

SPIRITUALISM IN AMERICA

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Spiritualism in America by Benjamin Coleman

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BENJAMIN COLEMAN

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IN AMERICA**

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AMERICA.

BY

BENJAMIN COLEMAN.

WITH

Fac-similes of Spirit Drawings and Writing.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Conductors of the *Spiritual Magazine* having determined to republish the papers on American Spiritualism, contributed by me to that journal, in an independent form, I desire to offer to the reader a few words of explanation as to my prominent connexion with the subject.

It will be seen by a perusal of this volume, how and under what circumstances I became a convert to a belief in spirit-intercourse, which belief I understand to be, *that the spirits of departed men and women have an existence in another sphere, and under certain conditions, that they can and do manifest themselves, and communicate with spirits in the flesh.* This being the cardinal point in my view of the subject, I see no reason why all denominations of religionists should not, when satisfied of the fact, become Spiritualists; for certainly the belief does not destroy the great truths inculcated in biblical history, but, on the contrary, it throws a new light on the sacred volume, and enables us to realize and comprehend many passages which are dark without it. But, as I am no theologian, I prefer to leave the religious bearing of the subject to be dealt with by other heads, believing that it is especially the duty of the ministers of religion to investigate Spiritualism, and give it, if possible, a right direction. Neither have I any scientific knowledge, though I do not think that to be a necessary qualification for the investigation of the facts of Spiritualism. I am a man accustomed to commercial pursuits, of strong nerve, and without fanatical bias of any kind. My mind is of that practical character that I am, I think, even a better witness to attest a physical fact that runs counter to generally received opinions, than the man of science, who has been educated, so to speak, in a groove, and who has first to unlearn and to throw aside the dogmas by which he is enthralled, before he can receive a new light which overturns his past philosophy. Having once become satisfied that the phenomena were real, I sought for an

explanation from men more learned than myself; but finding as I advanced in my enquiry, that the facts I witnessed completely set aside the theories which science had placed in my path, I was reduced to the necessity of either ignoring the evidence of my senses, or of admitting the spiritual origin of the phenomena. For instance—Professor Faraday's theory, that a table moved by the involuntary muscular action of the hands of those who sat around it, was entirely annihilated when I had seen, as I have frequently done, a table and other heavy bodies move about, *without* physical contact of any kind. It was of no use to tell me that it was Od force played the air I asked for, on an accordion, held by me in one hand, apart from any person present. It was equally futile and insulting to one's common sense to say that electricity had played on the accordion, and had answered questions, and had given me information on subjects of which I had no previous knowledge, without at least admitting that an intelligent agent guided and directed it; and, in a word, having become satisfied that it was no ordinary power that effected these marvels, I accepted the only rational solution, and became a Spiritualist.

As I was one of a few who recognised the truth at the earliest period of its introduction into this country, the only merit which belongs to me is, that I have steadily and boldly—despite the ridicule which the unthinking portion of society has cast upon the belief in Spiritualism—proclaimed the facts whenever they have been challenged; and now that thousands around me are seriously enquiring into the truth of this important subject, I have in my humble way become an authority.

As I am unaccustomed to write for the public, I am aware that the chief interest which may attach to the perusal of the following papers, will arise from the entire reliability that may be placed on the facts recorded in them, and not on their literary merit.

BENJ. COLEMAN.

London, Dec. 1861.

SPIRITUALISM

IN AMERICA.

DURING my recent visit to New York and Boston, in April, 1861, I made the personal acquaintance of some of the leading Spiritualists and best known Mediums of those cities; and at the request of several of the most prominent supporters of and contributors to the *Spiritual Magazine*, to whom I have read my notes since my return to London, I have great pleasure in placing them before its readers. I trust that my narrative may not only prove interesting, but that it will be instructive, inasmuch as it will convey additional proof of the reality of spirit-intercourse, confirmed by my own experiences in America, where, as it will be seen, I witnessed some of the most remarkable phenomena in Spiritualism to be found on record.

In my family and immediate circle of friends, for whom alone I kept a journal of my travels, I know that every statement I make is implicitly believed; but I am afraid that even among Spiritualists, it may be supposed in one or two cases to which I shall refer, that I may *somehow* have been deceived, and of course among the masses, who are still ignorant of the spiritual facts which are transpiring in their midst, my statements will be considered to be the ravings of a disordered imagination, or a gross attempt to impose on their credulity, senseless and profitless as such a proceeding would be; and therefore, it may not be out of place to remind these sceptics of an old story, which I hope those who are familiar with will forgive me for repeating. It is this:—

A Dutch ambassador assured the King of Siam that in Holland the water at times became so hard that a troop of elephants might walk on it in safety. The King is said to have replied, "Hitherto I have believed the strange things you have told me because I looked upon you as a sober fair-minded man, but now I am sure you lie."

The multitude, who from want of opportunity or inclination, have never seen the marvellous phenomena which are now attested by thousands in this country, and by tens of thousands in America, are exactly in the position of the benighted King of Siam. The *facts* simply transcend *their* philosophy, and with an arrogance which their sober reasoning cannot justify, they coolly ignore human testimony and declare them to be "impossible" and untrue.

It is not my intention, however, to discuss the general subject, for which I would refer the reader to the *Spiritual Magazine*, but only to warn the over-confident sceptic that before he endeavours to influence the minds of serious honest men by sneering at statements which to him may appear too extravagant for belief, he should first put himself on the same plane with me and others by investigating the subject with the sole object of eliciting the truth; and then, assuredly, the *reality of the phenomena* will no longer be denied by him, whatever differences of opinion the study of them may conscientiously lead us to.

My own belief in spiritual appearances, and that apparitions of departed persons are occasionally seen, has been long settled, and it is strengthened by the idea expressed in four lines of Byron:—

I merely mean to say what Johnson said,
That in the course of some six thousand years,
All nations have believed that from the dead
A visitant at intervals appears.

On my passage to America I took an early opportunity of introducing the subject among the passengers, and in a day or two it was evident that my advocacy of the truth of Spiritualism had become generally known, as I was sought for and constantly surrounded by groups representing every type of scepticism. Dr. Mack, a highly respected and well-known physician, residing at St. Catherine's, Upper Canada, placed himself in the van, and contested my arguments very warmly. It was, however, but a repetition of the old worn-out story: my facts were not facts to him—he must see them first—he must examine all the surrounding conditions—there must be something wrong in my powers of observation, &c., &c. To most persons, I find the *facts*, at first, are sad stumbling-blocks; which drive them to a setting up of their own judgment as superior to that of those who have become believers after due investigation. Judging from a variety of small civilities which were tendered to me on board, I had reason to think my unpopular views had nevertheless met with many sympathisers, and, among them, the very last person to whom I should have thought of speaking of Spiritualism from my previous knowledge of the man,—the captain of the ship. He however, I

found, had had his own experiences, as explained by the following colloquy which was overheard and reported to me:—

One of the passengers, a friend of the captain's, smoking with him on deck at night, said: "Have you heard all this d—d nonsense they are talking about spirits?"—"Yes," said the captain, in his solemn deep-toned voice, "I have; and let me tell you, Joe, there is more in it than people have any idea of." "Why, you don't mean to say that you believe the things of which Mr. Coleman is talking?"—"Well, Joe, I can only tell you that I had the clearest intimation of poor D——'s death, and in this way"—and the captain proceeded to tell his friend a veritable ghost story, which I have reason to believe made a serious impression on "Joe," inasmuch as he too exhibited to me afterwards many special civilities, showing a change of feeling in my favour. Among the officers of the ship who took the most interest in the subject were the doctor and the purser, who frequently invited me to their private cabins, and were serious and anxious in their enquiries. One evening, the purser said, "Doctor, do you believe in spiritual appearances?" "Yes," he replied, "I am inclined to do so—I never heard before on personal testimony of such facts as Mr. Coleman relates, but I believe them." "Well," said the purser, "so do I; and I will tell you why"—and he told the following story:—

"When C—— took a house, I went to live with him. One night I was disturbed by a loud knocking at the head of my bed, which destroyed my rest. I named it in the morning, and was laughed at by C—— and his sisters. This occurred a second and third time, with the addition of the bed clothes being on one occasion slowly dragged away from me. On a subsequent night, returning home late, I was groping my way in the dark to my bedroom, when at the door I was astounded by hearing a tremendous smash, as if a hundred weight of glass and china had been thrown at my feet. It was heard by all the house: C——, his sisters, and the servants rushed out of their rooms in great alarm; lights were procured, when to our surprise not anything was to be seen, and nothing was found to account for this extraordinary disturbance. The result was, that C—— gave notice of his intention to leave the house, and at length ascertained that the former occupant had packed up everything and decamped in the night; and the landlord on cleaning out the cellars found the body of a woman buried under the coals—who it was supposed had been murdered."

On my arrival at New York I made the personal acquaintance of Judge Edmonds, for whom I had long entertained the most profound admiration and respect. The undaunted manner in which from the first moment of his conviction he has proclaimed the truth of Spiritualism, and the worldly sacrifices he has been