

**THE CLOCK STRUCK ONE, AND CHRISTIAN  
SPIRITUALIST : BEING A SYNOPSIS OF THE  
INVESTIGATIONS OF SPIRIT  
INTERCOURSE BY AN EPISCOPAL BISHOP,  
THREE MINISTERS, FIVE DOCTORS, AND  
OTHERS, AT MEMPHIS, TENN., IN 1855**

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The Clock Struck One, and Christian Spiritualist : Being a Synopsis of the Investigations of Spirit Intercourse by an Episcopal Bishop, Three Ministers, Five Doctors, and Others, at Memphis, Tenn., in 1855 by Samuel Watson

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**SAMUEL WATSON**

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COURSE BY AN EPISCOPAL BISHOP, THREE MINISTERS,  
FIVE DOCTORS, AND OTHERS, AT MEMPHIS, TENN.,  
IN 1855;

ALSO, THE OPINION OF MANY EMINENT DIVINES, LIVING AND  
DEAD, ON THE SUBJECT, AND COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED  
FROM A NUMBER OF PERSONS RECENTLY.

BY THE  
REV. SAMUEL WATSON.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be  
heirs of salvation?—St. PAUL.

"TRUTH IS MIGHTY, AND WILL PREVAIL."

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1872.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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### THE CLOCK STRUCK ONE.

(From the *Memphis Appeal*.)

"SINGULAR PHENOMENON VOUCHERED FOR BY A PROMINENT DIVINE.

"There are more things in heaven and in earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

I FIND the following in the last issue of that magnificent paper, the *St. Louis Christian Advocate*. It is not about the extract copied in that paper from the *Lexington (Va.) Gazette*, but the little editorial notice of five lines, to which I wish to call attention :

#### "A VERY SINGULAR AND MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE.

"The *Lexington (Va.) Gazette* publishes the following, asserting that it has received the 'facts' upon undoubted evidence: 'Mr. Z. J. White, whose death occurred last week, was stricken on his return from our last court to his home in Brownsburg, with the disease that proved fatal. On the day of his return he had occasion to go into a room where was kept a clock belonging to his father, the late Robert White. This clock is of the old-fashioned, high kind, and has been stopped for years, not even having the weights attached, being merely kept as a family relic. When Mr. White entered the room, the clock, which had been silent so long, distinctly struck 'one.' He at the time paid no special attention to it, and not being of superstitious turn of mind, thought it was a mistake, or an illusion of his fancy. The next day, or the day after, he again had occasion to enter the same room. Again the clock struck 'one.' He immediately went out, telling his wife of the circumstance, and remarked that he felt assured he was going to die soon. His premonitions, as we have stated, proved true, and in a few days his spirit passed away.

"There is nothing singular nor mysterious in it. Such results of panic in persons of superstitious imagination are familiar to all who have paid any attention to the morbid relations of mind and brain."

I will give some facts which have come under my own observa-

tion and that of others, which no doubt will, in the estimation of the author of those lines, place me, and others in the category of persons of "superstitious imagination." It is popular with some people to ridicule facts when they have no evidence of disproving them, or argument to overthrow them. It is the easiest way to dispose of many things that occur which can not be accounted for upon any hypothesis or theory with which they are familiar.

Five years since I was at my place with my family, in Woodruff county, near Augusta, Arkansas. My wife's health had been feeble for a long time. Her physician had told me, before we went over there, that she might die in twenty-four hours. Her health was partially restored after a few months residence there. She was, however, taken with her old disease, and after a few days' illness she died. On the mantel in her room was an old clock which had not run or struck for years, only once, which was the day before she died. A little over a year afterward, a noble boy of about four years, named after Robert E. Lee, was taken sick, lived a few days, the clock struck one, and the next day he died.

The following summer my daughters visited my brother, Dr. K. P. Watson, near Memphis, and took with them their youngest brother, Durell. He had always been a very healthy child, but was taken sick at my brother's, and in few hours died. The clock on the mantel in Arkansas struck once again, and in a few hours we received a dispatch that Durell was dead.

The next autumn the clock struck again, and our Lillian, a babe of six months of age, passed away from us to join those who had gone before.

One more case. My father died in that neighborhood about twelve years since. Brother Coleman, the preacher on the Augusta circuit, lived that year on the place. There was about such a clock as is described by the *Gazette*. "It is of the old-fashioned, high kind, and has been stopped for years, not even having the weights attached," but was packed away up stairs with some lumber ever since the death of my father. Brother Coleman's child was sick, the clock struck "one," the child died soon after.

I have given you the facts, Mr. Editor, even at the risk of being called superstitious. I need not give you my explanation or theory, but I would like to have yours. All of these times, were in the daytime that the clock struck, and it was heard by different members of the family every time.

Were you not in Dr. A. H. Redford's office, when we were together in Nashville recently, when he told us of the glass breaking over

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the picture of Bishop Andrew? You remember he has a fine likeness of all the Bishops hanging against the wall in his office. It seems—it may be superstitious to believe it, but Dr. Redford told it to quite a number of preachers—that about the time the Bishop was attacked with what produced his death, the glass broke over his picture. I then told them what I have written of the clock striking, etc.

Yesterday evening, as I was going home, I met a friend at the door of a music store on Main Street. A gentleman came in just then with his arms full of picture-frames. I mentioned the fact of the glass of Bishop Andrew's picture breaking. He said he had known of a number of similar cases. There are many things occurring equally "singular and mysterious," but people do not like to be called "superstitious," and hence rarely mention them, for fear of it. I ask the question, are these "results of panic," or "the morbid relations of mind and brain?" as you said of the Virginia case. Or are they given us to demonstrate one of the most consoling doctrines taught in the Bible? I leave my friends of the *St. Louis Christian Advocate*, or any one else, to answer to the satisfaction of many anxious inquirers after truth, was it "panic" that caused the clock to strike when the child was over a hundred miles distant, and we had not the slightest knowledge of his having been sick.

SAMUEL WATSON.

I propose to give Dr. Bond's editorials and my reply to them, that the public may see this matter from the beginning. He introduced some things which I considered irrelevant to the subject under consideration. I have therefore omitted them and my reply to them, because they have no bearing on the subject under discussion.

(From the *St. Louis Christian Advocate*.)

### "THE CLOCK STRUCK ONE.

"The root of all superstition is, that to the nature of the mind of all men it is consonant for the affirmative or active to effect more than the negative or privative; so that a few times hitting or presence countervails oftentimes failing or absence."—BACON: *Adv. of Learning*.

"In our paper of June 13th we read, at our home in Maryland, a letter from Rev. Samuel Watson, occasioned by a few remarks we had appended to a story about the supernatural relations of the bell of an old clock to a divination of death. As we understand Christianity to require us to defend society, as much as we can, against the powerful, natural tendency to magic, which from the days of Moses we have authority to recognize as the most vivacious of the



enemies of the truth, we wrote a few lines to deny the inference of the supernatural in the matter. Bro. Watson comes valiantly to the defence of the miraculous in the clock, and in the full assurance of his faith in its premonitions, rebukes us as belonging to a class 'who ridicule facts when they have no evidence disproving them, or arguments to overpower them.' We certainly manifested no such disposition. We did not *ridicule the facts*, nor even deny them. We admitted that the old clock struck, and that the man who heard it subsequently died. These were the only *facts* in the statement. What we *denied* was, the unjustifiable inference that the clock struck because the man was about to die, and *struck* by miraculous interposition of the power and prescience of God. If it did, that old clock is as awful as the burning bush in which God appeared to Moses. It is an oracle of death, more terrible than the Ark of God, which did *not* foretell the death of men. We denied the miracle, and suggested a rational explanation. Bro. Watson, no doubt, thinks that explanation improbable. Suppose it is, at least it is *possible*, and *any possible explanation of a physical phenomenon is more probable—in other words, more entitled to belief—than a miracle; for it is the very essence of a miracle that it is absolutely improbable in nature.* We would not be justified in believing any miracle recorded in Scripture if we could account for the facts stated upon natural principles. The overwhelming force of the miracles that attested our religion, is secured to us only by insisting upon this inexorable canon of criticism.

"We are sincerely anxious to avoid giving offense to Bro. Watson. He is very sensitive to the charge of being superstitious. He need not be so sensitive. He has the great majority of people with him—perhaps there are a few who could show themselves clear of superstition upon close examination. The term is offensive, but the condition is almost universal. The greater part of the Christian world are but little freer from it than the worshippers of the *first* deities whose busts filled the Pantheon.

"Among the most educated, the blood is yet infected with the virus of the old magic. Dr. Johnson went through the streets touching posts, and was careful to put the safe foot foremost in leaving a house. The late Emperor and Empress of France consulted witches and mediums. Queen Victoria, and her ladies, followed her just-married daughter to her carriage, and sent good luck after her in a shower of old shoes. We think few ladies would be married on Friday. Countless omens and magical formulas are in activity every day in the houses of Protestants, who seem utterly

unconscious of the sin and shame of fearing other gods than their Father in heaven.

"We would not reply to Bro. Watson if we could conscientiously avoid it; but the challenge he has thrown out is too serious to be passed over. To admit the supernaturalism of the clock, would be to do mischief far beyond the sound of discarded and dilapidated time-keepers. It would be to admit and uncontrollable irruption of the old magiam into the church. It would be to give the sanction of religion to the undefined, distressing, and degrading superstition, that is one of the most remarkable characteristics of the carnal mind. If clocks, occasionally, become moved with knowledge of impending death, how are we to deny to the trembling rustic his privilege of omen in the howling of his dog, or the cry of the whip-po-will? How are we to laugh away the terror of sounds in a bedstead, or cracks in a looking-glass? All these ominous voices will be accredited to us by *facts*; and upon what principle shall we contradict them? For instance, it is what we dare to call a superstition, that it is a prevision of death for thirteen to sit at a table. We know respectable, well-educated people who would go without dinner rather than be the thirteenth. Bro. Watson will probably laugh at this nonsense. Yet, not long ago, at the table of a wealthy merchant in Baltimore, a lady happened to take her seat as the thirteenth. It was observed, and she was warned; yet she persisted. Before the end of the year she died. Now, how, if we admit the possibility of truth in such things, are we to discriminate between clocks and other oracles? Evidently there would be no definite line between faith and superstition, and the two would soon become confused into one. We do not mean, however, that the serious consequences of admitting Bro. Watson's claims for his oracular clock should prevent us from giving full force to his facts; but only that they should compel us to make a proper inquiry into his statements

"Without going any further, too, we are able, on the other hand, to assure Bro. Watson, that Bishop Andrew's picture is not the only one in which the glass sympathized with the original. Just before the battle of Gettysburg, a picture of Mr. Davis suddenly fell and hid its face behind a bed, and broke its glass. It is a *fact*, which we hold ourselves responsible for, *extraordinary as it is*. We do not, however, believe that God wrought a miracle to break the glass in Mr. Davis' portrait, or Bishop Andrew's either. We do not consider miracle as the most natural, easy, and lawful of all explanations of obscure phenomena. We have no faith in the mortuary

relations of glass, nor the dismal forebodings of clock-hammers. Many strange things are very easily understood, when once the key is found. Mystery in nature is only ignorance of nature.

"In the last century it was gravely stated, in a history of the Island of St. Kilda, that the arrival of a stranger gave the people cold. The author, Rev. Dr. Macauley, was very averse to superstitions, but he had to admit the fact. Dr. John Campbell took a great deal of pains to ascertain the truth, and found it established, beyond doubt. He did not, however, solve the problem by the ready application of a "miracle;" but he tried to explain the fact by some theory of human effluvia. He was wrong. The fact was not explained; still, there was no necessity for calling in miracle to explain it. The cause was only unknown. All that was known was the relation between the arrival of strangers and prevalent colds. Afterward, a few words explained the mystery. An 'ingenious gentleman,' in other words, a man of mind fitted for such inquiries (Mr. Dorking,) as soon as the problem was stated, saw the secret, which was only a disregarded but patent fact. Strangers could only arrive at the island *with a north-east wind*. The clock mystery will be solved in the same way. In the meantime, let us be satisfied with the '*living oracles*,' and place no confidence in old clocks and cracked glass. We have no reason to believe that God speaks to us in such ways.

"We have no reason to believe that he can communicate better with people who have old clocks than with others; or that picture-frames partake of the powers of the lost Urim and Thummim. This may be called *ridicule*; but it is the expression of serious common sense. Skepticism, of all marvelous assumptions, is the state of mind proper for the investigation of a truth.

"As we began with one quotation from Bacon, we will conclude with another:

"'Another error is, impatience of doubt, and haste to assertion, without due and mature suspension of judgment. *If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubt; but if he will be content to begin with doubt, he shall end in certainties.*'

"Our answer to Bro. Watson's peremptory challenge is, that we do not believe that his clock strikes only just before the death of one of his family. All that we believe is, that in several instances the clock has been *noticed* to strike precedent to such deaths. In three of the instances the observers were watching by the side of the dying, and the striking could not pass unobserved. We believe it struck when it was not noticed, for such is a natural and reasonable