

SPIRITUALISM

AND CHRISTIAN COMMON SENSE.

SPIRITUALISM, ACCORDING TO ITS ADHERENTS, IS A SCIENCE AND AN ART HAVING FOR OBJECT CERTAIN EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN MAN AND THE SPIRITS.

The following article on Spiritualism is from the pen of an eminent professor of theology in this city, and appeared in the *Semaine Religieuse*, of Montreal. It is translated for THE TRUE WITNESS:—

Let us examine, consulting sound reason and Divine Revelation, 1st, What are the spirits with whom man can communicate; 2nd, What providential laws ordinarily govern these communications; 3rd, What exceptions these laws may admit. Then, in the light of true principles, we shall appreciate at their just value the teachings and the practices of spiritualism.

I.—With what spirits can man enter into communication?

There exist no other spiritual beings than those God was pleased to create out of nothingness,—HUMAN souls and the ANGELS. Human souls are united naturally to material bodies, from which death separates them for a time, but to which at the end of the world they will be again united for eternity.

Pure spirits, ordinarily called angels, are absolutely immaterial substances, gifted with intelligence and free will. Destined by Divine Goodness to a happiness infinitely superior to their natural aspirations, and adorned with all the treasures of grace, some merited by their obedience the glory prepared for them; the others by their revolt brought upon themselves eternal damnation.

All spirits spoken of by poets and popular legends are included in the above two classes, or are only dreams of the imagination.

II.—Which are ordinary laws governing the communications of man with the spirits?

The human soul, during this mortal life, can have relation with the exterior world only by means of the bodily organs, disposed in a normal manner. Thus, that a living man may converse with another, it is necessary that the tongue of one produce articulated sounds which shall reach the ears of the other; or that the first make signs or write words to be perceived by the eyes of the second. We have said that the organs of the body cannot be of service to the soul unless they be in a normal condition. For experience has taught us from our first infancy, and proves daily, that our eyes cannot see unless they be open, unless the object be separated by a luminous medium and at a distance not too great.

Has the Creator deposed in human nature the faculty of distinguishing objects through an opaque body, or in darkness, or at a distance? Can it be seriously supposed that so many methods of persons who, from the origin of mankind, have not ceased to exercise and perfect their sight, should have remained in an absolute ignorance of so precious a gift; and that this faculty, latent for so long a time, should have awaited the advent of spiritualism to manifest itself in a small number of adepts, and in an intermittent manner? No, evidently that is not a faculty natural to man.

And what we say of the sight is equally applicable to the hearing and the other senses.

2.—Can we communicate directly with a soul separated from its body?

No; for being deprived of those organs that served as a means of reaching the outer world, it has become naturally incapable of those kind of communications the moment it has left the body. Moreover, we know that according to a law of Providence, that admits of only miraculous exceptions, souls cannot leave heaven, hell or purgatory, either of themselves or by the authority of any created being. It is, therefore, through the intermediary of God and of the good angels that we can converse usefully with souls that are already in heaven or are preparing to enter, and these conversations are as easy as they are consoling and useful.

3.—All angels possess naturally a very wide knowledge of the laws that govern the physical world and a very great power to act upon material elements. Neither the glory of the good angels nor

the damnation of the bad angels did deprive them of this science and this power, to which is added the experience they have gathered during thousands of years.

4.—The good angels use their power and their science in perfect harmony with the will of God, to make men holy and happy, for they love men as their brothers and esteem it an honor to serve them. Very especially, God, in his ineffable providence, confided each man from the first instant of his existence to a guardian angel, who, without losing sight of the face of the Heavenly Father, watches over his charge day and night unceasingly, with the devotedness of a friend, the strength of a warrior, the tenderness of a mother, turning aside dangers that threaten the body, removing him from occasions that would be fatal to the soul, weakening the violence of temptations, consoling in sorrow, inspiring saintly aspirations and salutary remorse, and suggesting serious thoughts to prepare for death, and never tiring when meeting with resistance. And the soul can also, when it will, make known to its guardian angel, without recourse to outward speech, its desires, fears, distress, its confidence and gratitude. And these holy communications become more and more intimate and familiar, according as the soul is more innocent, more docile to the angelic inspirations, more confident in its celestial guide, without, however, producing, except in certain extraordinary cases, any sensible impression.

5.—God leaves to the fallen angels a certain liberty of leaving the infernal abyss; they take advantage of it to work evil to men whom they hate, because they see in them the living images of God and the heirs of that kingdom they rendered themselves unworthy of. They would make men the accomplices of their disobedience and the companions of their eternal wretchedness. Nevertheless, howsoever great be their hatred, their astuteness and their strength, God restricts their attacks to narrow limits, and always offers to men the graces they need to win glorious victories.

Without neglecting the occasions they find to hurt men in their bodies and in their goods, it is chiefly against their souls that they strive. Unable to penetrate into the sanctuary of their intelligence and their will, whose key is with God alone, they exercise their natural powers on material elements in order to excite the passions and the imaginations, and thereby to assault freewill.

Thus they know how to dress in brilliant colours the shadows of vain honours and the fith of vice; they transform into spasms of hatred, of fury or deep melancholy, a slight feeling of aversion, impatience or sadness that had not been promptly controlled;—they lessen shame before sin and exaggerate it when the sin is done—they trouble well-disposed souls by calling up obstinate distractions, scruples, humiliating temptations; they prepare dangerous occasions for inexperienced souls, and seek to make them unmindful of good advice—they entice from their duty those who are active and strong in their own judgment, to suggest to them a pretended good which God does not ask—they inspire to the one who commits a first sin now presumption and now despair;—they prevent the sinner from reflecting upon his deplorable state, allowing him to enjoy a false peace, sometimes even to the very portals of eternity, etc. To be pitied indeed are souls become the slaves of the spirits of evil, especially by a long habit of sensual sin or by blasphemy, or by the profanation of the sacraments. It is only by energetic efforts that they can recover the liberty of the children of God.

III.—Does God at times allow extraordinary communications between man and the spirits?

We have seen that the good and the bad angels labour incessantly for or against men, but that the exercise of their activity is confined to narrow limits and does not enter into the place of Divine Providence except under condition of not upsetting the order that reigns in the physical and moral world.

I.—Can God allow them to intervene in an extraordinary manner? Yes, certainly, the Almighty has the right to make exceptions in the ordinary course of the laws whose author He is, not only by working miracles proper, that is to say that effects He alone is capable of producing; but again in granting to pure spirits the liberty to perform wonders, that is to say,

effects proportioned to their natural powers but superior to our intelligence and our powers.

Has God *willed* it? Yes. Holy Writ attests it at almost every page from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Apocalypse. We learn from Sacred Scriptures that good or bad angels can: 1, act upon material elements; 2, take the form and the voice of a human being; 3, communicate to man knowledge they have acquired about secret events long past or actually taking place at a distance, as also that which their sagacity and their experience permit them to conjecture about the future; 4, carry a man instantaneously to a distant place; 5, inflict him with sickness and infirmities; 6, take possession of his tongue and of his members to use them in their own name; 7, cause death. Now, this power being exercised even by the demons, who use it only for evil, we must conclude that it is a natural power, for God's sanctity could not allow Him to furnish His enemies with supernatural strength to satisfy their malice. They abuse, therefore, one of those excellent qualities with which divine goodness had adorned angelic nature in creating it from nothing, and which the fallen spirits have preserved in integrity, altho' they have lost their supernatural endowments.

II.—The holy use to which the good angels put their power explains easily to us why God has them exercise now and again this power by supernatural deeds. Sometimes He sends them as His ambassadors to reveal His adorable secrets; thus Gabriel, the angel of the Incarnation, appears under human form to announce to Daniel the precise epoch of the Messiah's coming; to Zachary, the birth of the precursor; to Mary, her divine maternity. At other times He makes use of angelic ministry to prove His love for His faithful servants by protecting them, delivering them, consoling them in a marvellous manner. Raphael, one of the seven princes that stand before the throne of God, is given for several weeks as fellow-traveller to the young Tobias on his journey. A prophet carried in an instant from Judea to Babylonia, offers to Daniel in the lions' den the food he had prepared for his reapers; an angel makes fall the chains of Peter and opens to him, without the notice of the sentries, the great iron gate of the prison, etc. At times, also, the holy angels have been associated by divine justice in the execution of sentences, as in the destruction of abominable Sodom, in the exemplary chastisement of Heliodorus, the sacrilegious plunderer of the holy temple of Jerusalem, etc.

From apostolic times to our days, as is proved by the history of the saints, God has not ceased to manifest His love towards His generous servants by procuring the good angels the joy of displaying on behalf of beloved brothers the wonderful powers with which their Creator has enriched their nature.

III. The infinite wisdom of God has deemed well to permit the fallen angels to intervene in the world in an extraordinary manner, but by marking out to them limits they must not pass beyond, as is let out the chain of a ferocious mastiff. By so doing, He intends to prove and sanctify the just, to convert sinners, to chastise the obstinate and to show their immoderation to those who enter into communication with the spirits of darkness.

Thus, 1, Satan uses lightning and the tempest to destroy Job's flocks and household; 2, he strikes down this holy patriarch with various horrible maladies; 3, a fallen spirit holds for eighteen years a woman bent towards the earth, as testifies our Lord when caring her; 4, persons possessed of demons were numerous in Judea during the public life of our Saviour, even at times one alone would be the habitation of a legion of demons; 5, an evil spirit puts to death the unchaste men to whom was married successively the pure and virtuous Sarah, later the spouse of young Tobias; 6, Our Lord and His Apostles have announced that towards the end of time the Antichrist shall have at his disposal the power of Satan, to whom God will give extraordinary liberty, and that this man of sin shall work wonders capable of deceiving, if it were possible, the elect themselves; 7, in pagan countries, before or after the coming of Christ, Satan has not ceased to uphold his tyranny by real diabolical wonders, which are testified to us by missionaries and travellers in Africa, China, etc.; 8, even in the

bosom of Christian peoples when a man wishes, through malice or curiosity, to enter into communication with the spirits of darkness, they are ever ready to render him services, for which they will exact dear payment; 9, as our Lord has established sacraments that produce Divine effects, even when he who confers them has not supernatural faith, so Satan, the ape of God, annexes, as far as lies in his power, superhuman effects to outward signs he is pleased to choose, for example, to certain signs, certain words, the use of certain material objects, such as tables, planchettes, etc. Even though imprudent persons using them have not the express will to question a demon, he will hasten to work, according to their desire, in order to entice into fatal illusions; and God often punishes their temerity by not interposing any obstacle.

IV. Conclusion.—What must be thought of Spiritualism?

As has been said above, spiritualism glories in being the science of extraordinary communications between man and the spirits, and the art of procuring these kinds of communications.

1. Let us examine what its end is,—what means it employs,—what its results are.

Its end is to obtain services that are more or less dangerous, especially the knowledge of certain things God has resolved to keep us ignorant of, as for example, the judgment he pronounces at the death of a certain person, the mysteries of the future—or certain events in themselves the objects of human knowledge, but which for the time being cannot be, or are not wished to be learned, according to the means established by the Creator of the natural and the supernatural world—for example, that which took place far from every human eye, that which is taking place at a great distance, that which is contained under lock and key, etc.

2.—The means is recourse to the spirits, with whom relation is established by words and signs, the intermediary of a material object, or of a person acting as medium, or even by a simple act of the will.

3.—What are the results? First and foremost, we must give a wide margin to deception and to the imagination; and then keeping equally apart from two intellectual weaknesses that consist in denying and in believing without examination:

It remains proven by weighty and numerous testimonies that many times, in different places, and in different epochs, there have been obtained by the practice of spiritualism, effects that are certainly superhuman, particularly as regards information concerning things distant.

II.—Can all this be reconciled with the light of reason and of the Gospel?

1.—The end is grievously sinful, since it is an attempt to rashly break down the barriers placed by Divine Wisdom about human understanding, and to upset the fundamental laws of the physical world and of human society.

2.—To have recourse to the spirits is a criminal means. In point of fact, what are these spirits from whom light and help are asked? The souls of the dead? Shall God send them miraculously, to make of them the accomplices of an insolent disobedience? Are they the good angels? No; this sinful temerity causes them horror. Therefore, the consultations of spiritualism are necessarily addressed to the spirits of living and malice, to the sworn enemies of God and of man.

3.—The results, when really superhuman, are stamped with a diabolical seal. The spirit begins by quaint feats, in offensive answers, pious words (Satan quoted words of Holy Writ to Our Lord, and St. Paul tells us that the devil can transform himself into an angel of light and holiness). Later, assuming the name of some dead person, he reveals secrets known only to the questioner. Fond of lies and of discord, he empties the poison of detraction and calumny on persons whose uprightness is suspect to the questioner. He goes so far as to teach errors more and more gross concerning the state of souls departed from this life, and too often succeeds in destroying the faith of the imprudent who take pleasure in listening. These poisonous fruits, and many others that might be given, show that spiritualism is condemned equally by faith and by reason.

III.—Therefore: 1. They commit a grievous offence against God who seriously wish to place themselves in communication with the spirits or to employ means suggested by Spiritualism, even