

STUDIES IN RELIGION

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Studies in Religion by Eliza Thayer Clapp

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ELIZA THAYER CLAPP

**STUDIES
IN RELIGION**

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"WORDS IN A SUNDAY SCHOOL."

Mrs. E. Clapp.



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STUDIES IN RELIGION.

SPIRIT.

We meet together, a band of learners; every thing invites us to study: every thing seems to us in possession of a secret, and allures us by the promise of unfolding it. We are at home in our world, and yet not at home in it. We are full of questions. The overhead sky, with its floating islands of condensed light, the broad earth, the regal domain of flowers, the shy birds, the serious animals, the busy insects,—to all we say, Tell unto us, whence come and whither go you? They move around in dignified possession. We are all askers of them. We importune them in their haunts, follow them to their recesses; but they say nothing: they are dumb, alas! for

them and us. A subject still more interesting than this world without, invites us. We question about ourselves: we become unto ourselves a study. Whence and why came we hither, with these curiously fashioned eyes and ears, these impish fingers, this irresistible vigor that burst forth in the leap and shout of infancy, these visions of future might, that wove their fantastic shapes so early in the hidden life of the child, that "wheel within a wheel," those sudden wailings of affection, that weakness, that thoughtlessness and yet unconscious consciousness of thoughts, far back in itself, and yet not belonging to it: a *possessed* creature? Whence this wondrous childhood,—this questioning youth?

Man, we are told, is a spirit in a body. I suppose all that this means is, that we are conscious of not being our body, but somewhat above, or, as it were, interior to it; and to this interior force has been variously given the name of soul, spirit, speaking of it as one; or mind, heart, affections, &c., speaking of its modes. That which we call soul is not separate from body, but lives through it: has taken form, become embodied. All that we see is the form of *somewhat*, is something embodied.

That which we see, touch,—in a word, which appears to all or any of the senses,—is body, or form, or appearance; and that which is not body, but the embodied, not appearance, but the appearer, we call spirit.

Spirit is then the invisible force, behind or in every thing that appears. The outward is not reality, but the form of it: the outward is the manifestation of the inward: the sensuous is the apparition of the spiritual. The human frame, no more than the stars and flowers, but equally with them, are appearances of an invisible reality,—of spirit. The star is body, so the flower, so our form; all equally impressions on the senses of an invisible force: the star one form of spirit, the flower another, the human frame another—all equally wonderful, divine, mystic. It is not in a figurative sense that flowers and stars are our brothers. They and we are alike the out-putting of invisible force: we are stars glowing here and there in the immeasurable arch of God's being; we are flowers springing upward from the earth and withering to it again; and the flower and the star, like unto us, are mortal forms of immortal spirit.

Now, this body, this outside, this appear-

ance of spirit, whether it be the human manifestation, or stars, or flowers, or words, or deeds, is limited, ended, finited or finite. Every thing perceptible to the senses must necessarily be finite; for, if it were not so, the senses could not take note of it. The reason we see an object, is because it is formed, limited, finite, has an end. Could we conceive its superficies sloping off into infinite space, we could not see it; only where it stopped, where it became limited, would it become visible; only as it took end, become finite. The invisible must take form in order to be visible,—the infinite take finity. That which appears is necessarily formed; that which takes form is necessarily finite; and so these two words, finite and infinite, come to represent the two great facts, which include all other facts: the finite expressing all that is outward, that has taken form in nature, in humanity, in word, or deed; the infinite expresses the invisible, the formless, the spirit.

Now, as the finite is the limit, the narrowing, the obstruction of the infinite, it must always be less than the infinite; and, for this reason, the finite and sensuous, beautiful as it may be, can never satisfy man, whose nature