

Section Twenty

Saturday, May 14th, 1853.

This evening, when Dr. Dexter called on me, I told him that in reading over the minutes of our last evening's meeting a question had occurred to me, and I read it to him in these words: You say, "spirit being of the same origin and of the same ultimate destiny," etc. Do you mean all spirits by this? Or is there a separate class of angels, or spirits, created as such, and not originally subject to the law of human progress? Or is the first sphere of human existence (meaning all human existence throughout the whole universe) the great storehouse from which alone the higher and highest conditions of spiritual existence are peopled?

After some half hour or more's conversation on this and other topics, his hand was moved, and this answer to that question was written:

How insignificant is man! How contracted the circle in which he moves! Surrounded on all sides by obstacles which his genius, not his strength, overcomes, he can not compare in his physical powers with the horse which he has tamed to his hand. He views the firmament spread out before him, studded with a thousand worlds, but, confined to earth, he stretches forth his hands in vain to reach them, and explores them only by and through his mind. He sends his ships to the farthest verge of his own globe, and yet he is scarcely able to move by his own strength the weight of his own body.

And yet, though man be so insignificant in the organization of his body, how powerful the workings of his wondrous mind! He measures the distance of the remotest star, and marks the wanderings of the most eccentric comet, calculating its return with the prescience of a God. He plunges amid the profundity of worlds, and out of the confusion of their own order he arranges system after system,

and makes them, as it were, obedient to the calculations he has established for their arrangement.

Confined to earth in his body, he penetrates its dark interior, and brings out to view the precious treasures hidden there. He approximates to the God who created him, for he commands all other created beings, and they obey the dictates of his will. In his care and foresight he provides against the contingencies of time, and lays up against the slow but sure passage of years, the support of the weak and the poor, as well as the rich and powerful. In his affections, he manifests a correspondence with the attributes of his Creator; for though in his artificial relations his selfishness is manifest and distinct, yet in the relation to the great whole of his kind, he has founded laws which protect the rights of every one claiming kindred with himself.

In his justice, he has reduced the biases of his own nature; and in the stern administration of the laws, he has made every one alike.

In his charities, he has provided for the poor and necessitous, and has made each one, according to his ability, contribute for the support of his brother.

In his tastes and fancies, he has made the dark and the hideous, the misshapen and distorted, yield to the godlike power of his innate sense of beauty, and avows his divine origin by his love for all the works of his God.

How wonderful is man, who has played with the lightning and the storm, and has toyed with them as a froward child!

Contemplating his works, we ask is this man, who, from the rough and misshapen world around him, has created objects of so much strength and beauty? What was man when the earth was covered over all its surface either with dark forests, or barren plains, or inaccessible mountains, or arid and parched-up deserts? Who has fashioned out of the unfinished world such glorious harmony, such wonderful consequences? Man—the weak—the insignificant!

And how is this? By what means has he leveled mountains, and filled up valleys, prostrated forests, and o'er the barren desert stretched forth his fruitful hand, and raised up such magical wonders by the mere force of his will? By the law of his nature, which has fashioned him as he is, and has made him the co-worker of his Creator.

Ask you, then, if there are angels created distinct from man? Ask yourself if an angel has transmitted, from age to age, the impress of his mind, and has made the hearts of man, thousands of years following him, burn with the eloquence of his mighty thoughts! Could God create two distinct classes of beings out of himself, and give to one the precedence over the other? If from his own nature he has created man, how, from that same nature, could he have fashioned another race of beings distinct from man?

Ask yourself these questions, and answer when you may.

BACON.

After we had read over, and reflected, and conversed on the foregoing for a while, it was further written:

What are considered by you as angels, are but the beatified spirits of men, in whom the progress of their nature has developed all that there is of beauty and perfection of form.

They are, as I am led to believe, the spirits of men whose organization has passed the seventh and last process of refinement, and are constantly in intercourse with all that can be known of God. No human mind, fertile in imagination as it is, can picture to its wildest fancy the overpowering and transcendent beauty of the progressed and elevated soul. The world's images of thought fail to convey the faintest idea of my meaning, and I shall, therefore, leave the description to the evidence of your own senses.

In communicating so many thoughts and new ideas as I have done, I have thought if it would not be well if you were to penetrate the deep metaphysical nature of many of

my observations, and ask questions concerning the abstract meaning of my statements.

There is, after all, a deep and innate feeling in man's nature of what is called superstition, but what I consider the only evidence we have that man's spirit recognizes the source from whence it emanated, and recollected, perhaps, something which impressed its consciousness before it was sent into this world.

Therefore, when you give your book to the world, will it not elicit the right sort of inquiry, if the deeper meaning of the revelations is probed, and the true intent and purpose made manifest? I trust you will ask all questions which are suggested to your mind, without reference to the magnitude of the object comprehended in their statement.*

The Doctor asked me if I had ever entertained the thought that the soul brought into its connection with matter, in constituting man, any ideas which it had derived from its previous existence?

I answered, Yes. I had imbibed such a notion from some of the earlier spiritual teachings which I had received, and that the fact, of which all of us were at some time or other conscious, that things which we knew had never happened to us before, were yet as familiar as if they had, was the relic of some such prior existence. I had subsequently been taught that in this I had been in an error, but the general idea, that the soul did retain some consciousness derived from such prior existence, still existed in my mind.

Then it was written:

I may, perhaps, give you a clearer idea of my meaning. When I say meaning, I intend to say what are my convictions from what I have witnessed, and from what I know.

After the separation of the spirit from the parent source, it, perhaps, receives no idea of any kind until it is incorporated with matter. But before this separation, it must have been impressed with thoughts far beyond any it receives

* This last remark was evidently called out by one which I had made in the course of the evening, in which I had expressed my unwillingness to ask any question that was not manifestly commensurate with the magnitude of the subject, and the elevated character of those who were teaching us.

while connected with man's body, or even after death, and in its progress through the spheres.

I am inclined to believe this, as from my own feelings even now, and from what I daily observe of man's mind. This feeling of superstition, or of spirit-recollection, is connected with an overweening one, in which the power, the might, and the omniscience of God is specially distinguished. It is as if the soul was conscious that at some time it had been impressed with thoughts too mighty to conceive; and the terror which so often assails the strongest mind is mixed with a seeming knowledge of what that power was, at the thought of which the soul shrank powerless, and that the spirit knew it from a sort of participation or connection with the origin of all power and might.

I shall close here, and hope that after a little conversation you will both retire, as I intend, next week, to push you as hard as you can well permit. Good-night.

BACON.

Section Twenty-one.

Sunday, May 15th, 1853.

The circle met this evening at Dr. Dexter's, and before any communication began, I remarked to the Doctor that, as Lord Bacon had suggested, I had been preparing questions arising from his teachings, and among others I had asked: Why the change of heart which the religionists spoke of was not just as much evidence of the truth of their belief, as the change Lord Bacon had spoken of was evidence of the truth of these teachings?

And remarking, also, upon the extraordinary character of these revelations, I said, That not more than one out of a thousand, even of the believers in spiritualism, would credit them.

The Doctor asked me if I had my questions ready as to Swedenborg's last teachings?

I replied, No; only one or two inconsiderable ones, and I would postpone them until our next meeting.

It was then written:

It is well; but before I proceed to the proper subject of my lecture, it might be as well to remark on the topic of your conversation just now, the effect which this new revelation may have on the minds and faith of community; therefore while I greet you, my friends, in the spirit of true affection and love, I suggest if I had not better do as I have proposed.

SWEEDENBORG.

We assented, and then it was written:

It is not strange that there should be believers and unbelievers on a matter the evidence of which is mostly appreciatory, and not tangible. But so it is in all the religious doctrines taught to man since the world was formed, and much of the faith exercised by mankind has been as much dependent on the will of the teacher as on the eternal truths of his teaching.

But while, on the one hand, you observe the various hues and complexions given to religious belief on precisely one idea, you can not well understand why this should be so, or why, when it is admitted that there is a God and Christ is his son, that the identity of the one should be disputed, or the existence of the other denied. You can well believe, that as only from material evidence God can be approached (in his idea of existence), you do not comprehend why all that God has directed for the government and action of man should be so variously communicated, when the fact of its being of God is supposed to be beyond all doubt.

You have referred to the change which a belief in any of the doctrines inculcated produces in the mind of man, and you ask why is the comparison of the same effect by Bacon of spirit-faith of any difference with that of any believer in any faith or doctrine? Now it is well and proper that we notice all that is the result of your thought and expression when we are present with you, as it gives

us opportunity of answering the objections of your judgment, ere the biases these objections might create should become a permanent conviction. Thus, if Christians teach you there is one God, and that he meant, in revealing his thoughts and intentions toward man, to differ in different circumstances, then you have not the mental ability to understand how God should be immutable and unchangeable, as he is represented. But, on the other hand, if you believe that the thousand opposite statements and doctrines represented as of God are but the vain or fanciful, the severe or stern emanations of man's brain, you can very well realize that a faith predicated on man's thought or understanding of what God might be, or what he might have intended to say, is of no vital consequence to man in reference to his life here on earth, or his life after death.

Now the meaning of Bacon's remark was this: that an effect produced by an arbitrary exercise of any power, whether over the body, and certainly over the mind, can not produce that change in life or action that a belief can which is left to man's judgment, after the whole facts of the case are given.

Thus, on the one hand, while there will be fanaticism and enthusiasm, there will be life or death for the advance or result of any given doctrine; and while there will be persecutions and burnings, torturing and imprisonment, to overawe the thought of man's mind, there will absolutely be a corresponding progress in his whole life and nature in keeping with the manner in which the doctrines are inculcated, and the means taken to make those doctrines prevalent.

I am satisfied, that while the world was under religious government, the thought, the progressive energy and development of every class of society, were either retrograding or positively stationary. While, on the contrary, not until man's mind, freed from all restraints of priest or church, was permitted, or, rather, did of itself recognize in the God they adored a God of progress and intelligence,

and saw the minute connection of this principle of his nature with every part of creation, did the faculties of man's mind fully appreciate their own power. I mean, not until this was absolutely granted man as a right, and he viewed it, too, as a law, could he advance one step in the race of mind. And I am glad that I have so pertinent and felicitous a comparison in the fact, that since the world has been called liberal, there have been more inventions, more contrivances, more science, more true knowledge, more positive advance and progression in one brief decade, than in hundreds of years before.

Thus, while this is so, we recur again to one part of this subject, and that is, that while the fruits of one belief are witnessed in the very fact of retrogression or stationary satisfaction, and the character of the mind assumed the complexion of the world around it, which again it has contributed to produce, the faith we teach, left to the undirected investigation of man's untrammelled thought, and the determination or choice of his judgment, produces a condition or change exactly the reverse. While it satisfies the void which no belief in any system of revealed (so said) religion has ever done, it at the same time imparts to his mind the change of just apprehension of himself, a *Γνωσις Σαυτου*, not by a comparison with any rules of any sect, but from the fact that he now comprehends that there is just as much required of him here as there is after death, and that a soul here bowed down by error, can not rise ascendingly toward the point of its ultimate and eternal home, until it shall have purged itself by its own efforts of the sin that besets it.

No marvelous dependence on the power or will of God can alter his conviction, that when he has of himself done wrong, it is by himself, and that self alone, that the wrong must be eradicated. And, therefore, that while a change of heart may be necessary, as a mere comparative term, yet no power, except the just action and operation of his own mind, can produce that change.

Many men, who have not the courage to avow a desire to investigate even, will oppose you from a fear that the interests of their church will suffer, if this strange doctrine should circulate. Other men, while they really believe that they are safe for heaven, will oppose you for the reason, that if you can obtain happiness eternal by such means, it will interfere with a certain right they have in dictating how your ultimate position should be secured. Others will deny all that is taught, because they do not know any thing about what is taught, and never will know, were they to live till the mountains tottered with old age. Many, from a firm conviction that you are wrong and desire to set you right. There is a class, too, who, fearing you may be right, will strongly oppose you from the apprehension that if, indeed, you be right, they must be eternally miserable, and thus they oppose you for fear that some spark will light up their minds and expose the darkness of error which there exists. Many will battle for the honor of Christ. Others fight for the honor of a name. A great many, and oh! how I regret to say, that there numbers in this list, a great, very great many clergymen, will ignorantly oppose you, because they can not admit that any new idea is of any good, forsooth, as if the whole range and phases of God's creation was not ever new and varied, and that every idea, however old, is always elicited from a new cause; this class will oppose you from the motive mentioned above, as well as the fear that they alone shall lose by it. Some from one thing, some from another, some from reason, some from insanity, some purely and honestly, others wickedly and perversely. But the effect will be, after all, to establish, like a sun in mid heavens, truth eternal, unchangeable, immutable, that God is alone and needs no help, that our ultimate destiny, dependent on ourselves, can not be unhappy, if we work and labor to obtain that truth.

And lastly, that spirit and matter are co-existent through eternity, and that the first evidence given to man that spirit

could communicate with him, was the evidence that God is of himself sufficient to the perfection of that which is of himself, and that he is the end and the beginning, and that man, accompanying him from the beginning, shall exist with him to the end.

Section Twenty-two.

Monday, May 16th, 1853.

This evening, in my library, Dr. Dexter and I were discussing some of these teachings. Some one had remarked, that as soon as he became satisfied these teachings were from Swedenborg he believed. The Doctor and I said that we did not assent to that proposition. We did not undervalue the source, or rather channel, through which the teachings came, but what had the most influence with us was, the teachings themselves, their clearness and precision, their candor, the profundity of thought, and the force of the reasoning. Come from what source these might, they would work conviction in our minds.

After we had closed this conversation, and I saw that the Doctor's hand was becoming affected, I asked if I should now propound the questions I had prepared?

It was written in answer:

As we have but little time to-night, I beg you will defer your questions until to-morrow night, as, too, I want to say a word on the subject you were discussing just now.

That I am pleased with the effect of our teachings it would be vanity to deny [as if spirits had any vanity!!], and as the subject opens before you, there will be more of surprise and wonder that even your minds, accustomed as they are to examine carefully the whys and wherefores of every question, should have so many years remained ignorant of the eternal truths which pertain to your immortal nature.