

constant apprehension that he is deceived. What may appear incredible to-night may be so clearly explained to-morrow, that you will wonder at yourself that a doubt entered your mind. Be willing to be advised by those who have received greater light than yourself; and when so advised, remember that the mind to which has been vouchsafed the higher teachings of the spirits can not if it would, press on you considerations which it has received for the mere purpose of gratifying vanity. Every revelation of high character leads the mind one step toward its eternal progress. And when your notions and prejudices on many subjects shall have been submitted to the searching analysis of spirit-chemistry, you will be confounded at the causes which have rendered your investigations so perplexing, and you will regard most of your past experience as of but little consequence compared with the great truths which will be opened to your comprehension.

Your mind is so unsettled, that I am afraid I have scarcely made myself intelligible. BACON.

Mr. Sterling then left, and I asked some inconsiderable question, and received this answer:

I wish you could know the engrossing topics of my heart. When I have imbued yours and the Doctor's minds with all I have to explain, then shall I wend my way back to those glorious spheres where my soul can rise step by step toward the eternal rest in store, where the chord touched in love on your earth will vibrate in such tones of harmony through *all* the spheres, that there will resound one grand response of celestial melody that shall fill the remotest bound of creation with the inspiring theme of love, love forever and ever.

## Section Eighteen.

*Wednesday May 11th, 1853*

This evening, in my library, it was written:

I FEAR I can not well talk with you to-night, as I find my amanuensis is in an unfit state of mind to write freely. I wish the Doctor were with *me*, as I could then give him the sympathy he so much needs. After a while, perhaps, I could write more easily, but I want he should go home early, and rest both mind and body.

We then sat and conversed for one hour or more, when the Doctor's hand was moved, and the following questions were propounded, and answers given:

I said, Let us not forget that Luther and Calvin were once with us, desirous of conversing, and that we are willing and will be ready at any time to have them do so.

It was answered:

I have not seen Luther or Calvin since the night when they were here. When the proper time arrives, they will visit you, if you wish.

I then asked this question: Will spirits be instructed generally as to your arrangements and plans through us, and so be led to aid them? And how can inferior spirits be prevented from communing?

It was answered:

Spirits recognize the feelings of the mind in its reflex action. Thus, when your mind is engrossed with an important and grave subject, the effect of which would contribute to the benefit of man, they feel the influence of the thoughts; and the progressed spirits, acknowledging the principle from the affinity with their own desires, will aid you in accomplishing your purposes. Thus, then, there is no difficulty in attracting around you good spirits, if the

motives of your heart partake of a divine character. And you may be assured that no unprogressed spirit will visit a circle or individual when there is a general or individual desire to seek information of an elevated character. The unprogressed spirits can have no congeniality with high and noble desires, and therefore they leave the way clear for those whose affinities correspond.

I then asked, What is it that makes it so much easier for us to learn what is wrong than what is right?

And it was answered:

Because the mind is a mirror from which is reflected not only objects from the external world, but also the ideas which that impression has produced. Now there is a principle beyond the question you have asked which you have recognized, but do not choose to avow; and that is, that the mind must have first admitted the right, even if it elected to do the wrong. It is not easier, therefore, to do wrong; but the right conceded, the wrong may not be easier, but more convenient for the purposes of self-interest.

No educated mind exists but what must struggle with itself when it chooses wrong rather than right. Then oftentimes the image reflected is distorted, crooked, and the action is consequently irregular. But your mind has answered the question already. Circumstances control the acts of man far beyond the belief of a majority of philosophers.\* Somewheres your said-to-be-inspired writers say,

\* When this had been said to us, I illustrated it to the Doctor by telling him an incident which had occurred while I was one of the Inspectors of the State Prison, and which had struck me with great force, and I thought it would not be amiss to insert it in our book as an exposition of the teachings

Through the Doctor's hand it was written:

"I am overwhelmed with the question. Insert it by all means."

The incident was this:

I was endeavoring to introduce into our penitentiaries a reform in the mode of government. The system had been for many years one of force and fear only, and it had grown to be horribly cruel and harsh; so much so, that in the prison with which I was connected more than 3,000 blows with the whip had been inflicted a month. There was no appeal to kindness, none to the reason, but the prisoners were kept in subjection only by the whip.

"When I would do good, evil is present with me." Now

My effort was to introduce, instead, the law of kindness, and appeal rather to the reason than the fear of the convicts.

This necessarily involved a great deal of personal intercourse with them, and I tried to set an example of that to the subordinate officers of the prison. Among the persons with whom I was thus brought into contact was a man about forty-five years of age, whose early history I inquired into.

When he was about five or six years old his widowed mother, who resided in one of our largest cities, had married a second husband, who was harsh and unfeeling toward her children, and had actually turned this little fellow out of doors. In the daytime he had wandered about the streets, begging his food, and at night, having no place to sleep in, he strayed back near his mother's residence, and slept in boxes and on the stoop of her house, etc. The watchmen had found him there several nights, and taken him to the watch-house, until finally he was committed to the poor-house.

Here he had lived among pauper children, in an institution not very well regulated, according to his account, until he was old enough to be bound out as an apprentice. He had had a hard-hearted, unfeeling master, and in a few years run away from him. Then for some years he wandered about the wharves of a large sea-port, gaining a precarious livelihood by occasional labor, and herding with the depraved and the ignorant. He went to sea, and tiring of that, returned to his old life along the wharves, and thus spent a number of years between "ship and shore." He varied the scene at times by being sent to prison, and had spent a good deal of time in various prisons, as well in those designed for punishment as in those for detention, and finally brought up in the Sing-Sing Prison, where he had been several years when my attention was directed to him. I conversed a good deal with him, in order to find out the modes of government of the prisons where he had been, and the effect upon him, to ascertain what his early training had been, and how he had been led on to the state of degradation in which I found him. His natural powers of mind were considerable, and from our frequent intercourse he became quite familiar with me, and would speak to me almost every time I came near him. I found that his thoughts dwelt almost entirely upon his animal comforts. I endeavored to give them a different direction, and elevate them to something higher. But it was difficult, for he could not read, and the rules of the prison forbade his conversing with any one but his overseer and the superintendent of his work.

One day as I passed him, he accosted me, and entertained me with a long and animated account of his personal discomforts. Vexed at the little progress my teachings had made with him, I somewhat impatiently said to him, "Ever harping on your animal wants! Why can't you have better thoughts?" "Better thoughts!" was his answer, "where shall I get them?"

And when I reflected that, with all of us, our thoughts are more occupied with the past and the future than with the present, I was struck with the question as one teaching me a lesson of great wisdom.

this is a fair admission of the proposition stated above; the good is there, but the evil is consequent on the thousand contingencies which beset man on every side. Were man to believe that the spirits of his friends may witness his thoughts and acts for good or evil, he never would give loose to those feelings which, dependent on his selfish desires, control so much of his action.

I remarked, that I had some more questions, but did not know about asking them.

It was written:

Be brief. Yes, yes—ask, and it shall be given you.

I then asked this question, How came Luther and Calvin here on that occasion? What was it brought them here?

It was answered:

The general effect of the tone of your minds. I wish I could impress the fact on your comprehension, that when the feelings of your heart are of a lofty aspiration for good, for truth, it draws around you spirits whose mission is on earth, and yet the influence of your mind is felt in the spheres; for the principle of truth, of knowledge, of good, binds this whole creation in chains stronger than brass, and the great link of communication carries the current of your feelings to every mind which assimilates in the sentiment with your own, and your acts, your desires, are recognized and admitted by the spirits occupying them.

I then inquired, Can we ever be so advanced as to be able to see you. I mean ever while in the flesh? I make my question personal to the Doctor and myself, merely to give it point, but my inquiry is intended to relate to all mankind, for what is true of us must be true of others.

It was answered:

When I say I can read your mind, I mean just what I have intended to say in what was written a moment ago; therefore to pretend I can read your heart would be to assume powers I do not, can not, possess. But believing that you are a true man, earnestly seeking to unveil from the grave's dark abyss the glorious scenes which lie far beyond,

I converse with you, teach you, feel with and of you, and am desirous to answer the questions you propose. Thus, then, I answer yes, when there shall be a desire existing in your mind, unmixed, unalloyed with self; when you can stretch your vision back over the acts of your life, and forward to the future, and, comparing that future with the past, shall have felt your whole nature moved with the uncontrollable wish to divest yourself of every selfish feeling; when you shall plan and execute how, and when, and where to do good for the sake of the principle, then will your nature become so purified, so elevated, that the daily and hourly communion with spirits will take place at your simplest wish. But even with all your faults, there are means now being tried to manifest ourselves personally to you, that you may have assurance made doubly sure. I want to ask you if you act daily on the suggestions made in these teachings? Do you exert yourself to soothe any anxious heart? are you willing to work as well as wish? Not in reference to this cause alone, but for humanity in the effect; but as you understand me I will not write the rest.

I then asked this question: Pray tell me what it is that prompts me to make these inquiries? Is it my own mind or the action of some one else on it?

It was answered:

The strong desire to understand yourself, and all that pertains to this subject.

I here remarked, that I should have to defer our meetings for one or two evenings, as I was behind in my official business, and must devote more time to it.

It was written:

Certainly. Never neglect earthly duty, for there is time for me and you and the Doctor. Well, much as it will pain me to defer these teachings, now that the Doctor's mind is really zealous and earnest, still I will not, should not, tax your strength or interfere with your official duties. I am not always conscious of your work before you. This is my excuse.

## Section Nineteen.

*Thursday, May 12th, 1853.*

This evening, at Dr. Dexter's, all the circle being present, it was written:

WITH us, as with you, there are certain inducements offered us gratuitously by other minds, and certain attractions of like feeling and sentiment, that unconsciously draw us to certain localities, where we derive a pleasure and satisfaction that it is almost impossible to describe.

Attracted here as I am, and have been for a long time, in the heart's expression corresponding to the same feeling in my own mind, I look forward to the time when I shall meet you with a sort of impatience, as I feel that the ideas taught by me and received by you will not be buried in your brains, but will be disseminated at the proper time, so that the good they are designed to accomplish will sooner or later take place.

Therefore do I to-night greet you, my friends, once again in the name of that Being whose principles I am to inculcate, and whose attributes it is my peculiar province to describe.

SWEEDENBORG.

The daily habits of spirits have been but little understood, and the attempts heretofore made to give you a correct idea of the every-day life in the spheres seem to me to fail entirely, as what has been taught you affords no consistent idea of their daily occupations, their mode of life, their form of government, in fine, the history of spirits in the several spheres.

I will now briefly tell you how they live, how they act, and how they pass from one sphere to another.

I want your undivided attention.

Learned men who have written about life and death, have in vain labored to describe the act of dying. And those of you who have witnessed a death-bed have often observed the singular expressions made by the sick person, which faintly shadow, as it were, the indistinct glimpses of that land of which he is soon to become an inhabitant.

What the last sensations of the dying may be, perhaps it will ever be impossible to know; but that, when the spirit has half-way shuffled off its mortal covering, and the last sparkle of life-connection flickers and flashes fitfully amid the wreck of the body of which it is a proper part, the mind seems to acquire, even in death, a new property—that of observing the many circumstances which are taking place in the world to which the spirit goes—and I believe that this new property gives it the power of assisting the spirit to see the forms of friends, and the light which always surrounds a good spirit; and, I am confident, facts bear me out in this assertion. When, then, one is dying, his spirit passing out of the old body as out of a shell, often indistinctly beholds the forms of men and women around it. It sometimes, too, beholds the shadowy outline of some parts of the second sphere, and thus the expressions which we often hear may readily be accounted for. The last idea, or tangible sensation to the dying—I mean to the dying who retains his senses—is, perhaps, anguish at parting from friends, and a sort of strange expectancy at what he is to witness after death. I am inclined to agree with an idea often advanced by one of you, that, for the most part, the dying lose all fear of death. The near approach of the spirit to the borders of that sphere into which it is about entering, acts upon the mortal dread of death as a soother and quieter of its previous apprehensions. It is a sort of an amalgamation of feeling, a kind of mingling of spirit-land with earth, and it tranquilizes the soul in its last conflict with this state of its bodily organization.

With its feelings calmed, and its thoughts dwelling on friends and kindred, this mingling together of the two in-

fluences attracts a portion of its last sensations of thought to the spirit-land, and while it is struggling with itself, and the anguish it feels, there comes the aid of spirit-friends, and the charmed influence of spirit-land, and the last sensations recognized by its brain may be the mingling or admixture spoken of.

The heart has ceased to beat, the heaving breast has settled into an everlasting quiet, the soul has bounded one step forward in its immortal race, and stands on the confines of eternity.

Unconscious it remains, benumbed as it were by the terrible struggle it has accomplished—the first and last struggle where there is pain—until it wakes up from its dream, and recognizes the forms of friends long since dead, and a new land, the beauty of which dazzles its untried senses.

The spirit does not lay in its spirit-form; but as soon as the death is over, it passes into a new organization, into a new body created from matter, but so pure in comparison to its old body, that even its beauty and refinement occupy no small portion of its first examination.

And here it may be argued, that the body could not be made so matured and laid by, waiting for the occupancy of the spirit, when it leaves the earth. But it may be answered, that when every thing on your earth is measured by the standard of what exists on that earth, it is no criterion by which to judge of cause and effect in the spirit-land. And again, your ideas of creation are so circumscribed by the diminutive little earth you occupy, that there is no great wonder that your conclusions should be of no great magnitude either.

Well, the soul has waked up in a new body and on a new earth. It has recognized friends and kindred, and has learned, that it has passed from death to life. Now commences the history of the life of that spirit.

After the natural curiosity of the spirit has been gratified—for under every form of organization the spirit develops its desire to learn—it is chosen, or, rather, it selects, by the

force and direction of its affinities, the associates with whom it will daily mingle, and the neighborhood in which it will reside.

Now, in the second sphere, there are many places or planets occupied by spirits, and it goes to one or the other in obedience to this law, and there remains until it is ushered into the sphere above. It finds the land or earth which it inhabits organized like your own, requiring labor to develop its resources, and that it is incumbent on it to labor for its own good as well as others. And here let me say, that, in the spheres, labor is substantially the first fealty demanded in any community of any person who may claim to be a member. It is the great characteristic of the spirit-land, and is recognized as of God.

In the second sphere, the organization being less refined than in the spheres above, the new spirit often finds it necessary to shelter its body from the sun or storm; not because it gives it pain, or that it would induce sickness or disease to expose its body to all the variations of temperature, but that its pleasures are enhanced by its compliance with all the laws of nature; and to expose the body to cold or wet, with its organization not entirely freed from all admixture of earth, would diminish the real pleasure it would receive from shelter or protection. Consequently, it erects its habitations, and clothes its body, and looks out for the means of sustaining its strength, or, rather, of providing for its appetite. Learn, also, that the laws of nature, in their application to the material body of the spirit, are so properly appreciated by the spirit, that while a violation would not produce disease or pain, yet the spirit who neglects or refuses compliance is degraded, as a punishment for such infraction of what it knows to be right. And this is not inflicted by any tribunal, but takes place as a natural consequent; the spirit sinks lower and lower, till its density bears it to the places below the earth.

I had better close for to-night, for reasons obvious to all.  
Good-night.