

The Seven Principles of Spiritualism

An Address delivered to the Annual Conference

Halifax July 3rd, 1921

Nearly twenty years ago, I stood in the Birmingham Art Gallery lost in the contemplation of a picture that had captured my imagination. It was only a small picture showing a piece of desert land, a blue sky, and some prominently placed stars arranged zodiacally in the upper portion and proclaiming its symbolic character. The attention was mainly directed to three figures whose actions and attitudes served to focus one's thought on the mysteries surrounding our human life.

The first was an old man bowed with the weight of years, almost sightless eyes, and leaning heavily on his staff. One palsied hand was outstretched to guide his weary way along the road no longer open to his earthly vision. He had left the morning of life far behind; his mission was fulfilled: and now it was night with him and he was waiting the call to go hence. Hopes and fears, joys and sorrows had all ceased to move him; he longed only for sleep and a little forgetting. Instinctively there came to one's mind the proverb "Work while it is called today, for the night cometh when no man can work." Whatever this soul found time to do must abide. Whatever he intended, but forgot to do, must now remain undone forever. The will and the strength to accomplish have vanished. Much or little, good or evil, the sum of his deeds was in the pouch at his girdle, and cannot anymore be added to or taken away.

Near him was a younger man in the prime of life. He is a hunter and has just drawn his bow, his eye following eagerly the speeding arrow. Perhaps he aimed at Truth, or some other quarry. He is essentially the man of action, fully conscious of his physical and mental powers. He has definite ambitions, and is quite sure what gifts he will ask from life. With steadfast purpose he seeks those things that the eyes can see, and the hands handle. Above all he grasps for the power to wield over Nature and lesser humans. He is the supreme Materialist and the creature of today. For him the questions "Whence and Whither?" may wait till to-morrow for answer. Sufficient for the day is each day's experiences.

The third, figure was that of a youth, beautiful and fair to look upon. He was the heir, and his inheritance was all the future. He was lovely for the potentialities that lay hidden within him, and for the promise of what he might become. How tenderly his folk must have regarded him, rejoicing in the innocent unsullied purity of an opening flower. He had scarcely awakened to anticipate any of the prizes life may hold. He was all untried, with every goal still to be won. One imagines the parents watching eagerly for the signs of his dawning strength, yet loth to face that coming day when he would leave their side to begin his battle with fortune. In his pure presence the father no doubt often looked backwards to his own strivings and offered silent prayer that the victories he missed should come to the son. Nay, would he not anticipate for him, and in his great pride look forward and see his own old age crowned with the glories of his boy's conquests. But alas! The hunter who shot at a mark saw his arrow deflected by some unseen power and bury itself in the heart of his beloved son. What is this dread power, and whence comes it? Why are we mortals so constantly doomed to see our most cherished and carefully thought out plans brought to nought? What awful influences are these which blind the eyes, unnerves the strength, and paralyses thought till the blessing sought for one's own turns to a curse and injures those one loves best? In a narrower sense, why should the old and weary be compelled to struggle on, being denied their well-earned rest, while' the young and vigorous be cut off without a sigh? Why all this injustice?

Here then is the mystery of the Ages presenting itself to Humanity as soon as it is able to ponder the

problem of its circumstances and destiny. Under every clime, and under every type of social structure, from the oldest and far-distant semi-barbarism to the newest and highest civilization, the same perplexing round of tragic experience has dogged the steps of mankind. In the face of such universal experience man yearns for a satisfying solution to the riddle of his life, and his ever growing intelligence demands an explanation that shall not outrage his higher reason. He seeks ever for some view point from whence he can satisfy a craving to believe that he really lives in an intelligently ordered Universe, and that somewhere, somehow, sometime, those great principles of justice, Goodness and Truth must prevail. In this search all Religions and all Philosophies, under whatever forms they have been presented to the world, are finally discovered to be so many efforts of conjecturing man to answer the problems surrounding his existence on this planet.

Philosophy is often regarded as something alien to Religion, if indeed it is not sometimes regarded as its very opposite. Too few realise that philosophy inevitably underlies every religious outlook. We may not all be able to point out the philosophic framework of our beliefs, but it is there nevertheless if we only search deeply enough. In practice it really consists in collecting together the general laws or principles belonging to any department of knowledge, and reasoning about its phenomena till one's intelligence perceives harmony and relationship where before there was only unrelated and contradictory phenomena. Applying the process to Religion it is the effort to show a real relationship between God, Man, and the Universe.

Hence we see that our first principle, "The Fatherhood of God" is the Spiritualist's effort to set forth his philosophic conception of these same Eternal Verities. As a beginning let us separate the two terms and try and put before ourselves clearly what we understand by these words "God" and "Fatherhood." By the term "God" we mean some Power, Intelligence, or Force, which we can regard as the responsible cause of all that is, or all that will be. The question is thus scarcely opened before we realise an unmistakable necessity to allow the largest measure of individual freedom in the interpretation of the idea of God. The only exception to this freedom of interpretation would be in the case of a complete denial of the fundamental proposition that God is. But whether our God be a personal one or impersonal, there is one central thought we can all hold with perfect unanimity, and that is, that God is the efficient Cause of all that is. Accepting this central thought we may briefly look at the two or three aspects under which God is usually conceived. First there is the mind which approaches the problem from the standpoint of Science and Philosophy. For him God is essentially an impersonal Great First Cause; and something beyond the power of the finite human mind to know or understand what it must be in itself. So far as men can discover, this Cause operates only through universal laws which can never be deflected by any personal appeals to the Infinite. Thus the sun shines on the just and the unjust alike. So also the rain falls in due season irrespectively of the presence or absence of man; and without reference to his immediate need or comfort. Catastrophies by fire and flood, or the upheavals of the earth's crust occur by the operation of these same immutable laws. Any wholesale destruction of life, animal or human, occasioned thereby is neither the vengeance of an angry god, nor yet the consequence of man's transgression of some moral law. All and every phenomena are equally involved in the working, out of these inscrutable laws, and are entirely non-moral in their operations. Good or evil flow from these events only in the degree that man learns to adapt himself to the knowledge of their recurrence; and to the extent that his dawning powers enable him to harness

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natural forces to his service, and use the products either selfishly or for the common good of humanity. Intelligence is predicated of this Great First Cause because it is inconceivable that the created shall possess powers not possessed in greater measure by the Creator.

To other minds this austere aspect of an impersonal, God merges towards a Pantheism. God is then conceived as the totality of all that his Universe contains. All living creatures with all inanimate nature are necessary and inevitable portions of the stupendous whole. Reason, Instinct, Intuition, and all the higher wisdom principles and powers, manifesting in their myriad modes are only facets reflecting some point of the glory of the incomprehensible and infinite Godhead.

By far the great mass of minds find these mountain heights of thought inaccessible. To them God is, and perhaps always must be, conceived under more human aspects. From their lesser knowledge they ask “How is it possible for intelligence to manifest except through a body responsive to the Creator’s will?” or “How can Divine Wisdom express the relationship between Himself and his human children except through some kind of personality?” Such minds are obviously travelling along the more ordinary channels of theological conceptions. Now that he is acquainted with the fact of entities manifesting through a spirit body, and not one of flesh and blood, this questioner undoubtedly feels he may press the argument more successfully against the idea of an abstract impersonal Deity; because that conception was largely the effect of a revolt against the crude anthropomorphic god of the old days.

In thus seeking to outline these several interpretations of the God idea, we shall all agree upon one point. We shall not permit the Movement to be split by attempts to impose on either section those conceptions opposed to their several temperaments. It is just here where the largest measure of individual interpretation is granted. We are content to hold unanimously the one central fact that God is.

We turn next to the thought of Fatherhood. The word instantly relates it to the most human of all ideas of God. It suggests a Divine Parent who provides for all the wants of his family; and whose rule bases itself on our common human emotions of love or anger. This divine parent takes note of all our actions and rewards or punishes like any ordinary human father.

It is a beautiful idea, but we shall do, well to regard it is a symbol only. However useful it may have been in the past in helping men to conceive of God as the divine Father, we must frankly make up our minds that in no sense can we bring in the physical parental aspect of God and his children. As a symbol expressing spiritual relations, we should rather concentrate on the conception that we are each and all indissoluble portions of the Godhead, and partake of the Divine nature. We may then look within ourselves for some manifestation of that indwelling divinity. We can begin to measure our capacities, and thus throw away once and for all the degrading idea of ourselves as worms in the sight of God. Instead we can stand on our feet, and look into the sky as into the face of the Heavenly Father, and say, we too are Gods. This is the message most needed today; that men shall realise the potential godhead within each soul and set themselves the task of developing those divine powers.

Look for a moment at the creative function. Is this not an essentially human attribute. Men are ever seeing or hearing something in the invisible, and giving it body and birth. Music, Art, and Science all proclaim the reality of this power in man. It is not alone that the products of the mechanical arts exhibit these powers: Before the city is built, the nation must come to its birth; and this is equally the

handiwork of man. Men build states, make laws, construct governments; and in the sphere of Politics, Religion, and Philosophy, weave fabrics upon which they embroider thought.

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Or consider how man transcends time and space. In the domain of mechanical engineering he has girdled the earth; and has constructed eyes and ears to inform him of all that happens in the remotest corner of the globe very nearly as soon as the event transpires. Beyond the earth he dares to measure the distances and volumes of worlds lying far out in space. Touching our own special province, consider the faculties of our deeper selves. In the world of human affairs men separate and drift away till oceans and mountains divide. The affectionate soul cares nought for these barriers. There is abundant evidence to prove that in some hour of crisis, time and space suddenly cease to be for to some loving heart is revealed the peril that threatens the one far away. On higher planes we find the Seer arising to rebuke the iniquity of his generation. As he thunders forth his denunciations the veil of the future is drawn aside, and he foretells the doom of nations, and shows the nature of the cataclysms that shall shatter empires centuries ahead.

More precious than these godlike gifts and we venture to think, nearer to the Divine Father's great soul is that wisdom which even the simplest and most humble may acquire. Every human soul can open his mind and find it expanding in the light of experience till the divinity which is hidden within shines forth as a veritable crown of divine wisdom. Then indeed we know ourselves as gods. Just as our idea of God includes the attribute of Eternity so we realise that as we partake of the divine nature, we too have our place in that eternal cycle of Existence and Manifestation. However difficult it may be for us to fill in the details of the backward glance along that great cycle, we can look forward confidently; knowing that our Movement, more than all others, has made clear and intelligible the meaning of an Eternity; and has shown us that we have an abiding place in all that lies ahead in its forward aspect.

The, second principle, - The Brotherhood; of Man - arises naturally from the conception of Fatherhood. But again, I am insisting that this term, like its counterpart Fatherhood, had better be quite frankly recognised as just a spiritual symbol. If we do this we may find some spiritual lessons that might probably be missed if we strain the analogy of family ties. Let us be frank and look at what we know are common experiences. Our human families, taken as we know them, do not present such a picture of perfect brotherhood that we can hold them up as examples of the highest we can conceive.

The two great cosmic laws of Attraction and Repulsion find expression in family life just as certainly as these same laws operate among the planetary bodies around their parent sun. In plain terms the common experience of every-day life points to the presence of disruptive tendencies quite as often as the opposite tendencies displayed in our family life. This is not to take a cynical view of the situation, or to deny the force of the adage that "Blood is thicker than water." Nor will it serve to let good natured tolerance or pride hide the truth from us. The Sociologist realises the facts, and sees in the disruptive tendencies a principle working for the ultimate good of the community. He considers the inconvenience and distress in the individual family of small consequence when compared with the influx of new blood, new thought, and new associations, involved in the transfer of individuals throughout the Tribe, Nation, or Race. Studied from this higher standpoint, that which is naturally dreaded by the participants turns out to be for the greater good of the whole. The equally natural desire to bind all souls indissolubly into one group irrespectively of their mental or physical affinities, proves in practice to be more disastrous than useful.

The complementary factor, - the Law of Attraction – because, more pleasant to contemplate is very easily recognised. Its most intense manifestation is of course the drawing away of a man and a woman

from their particular families to build up a home of their own, and found a new group. Other natural

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attractions arise from common interests and aspirations in Art, Science, Politics, Religion, or other special forms of human activity.

Once capture the truth and significance of these two powerful tendencies really operating throughout all forms of human associations, and the wise man will realise the hopelessness of drawing the whole of the race into one universal family; whether that Universal Brotherhood be a Social Commonwealth or a World Religion. We seek therefore, under the term Brotherhood to recognise, not the common blood relationship of all the human families dwelling on the earth, and thereby some acknowledgement of filial obligations from each to each; but the relation of equality in sonship in the sight of the Divine Father. Under this conception we shall see each soul as an integral part of the Infinite, and inheriting the nature of the Universal Soul. What is of more significance, spiritually considered, would be a recognition that such an Infinite Whole involves an infinite number and diversity in the units that compose the whole. It should not be impossible to go further and comprehend that it is only in the full totality of these diverse units that the whole exists. Surely one understands that God is not, if any part of his divine creation be missing. It is easy to acknowledge the vast difference between individuals; their range of intellectual abilities, the variations of physical strength and endurance, or the presumed difference in degree of usefulness to Society. Such distinctions may bring very flattering functions to souls who delight in the thought that they are not as other men. But the spiritually minded man rightly understands that it is this very diversity in attainment and manifestation that constitutes the glory of the Infinite.

Warfare will cease when the Nations drop their ambitions to bring under the imagined beneficence of their own superior Governments the smaller Peoples of the earth. Human life will be fuller, of divine expression when it is recognised that not only have the small States the right to self determination, but that in the fullest development of their inherent national genius lies the surest contribution to the common stock of human advancement, and achievement.

Religions bigotry and enmity will be banished from the earth just as soon as men learn that neither Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, or any other founder of the world's religions can possibly be "the only name given under Heaven whereby men can be saved." The spiritual advancement of the race will have taken an immense upward trend when men are willing to admit that the Divine Father speaks divinely to all his children according to the measure of their capacity to hear Him; and that God's Revelations to mankind were never given finally into the keeping of any single nation; but are continuous and varied to meet the ever changing needs of succeeding ages.

The Continuity of life is our third principle. Here, at any rate we are meeting with a Principle that must mark us off very definitely from other religious bodies. For Spiritualists it is not something to be reasoned about and reached through processes of logical deductions. It is not something that arises by inference out of our conception of God. We have removed this particular thought from the region of speculative philosophy to a region of direct proof. Is there continuity of life? That is the question of questions. Until the proofs were gathered together, and assumed such formidable masses of evidence and weight that they could no longer be set aside as unworthy of credence, the belief in continuity rested not on proof but on speculation only. The whole of Modern Spiritualism has concentrated, as no other body has, upon the necessity of proving this question. It is the fundamental Principle upon which our Movement is founded. The proofs we put before the world have been stubbornly contested by

Scientist and Religionist alike for the full seventy years of our History. Today the victory is ours. No

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fact in Science is now better attested. The tardy, but now general acceptance of the proofs by the religious world is one of the greatest triumphs of our Spiritualist Propaganda.

The fourth Principle affirms the Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels. Here again, we begin on a basis of experience and fact. Without the multiplied proofs which have been gathered by patient investigation, this article of faith, like the belief in the continuity of existence, rested solely on speculation. True, it is a good specimen of a speculative conception being subsequently justified by the facts of investigation. But never forget, until the proofs were obtained it remained in the realms of pure speculation. We know we have communion with those on the other side of the veil. It is a matter of common experience to those who have satisfied themselves regarding the proofs for the fact of continued existence. There is quite a natural sequence in these discoveries. First the endeavour is for proof that our own are really living an active, conscious, and intelligent existence. The second step is the discovery that those who loved us and have passed hence, are in very truth the ministering angels who come to us from that farther shore; and not some high angel from around the throne of God. What can be more natural? If they live a conscious life and memory goes with them, their love and affection are as lode stones to bring them near to help and sustain those left behind, through the very advancement in wisdom and power their new life has brought them.

Here again our position is quite clearly marked off from Orthodoxy. Communion in the Church does not mean communion in our real and practical sense. It is rather the idea of lifting up the mental vision of the communicant to aspire to a like noble service for which Saintship was conferred. The thought rises no higher than that those who have passed from us live again in our memory of their deeds. The intention is plainly to use these forces as a spiritual discipline and an inspiration to a better life. Hence the curious spectacle that rarely does the saint receive this reward of saintship by his own generation; too often he receives ignominy and contempt, perhaps martyrdom. Sometimes centuries elapse before the Church Authorities recognise the nobility of the deeds of long ago. From our point of view these Saints were forces for good or evil from the moment they passed into the world of spirit.

We know something more of the Life Elysian than these first intimations. From the great volume of inspired utterances and writings now before us we learn that there are ascending scales of Spiritual Beings united in higher and higher Orders, and range upon range of exalted and ever more exalted planes or spheres of experience. Between these various Orders and Spheres communication is maintained. The great purpose being the advancement in welfare and spiritual upliftment for those in lower spheres to progress to higher, and beginning with the earth dwellers up through all the ascending scales. Communion between all spheres, and helpful service from those in higher realms to those below is seen to be a great natural law operating throughout the Spirit World. It is the antithesis of man's conception which invariably finds itself upon compulsory or paid service from the lower orders to the higher.

From contact and communion with one's own to the companionship with the dwellers in the inmost is a prospect open to all human souls. Most often the determining factor in this higher development does not depend upon diligent attention and practice of some purely mechanical or automatic unfoldment of the psychic powers; but upon spiritual desire and aspiration to lift up one's soul to heights of intuitive perception. A deep unselfish love will more surely open the soul to communion with the highest spiritual Beings than great knowledge without sympathy towards all men. The gifts of Mediumship are

precious and should be acquired only that life and service may be more fittingly offered to the Lord of life. But if we have the true wisdom we shall realise that the most perfect gift is to live so close to the

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Spirit World, and to know and love its Messengers so intimately, that thought flows from soul to soul, not through the instrumentality of some friendly medium, but swift and sure and as intuitively as the holy love of man and wife.

Passing from Communion we come to the fifth Principle, Personal responsibility. This principle still further separates us from Orthodox opinion. We dismiss entirely the doctrines of vicarious Sacrifice or Salvation through faith in the sacrificing acts of another. It should be within the power of those, even, not given to exercises in close reasoning, to realise that the acceptance of the idea that in each soul there is potential divinity, is a first step to comprehending the fact that every soul stands on his own footing. You cannot be a god and throw your responsibility on to someone else. That is the negation of Godship. We are "the captain of our own soul," and make no mistake about this fact, there is no one else in the world, or the Heavens beyond, who can make or unmake our destiny but ourself.

The moment we realise this truth the word sacrifice takes on a new meaning. It means the help we can and should be ready to offer a struggling soul. It may also mean the hindrance placed in our own path, and, possibly also of that other, by a mistaken or overkindly attempt to do something for another which in the end he can only accomplish for himself. The complete sacrifice of one soul with the idea of saving others from particular experiences, or to put them forward on the road believing some part of the necessary training can be omitted, is probably the most stupendous misuse of one's effort that could be made. The result will often be an intensification of selfishness on the part of the one so aided. Let us take life and its lessons as illuminating spiritual things, and we shall see clearer where we are travelling. Every wise parent knows that his duty is to train the children for the day when they are to be launched into the world fully prepared to face its responsibilities and duties. There are few fond parents, perhaps, who have not wept bitter tears in after life when reflecting on the difficulties actually created for their children arising from that unfortunate ideal of self sacrifice. Personal Responsibility is a call to every soul. To further realise this truth look deeply into the affairs of the world of today. There are conditions obtaining over the last few months both in Industry, and Home and International Politics that touch vitally the interests of everyone, be he Workman, Employer, Trader, Consumer, or Officials or members of any of the organised bodies dealing with these problems. Is there anyone at this moment who does not understand that the morass into which affairs have drifted arise solely from the fact that men everywhere holding responsible positions have shirked the task of giving the lead they knew ought to be given? The consequences of that failure are all too patent. It is the prolonged misery and the attendant evils upon large sections of the community who are not immediately parties to these various disputes. There can be no end to these Home or World problems till a majority of men are prepared to act as men and boldly shoulder their obvious responsibilities. Do not shirk the task because it is possible that mistakes may be committed. It is far better to attempt to accomplish something, even if failure results, than stand idly waiting for others to give the lead. It is not so much lack of vision one complains of just here; that of course is a separate problem. What is distressing in these recent troubles is that after events prove that men not only saw the drifting, but also saw some means of preventing the policy of drift, and lacked courage to speak out.

Against these and similar dangers to the stability of the nation wise men are all agreed that the greatest need of our time is a wider and saner education which shall call out the latent capacities of the individual, and teach it to show self-reliance and courage in the face of difficulties. Men need to be instructed in the truth that to overcome difficulties is part of the real discipline of life. The Religion

that will ultimately hold the people, and keep the world on the path of progress is that which will range itself boldly on the side of these wise teachers. Let the trumpet ring out its message in one clear call for men

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to prove their divine sonship by accepting the responsibility to rebuild this broken world after years of war, nearer to the heart's desire for Peace and Goodwill among the nations.

We turn now to the sixth Principle, Compensation and Retribution here and hereafter for all the good or evil done on the earth. Let us look at the principle a little closer. The first thought may be "if I have done my best, why should I be punished?" That word "punishment" must be wiped out. The problem will never be seen in its true light while the idea of punishment is retained with its ordinary penal significance. The image of an angry God punishing his children is the relic of a bye-gone age. Among the better informed today the idea is quietly ignored as stultifying the conception of a God of perfect Wisdom and Love. Considered from a spiritual standpoint it is now realised that what was formerly regarded as a punishment is really a lesson for future guidance. Men in fact do profit by their mistakes.

It is important to make a distinction between punishment and the unavoidable suffering consequent upon a transgression of some natural law, physical or moral. In the one case a punishment is an arbitrary infliction of a penalty imposed by a superior on the supposition that the pain inflicted will act as a deterrent from further infractions. The good accomplished in this way is apt to prove more apparent than real. The desired change of heart is unaffected. The mind may go on hungering for the forbidden fruit with the old ardour; and be only deterred from reaching out for satisfaction through fear of renewed penalties. On the other hand all suffering endured through the breaking of a natural law follows inevitably from the nature of the act. For instance, fire burns the body submitted to it because the rate of combustion is immeasurably higher than the same natural process going on in the living tissue. The effect of placing the body in conditions unnatural to it is to experience painful sensations. To change conditions that were producing ill health is to do more than get rid of pain and suffering. It is to produce a positive good. The new vitality brings more than the cessation of disagreeable sensations; it brings pleasure, joy, activity, and a zest for things utterly unknown in the former conditions.

So it is with the Social experiments of Mankind. In the march forward from the age of the brute to modern civilizations it is obvious that many experiments should be made. In what other mode can the right structure be discovered, but by the actual test that one form makes for happy conditions for its people, while another form produces only misery and degradation for the bulk of its folk? Apparently only an observation of the effects produced proves that what is suitable to one age and climate, will not be equally suitable for totally different ages. The moment these facts are realised it is seen that it is foolish to blame individuals or groups because results turned out other than was expected. After all social structures are temporary things, just as temporary in fact as the habitation of the human spirit in the present physical body. Our Social Life, when it is ready for a new structure will provide that new structure, just as your spirit is even now preparing the new habitation it will occupy when it removes into the land beyond the shadows.

Again, consider the matter as a process of evolution applicable to individual life as we have just now applied it to social life. As a means of discovering the divine potentialities hidden within us events prove that pain and sorrow are splendid disciplinary aids to spiritual unfoldment. Whoever has spent an hour in bitter tears and remorse will later on prove better able to help another soul in deep tribulation than the butterfly individual who has never known anything deeper in life but flitting the hours through God's sunshine. This is the way life's experiences work on your inner self. You rise up out of your failures and sufferings with a fuller understanding and conception of humanity. Something

needed to be eradicated from your nature, and before that reformation could be effected it was probably necessary that you should be stripped of all you loved dear, and made to stand alone in the silence

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with only yourself and God. To you, as to the Hunter in Olive Schreiner's "Dreams." Wisdom comes saying at the first "You have not suffered enough," and so leaves you for a time. Afterwards wisdom comes again and then the message is "In that you have suffered much and wept much I will tell you what I know." These experiences are not punishments; it is the way of the soul's Emancipation and Freedom, and the pathway to the supremest heights of Divine Wisdom. It is not book learning or what is called knowledge by the world that this Wisdom comes, the Golden Crown is to be won only through experience.

Now a word about Retribution. It means the law of Compensation working for a time in a downward direction instead of the upward path set forth above. I want to say over and over again, get the habit of looking steadily at life until it reveals the inner working of these great primal principles of life. Let no false ideas prevent you from admitting what really happens in life. It will invariably illuminate some spiritual principle. Let us be thankful really wicked men are few. It still remains true there are minds deaf to all appeals for mercy, and whose earthly ambitions blind them to the perception of the ruin they leave in the trail of their pursuits. These harden their hearts again and again, seeing in every effort of approach for discussion of differences, only a weakness in the other side that can be exploited still further for their own selfish aggrandisement. There is only one way to deal with stubborn souls, they must go to the full and utter limit of what ambition means. Then if in this life they have not learned the lesson, then in the spirit world, they will assuredly plunge into the darkness of an abyss of their own creation. In a world of new values, where it is no longer possible to hide from others the secret of one's heart, nor to pretend either to others or to oneself, they will stand confronted with the sum total of their achievements, and find all turned to dust and ashes in their grasp.

There is a stern law operating throughout the moral and spiritual planes which few persons care to admit. Usually these difficult problems are glossed over with a sentimental allusion to Forgiveness and Mercy. Again I say Look deep enough into life and the stern fulfilling of the law is seen working silently and surely. Two passages from the Bible put this position with wonderful clearness. One is the story of Esau selling his birthright for a mess of pottage. Do not miss the operation of the law by concentrating

the unprincipled conduct of the younger son Esau parted with a priceless thing for a temporary advantage of pleasure. As might have been foreseen he repented his act; and foolishly thought some other person's sense of justice would save him from the consequences of his folly. It is not so in the working out of this law. He realised the truth too late. Then mark the statement of the law, "He found

place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Oh the bitterness of unavailing tears! The other passage reverberates with the thunder of indignation through a prophet's lips. He is rebuking

iniquity of a people, and speaking for the Almighty says, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." No! there is a limit to the effort to prevent the wicked overleaping their ambition. Efforts are made to this end. There is vast patience before the moment "too late" comes. Many appeals are made

the better self. But if such souls will not listen, then they must drink the dregs from the cup of wormwood and gall. They must see the ruin they have worked in the lives of others, and make the gastly discovery that the vaster ruin is in their own souls.

Then, and then only, these souls begin, what is our last Principle, the path of Eternal Progression

towards Perfection. I notice in dealing with the question of Perfection, a tendency in some quarters to raise nice questions in logic. With childlike guilelessness the question is asked, "Can perfection ever be reached, and if it is possible to reach perfection, what lies beyond?" The most hopeless intricacies that ever entangled the feet of men lies in that direction. To all who are smitten with a bent of that sort let me commend these words of that great philosopher, Herbert Spencer. In the first volume of his

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Synthetic Philosophy, in the chapter on Ultimate Scientific Ideas, he writes: In all directions his investigations eventually bring him face to face with an insoluble enigma; and he ever more clearly perceives it to be an insoluble enigma. He learns at once the greatness and the littleness of the human intellect its power in dealing with all that comes within the range of experience; its impotence in dealing with all that transcends experiences. He realises with a special vividness the utter incomprehensibility of the simplest fact, considered in itself.”

Let us try not to be wise beyond our capacity of understanding. All that is meant by Perfection is a point in progression at which all souls shall arrive in common, notwithstanding all the inequalities of opportunity and beginnings. However long it may take to awaken some souls to the possibilities of progression, all can and shall move forward through the cycles of eternity to the complete end of that potential Godhead that lies within them.

In this aspect truly there is neither first or last. Nor need there be limits set to the amount of perception and wisdom that any soul can attain. This is the utmost that can be put forward as the idea of Perfection. The finite cannot comprehend the Infinite. But this we can be sure of, whatever the illimitable future may hold for the race; whatever destiny the Lord of Life has in store for his children, to satisfy our own conception of Perfect Justice and Love, every single soul himself shall know, intimately and entirely, the Father God,

Geo. F. Berry Worcester

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By Geo. F. BERRY

Annual Meeting, July, 1921.

In attempting to estimate the progress made during the past year, we shall do well to focus our attention for a moment on the factors that exert their influence from without as well as those which operate from within. To set these influences in right perspective let us put before our mental vision the law governing organic social growth.

All movements start from a point where there is little or no distinction between officials and the members; and where all duties are likewise performed indiscriminately by any or all the members as occasion arises. At this stage unbounded and not too critical enthusiasm for an idea is usually the only bond of unity; and at no succeeding stage individual liberty of expression and activity be so great and untrammelled as in this period of primitive association. It is the “golden age” of the egoist, to which all those in later stages who cannot work in harness with their fellows sigh for as a lost Paradise. At the next stage the growing organisation begins to assume definite formation. Specific functions are assigned to particular individuals, and committees come into existence to carry out these diversified operations. These are the rudimentary skeleton and bodily organs through which alone a multiplicity of separate but related and interdependent functions can be performed. Later, alliances and fusions take place with similar associations; these committees assume more permanent dimensions, and their functions become more clearly defined. Inevitably under this law of development must ever be from the undefined to the clearly defined, from the unstable to the stable. Such stabilisation means the emergence of a strong powerful organisation upon its necessary skeleton supports. It marks a transition from the invertebrate to the vertebrate stage, and produces a body fitted for a long continued existence in contradistinction to the short life of the ephemeral. Not unnaturally there are those who cry out against the limitations of individual liberty for the common good imposed by this more rigid type. To such the appearance of bones and sinews and muscles spells disaster. They miss the elasticity of the oyster. But in the scale of terrestrial being the vertebrate is higher than the invertebrate.

Applying this analogy to the growth of the S.N.U., it will be observed that we have arrived at the stage of alliance and fusion with other bodies. The most outstanding feature of the past year has been the impetus given under the new Constitution towards consolidating the various organic units having natural affinities with the main body. The B.S.L.U. with its thousands of scholars is happily now in association with us, and for the coming year will have its own representatives on the E.C. It is perhaps too early to realise the full significance to the whole Spiritualist movement of this alliance. There are problems arising in the training and education of these young potential workers, especially in the transition from youth to adolescence, which will need the combined wisdom of both bodies.

Then we have the B.M.U. and the L.C.M. joining their forces with ours. Both bodies are concerned with the problem of providing the movement with efficient platform workers and mediums. As you now know, the S.N.U. also has its Exponents' Committee working along the same lines. The outcome of these new links in our efforts will surely lead to some Coordination of work to prevent overlapping; and I trust to real differentiation of function between the groups. I look forward to the gradual emergence of a highly trained staff and equipment for providing that standard of exponent and demonstrator which the coming years will demand of us if we are to hold our own against the new competition which I am confident is being prepared to put against us at no distant future. Is it too much

to hope that from the coordination of effort of these bodies there will spring the first real British College aiming at the training and development of platform workers for Spiritualism, and not the exploitation of mediumship for pecuniary gain?

One other factor of great importance considered as a matter of internal organisation is the new status conferred on the Area Councils. They have in effect become Administrative Committees of the S.N.U., and to them will be delegated duties and functions for the more efficient organisation of the movement. It should be possible to secure more concentrated propaganda efforts, and more systematic exploration of new ground in the districts contiguous to existing churches. The successful use of National speakers or of overseas propagandists and mediums of repute should be widening the scope of the activities undertaken by the Area Councils. There is room for initiative and enterprise, and it may well be that some Area Council will pave the way for the appointment of national full-time organisers and propagandists by their own initial experiments in this direction.

Turning our attention from these inner influences to those exerted from the outer world, we readily discover that growth brings changes here also. No movement stands uninfluenced by the activities of its contemporary rivals. There are some forces which operate to depress or invigorate nearly all movements alike; as, for instance, the present worldwide attachment to materialistic conceptions of history and morals. Other influences arise from changes in the stability of organisations once thought impregnable. The struggle may be realised as one of life or death to the organisation, and from that standpoint it may proceed to enter upon a campaign against its rivals in the hope of retrieving its lost position. The threatened organisations in these circumstances will need to give great attention to their own defence, and to search all avenues for the probable line of attack so as to discover the hidden sources and ramifications of their opponents' operations.

Thus there is one item of interest which although it does not immediately concern our year's work, nevertheless deserves attention because it illustrates the subtlety of the attack on Spiritualism. It further brings home to us the need for eternal vigilance if we are not to lose our hard-won liberties. I refer to the appeal of Miss J. Stonehouse and Mrs. K. Smythe against a conviction for fortune telling at Marylebone Police Court. It is no part of our work to protect fortune tellers or palmists as such, nor to give shelter under our auspices to charlatans, but we are concerned in protecting genuine psychic manifestations. There is little doubt, I think, that the agitation created by the S.N.U. a few Years ago, and which resulted in the inception of our Parliamentary Fund, the petition to Parliament for a Charter, and the publication of two pamphlets dealing with the legal aspect regarding psychic phenomena, one in 1916 by Angus McArthur and the other by Dr. Ellis Powell in 1917, helped in some small measure towards the decision of Mr. Justice Sankey in the King's Bench Divisional Court on October 25th, 1917, that the intention to deceive was "an essential ingredient" in an offence. That position has now been reversed by the above appeal, and so brings again into prominence the inequality under which our movement labours compared with the freedom accorded other religious bodies. I submit that as a challenge to our claim for religious freedom we cannot afford to ignore the plain meaning of this new decision of the Lord Chief Justice and his fellow judges.

Of more direct significance to our movement is the discovery that orthodoxy appears to be seriously disturbed concerning its own future, and envious of our wonderful progress. Two opposing tendencies are showing themselves. On one side are clerics who plainly recognise that the time has come for frank confessions regarding the untenable nature of some old dogmas and modern views about the Bible. As one puts it (quoted from the "Psychic Gazette" for May): "Truth to tell, we have not been quite honest

about the Bible. We most of us hold one theory and assent by our silence to our people holding another.” Another with equal candour says. “Traditional Christianity is on its trial. The next few years will give the decision whether it will, or will not, be the world’s religion.” To these may be added such further damaging admissions, first from Canon Barnes, that the evolution theory must apply to man’s moral growth; an admission that inevitably alters the whole theological balance of the doctrine of the Fall of Man. Secondly, the doubt expressed by Dean Inge concerning the reality of the Virgin Birth. Such a doubt must fundamentally alter all previous conceptions regarding the Divinity of Jesus. Then, thirdly, we have the admissions of the Rev. Vale Owen “that the Church has lost the Pentecostal Shekinah, and that this luminous cloud evidential of angelic presence is to be found within the ranks of the Spiritualists.” These are admissions of men who believe that something is fundamentally wrong with the churches, and have set themselves the task of discovering the real cause of decay, that they may apply some radical remedy. It is from among such that the inspiration arises for such a series of articles recently appearing in “Light” under the title, “What the Churches can learn from Spiritualism,” These men are not studying Spiritualism for our benefit, but their own; and I venture to suggest that our most formidable rivals in the near future will come from these serious students of our movement.

The other tendency in the Church is from those who cannot read the signs of the times, and who still pathetically believe that if only the old dogmas are cried loudly enough and persistently, mankind will once again be frightened back into the Church. From this source we get the plea to save us our Jesus. They mean the old theological Jesus, with all the old ideas of virgin birth, vicarious sacrifice with its blood washings, and the bodily resurrection of the man, and the salvation that comes through faith in these dogmas. From this source also springs those strange efforts to invert the order of investigation and values of truth by using the facts of modern psychic science to revitalise the old Bible stories, intending by that process to impose the Bible personalities on our modern Spiritualism as its divine guides and leaders. In short, it is an attempt to re-impose authority once more on us, and install themselves as the custodians and interpreters of what these guides and leaders mean the modern world to accept as truth.

When our enemies are thus openly divided, and their intentions so obviously apparent, we should be recreant to truth and the old pioneers if we failed to declare boldly our position. Who that calls himself a Spiritualist and realises the battle in front of us will hesitate about subscribing to the Seven Principles? Let there be no mistake about the issue in the coming struggle, “Who is not for us is against us.”

Let us give our message to the world in a clear-ringing note distinguishable from all other notes. To palter with these dying creeds is only to add to the babble of sound that will prevent the complete unification of our movement which should be the crowning achievement of our efforts to organise our forces. Our aim is the perfection of an instrument through which the spirit world can send that perfect revelation which our own world so sorely needs at this moment.