truth, will take the premises assumed and laid down by Dr. Sprecher, and logically conclude that the thing is true. We do not believe that mesmerism, psychology or clairvoyance can be explained upon natural principles. We are

aware that professed scientists have their explanations of these things, but, as one said to us when closely questioned on the subject, "That is our theory of the matter; but whether or not it is true we cannot positively say." But the number who have heard inexperienced and illiterate mediums, while entranced, speak in language which they could by no means command in their normal condition, is so large that the last part of the paragraph quoted above will have no effect at this day in overthrowing their claims to "spirit inspiration." The following paragraph concludes the report. As it is a noteworthy discourse on the subject, we thus give the report in full:

"There were many who believed in Spiritualism because they saw wonders which they could not account for on natural principles. But that was simply folly, for no medium had ever performed tricks equal to those of the professional jugglers of India, who disclaimed the agency of any supernatural power. They are simply illusions. Mesmerism and clairvoyance and mind-reading, which are agencies of mediumism, are all explainable upon natural principles, as is also the belief that many persons have that they see spirits. Medical works abound in instances of the latter, and prove that it is the result of an abnormal condition of the system, and that these supposed visions can be produced by mechanical appliances. The speaker had no faith in the habitual appearance of spirits, but there was one case in which it did seem possible for the spirit of one to communicate with another – at the hour of death. Many instances have occurred where a person has been apprised of the death of some dear relative or friend in that manner, and the fact of the death and the very hour and minute has been subsequently **[R617 : page 7]** confirmed, together with the circumstances as they appeared at the time. The power of the mind and will of one upon another in close sympathy of thought and feeling was very great, and it was possible that the soul in its extreme experience might

communicate with a kindred soul. These occurrences could not be coincidences. But this was not Spiritualism. The communications came direct without the aid of a medium. The speaker concluded by warning his hearers against the danger of being led into grave mistakes by listening to the advice of mediums, who are often in collusion with those who sought not their welfare."

We cannot think he has shown his reasoning powers to great advantage, according to this report. First, every probability, and facts of Scripture, he claims as proof in favor of the spirits of the departed reappearing. Then he states his belief that the interest of the departed in the welfare of the living is not lessened by their death. And next he attacks the mediums, clairvoyants and materializers as humbugs, and finally claims the possibility of one spirit communicating with another at the hour of death. But "possible" has no more place in this connection than in the other cases, as phenomena are presented under other circumstances which can be accounted for only by admitting their supernatural origin. And if his premises are correct, then all the phenomena shown by the most pretentious mediums may be true or genuine. To admit his premises is to admit the possibility of every claim of the Spiritualists to be just.

Not long since we saw the belief expressed by a writer that Bishop Bowman is a Spiritualist. We heard the Bishop speak of the presence and ministrations of his departed in such a manner as to lead us to believe that he was a full believer in Spiritualism; and his disclaimer, immediately made, did not change our opinion, if he meant just what his words expressed.

These positions of well-known ministers are the positions of hosts of ministers in the land who are making Spiritualism popular, and preparing the way for its general acceptance by the churches. The churches and the Spiritualists are drawing more closely

together. In a "reception" recently given to a Mrs. Lord, in Boston, she said, as reported in the Banner of Light:

"She remembered that in the audience before her were some who had not yet seen their way clearly to accept the light which was shining upon the pathway of mortals to-day. But why should the Christian Church deny the possibility of present as well as past inspiration. Though human tongues fall out of speech, would immortal love send back no echo across the waves of death? Could he who promised the full harvest forget the weeping sower? If such a bridge as that of Brooklyn could be reared by feeble human means across the pulsing tides, could not angel-minds plan and spirit-workers build a bridge of communion over the soundless waters of death? Spiritualism came to take away no one's faith, but to give knowledge to each and all – to make assurance doubly sure that the course of human life is an upward one, and the chain of being stretches through an eternity of progress."

This profession that Spiritualism came to take away no one's Christian faith, but rather to give knowledge of that which before was only belief, is "a new departure" for Spiritualists, but they are all fast advancing to that position. All now claim that Spiritualism is a religion, while very many claim that it is the Christian religion perfected. This is their part of the "compromise," while the churches are admitting the return of the spirits of the dead, and their intercourse with mortals, which is all that Spiritualists ask them to admit, and the members are assured that they need not leave their communions because of their entertaining such belief. If anything more is needed to place the churches and Spiritualists on common ground, we cannot imagine what it is. These main points admitted, minor questions will settle themselves.

These things are not unexpected to us. He who knows "what is man," and "who knows the end from the beginning," has placed

on record in the "sure word of prophecy" just such a state of things. Miracles to deceive, yet professing a pious intention, are plainly spoken of in Rev. 13 and 16, as being done in the last days. Our Saviour, in Matt. 24, and Paul in 2 Thess. 2, speak of these things, and all place these deceptions [R618 : page 7] just before the second advent of the Lord. Why, oh why, will not Bible readers and professed Bible believers look at these matters candidly, and accept the warning message which heaven sends for our instruction at this time? If the multitude will follow in the broad way, and choose darkness rather than light, we pray that God will give zeal and power in the proclamation of the message, that a little flock, a remnant, may accept it and receive the kingdom as their reward. (Luke 12:31-37.) –

Selected.