

THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

A H A N D B O O K

O F

CHRISTIAN THEOSOPHY,

HEALING,  PSYCHIC CULTURE,

A N E W E D U C A T I O N,

BASED UPON THE IDEAL AND METHOD OF THE CHRIST,

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PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR,  
BUFFALO, N. Y.

1888.

## APPENDIX IV.

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### THE SPIRITUS MUNDI.

The following is taken from an interesting sketch by the talented spiritualist, lecturer and authoress, Emma Hardinge Britten, published in 1876 :

A curious paraphrase of the Holy Ghost legend obtained currency amongst certain classes of European mystics during the great outpouring of Modern Spiritualism. During the early days of this movement, I met with a large number of intelligent persons in Europe who attributed very remarkable spiritualistic endowments, not as the majority of the Spiritualists claim, to the influence of their deceased friends, but to a mysterious, incomprehensible, impersonal sort of a personage, a somebody, yet a nobody, to whom has been given the comprehensive title of the SPIRITUS MUNDI. Vague and various as are the theories afloat concerning this last named mystic agent, there seem to be two which represent the sum of the whole. One class of believers infer that there is in the world an element aggregated of all the intelligence dispensed by humanity. Its operation on the mind is assumed to be something analagous to the influence of oxygen on the body, but in addition to its universal influence upon mentality, it is represented as susceptible of being *collected* and focalized by any concrete gathering of persons to such an extent that it can and does respond to questions, move tables, and, under the influence of WILL, *effect all the marvels* attributed to the spirits of the so-called dead.

\* \* \* \* The second class of believers in the action of an universal "Spiritus Mundi" simply substitute that term for the Apostolic "Holy Ghost." Unlike the credulous and unreasoning Chris-

tian, they do not pretend to impersonate their idea, but claim that it is the direct procedure from the Divine Spirit—the influx of God-like power, the action of the Supreme Being manifest to those who in faith and apostolic aspiration seek the gift. As an example of this class of believers, I shall here cite my own experiences with a very interesting family to whom I had the pleasure of an introduction during a hurried visit to France, some eight or nine years ago. The family in question is one of high rank, and occupy too exclusive a social position to permit of my naming them, although the peculiarities of their phenomenal experiences have become the subject of wide-spread rumor. The members of the family consist of the father, mother, and three children. The eldest, at the time of which I write, was a fine lad of fourteen, with a brother two years younger, and a little fairy sister of six summers. It was the custom of this family, once in each day to assemble together in what they called their hours of Pentecost, during which they were visited by the manifestation of the spirit in every conceivable form of intellectual development. Their exercises consisted of invocations, the singing of hymns by the assembled circle, the performance of fine music by hired musicians stationed without the place of gathering, trance speaking, drawing, writing, visions and eloquent improvisations. Their sessions were limited to two hours, and during that time they received prophetic addresses, medical prescriptions, business directions, and instruction for the younger members of the circle in reading, writing, elocution, languages, mathematics, astronomy, history, and every branch of knowledge necessary to perfect an accomplished scholar.

The father of this wonderfully trained band of mystics, a nobleman whose rank, standing and unimpeachable character would seem to forbid the possibility of deception or falsehood, himself assured me no teacher of any kind had ever given his children a single lesson. In the trance condition these little ones had themselves mastered every branch of knowledge with the most perfect facility, and that, commencing from their earliest infancy. It was their custom to employ themselves in useful and intellectual pursuits during the day, but whatever problems arose among them,

that their quick intuitions did not immediately solve, were reserved as matters of inquiry from the *Spiritus Mundi* at the next day's seance. Having the privilege of an introduction to this singular and accomplished family, I was courteously invited, before my departure for England, to be present at one of their seances. Joyfully availing myself of this opportunity, I repaired to the *chateau* at the time appointed in company with an intimate friend of the family's, by whom I had been introduced as "one worthy to share in their holy communion." Before entering the Oratory, which had been fitted up for, and was kept exclusively devoted to that purpose, I was gravely, though courteously, warned not to indulge in feelings of idle curiosity, or advance to that spot as a mere spectator of some remarkable phenomena. "If," said my host, "you are sincerely desirous of partaking of the high spiritual afflatus to which this sacred place is dedicated, I doubt not you will realize the presence and influx of the *Spiritus Mundi*; to no lesser motives will the divine power we invoke deign to respond." Somewhat daunted by this preliminary demand upon conditions of mind I did not dare to analyze, and certainly could not command, I nevertheless advanced with all possible desire for *truth*, if not for religious illumination, and this was the result :

The Oratory was built in a secluded grove, fitted up with vases of flowers, rare pictures, noble sculptures, gems of natural beauty and artistic skill everywhere greeting the senses. Soft music from invisible performers stole on the ear; a remote chime of exquisitely toned bells occasionally rung a sweet peal, and the distant chant of a beautifully intoned litany was answered by responses from the family, standing around the altar-shaped table within. That altar was simply adorned with a pure white cloth, supporting seven delicately perfumed lamps, and clusters of fragrant flowers. The family took their seats in a semi-circle close by the altar, on the further side of which were seats for invited guests, occupied on the present occasion by myself and the friend who had introduced me. Although not particularly prone to reverence or veneration for ecclesiastical displays, I was too easily psychologized by my surroundings to have required any further injunctions to

yield myself up to the fascination of that deeply impressive scene. There was a serene and earnest air of aspiration too on each calm brow, that would have subdued the most rebellious or mocking spirit into courteous attention, if not sympathy with the principal actors. After the opening invocation by the master of the house, and the performance of the musical services, before mentioned, each member of the family, according to custom, proceeded to lay the special petition which filled their hearts before the invisible presence they invoked. The little girl lisped out a prayer that the Great Spirit would be pleased to inspire her with an understanding of how the flowers grew which she held in her hand. The younger boy wished for inspiration to continue the Roman history, in the study of which he was at present engaged, and the eldest offered a brief prayer for light upon the mathematical problems to which he was devoting his attention. These singular requests seemed to be presented in the most perfect confidence that they would be complied with, and addressed with as much good faith to the invisible *presence* as if spoken to their attentive father. As the children concluded their brief petitions, the mother arose, speaking evidently in a deep and unmistakable somnambulant condition. She reminded her children that there were strangers there who had honored them with their presence, and who, therefore, in Christian kindness should be preferred before themselves, and she called upon her husband and children to unite in desiring that such tokens of spiritual light and guidance should be vouchsafed to the visitors as should be best suited to their frame of mind and requirements. Instantly, as with a flash of mental lightning, the eldest boy, addressing me, said: "Lady! you are anxious to be informed of the fate of Sir John Franklin. Learn it now!" The boy had echoed my inmost thought—nay, revealed one of the secret purposes that was leading me to visit every available source of spiritual light and knowledge.

The moment the child had ceased to speak, and silence followed, a vision full of deep meaning and significance was presented to me. Like everything that transpired in that strange scene, it was given rapidly, clearly, without pause or halting. It came as the children

spoke, upon the instant, and passed away almost as rapidly, and I have since had reason to *know* that brief as that vision was, it represented graphically the special points of the great navigator's life and death, upon which I sought to be informed. Directly it closed, each of the party described it, and though I had not had time to breathe a syllable of what I had seen, their words agreed in every iota with one another, and with my own visual experience.

"Dear lady," said the little girl, turning coaxingly to me, "I see you are wishing two things, and they cross each other in your mind just so,"—crossing her little hands over each other as she spoke; "you wish that I should have my question answered about how the flowers grow, and yet you want still more to hear about your *double* that was said to have appeared to a circle of people somewhere in the north of England. Now, don't you, lady?" This was strictly true; every word of it. I had felt a wish running through my mind, that the little fairy who had brought her flowers to show to "dear God," and ask him how they grew, should be satisfied, and yet I could not keep from thinking all the time about a tale I had heard of my "double" having appeared and communicated to a circle in Yorkshire. Before I could respond to my little querist she arose, and with a beautiful mixture of childish simplicity and spiritual dignity, recited some incidents known only to myself—on earth at least—went on to describe the circle where I had appeared, mentioned correctly several attendant circumstances, and wound up with a brief but deeply philosophical explanation of what the "double" or apparition of the human spirit really is. *My own future destiny* was my next fixed, though involuntary thought, and before it was fully framed into shape, the matron arose, and poured out in thrilling accents a prophecy, the details of which will never pass from my mind. Many of its predictions have been already fulfilled—some have failed—still I believe in them, for the memory of that inspired woman cannot connect itself with aught but truth and purity.

"Stonehenge!" cried the deep voice of our host, speaking seemingly in his normal condition, but with the same breathless rapidity in which each communication followed on the heels of the other. My companion was addressed this time, and our host fixed

his piercing eyes upon him as he waited for an answer. "Yes—I was thinking of Stonehenge," replied my friend, "and wishing that I could receive some special information concerning the rites once practiced there." Instantly our host explained grandly, authoritatively, and philosophically, problems connected with that mysterious Druidical temple which must have been the echo of divine truth.

At length the closing moments of this wonderfully fascinating and instructive seance drew nigh. I had not been in that presence above fifteen minutes, before I felt that I was partaking in the illumination of the scene, and, realizing the wonderful mental lucidity of those who surrounded me, I was beginning to read them as they read me, when, to my regret, I perceived mentally—for I was all perception now—that the hour of parting was at hand. I wished for music, and *they knew my wish*, and obeyed it. I longed for further intercourse, yet felt the hedge of impossibility crowding upon me. They spoke my thoughts, expressing their deep regret that we should so soon be estranged. I *knew* they were sincere in those regrets, knew, as they said, that we should never meet again.

I knew the points of difference between their belief and mine, when we soared away to heavenly knowledge, but perceived our perfect agreement on points that concerned our mortal existence.

We all enjoyed in those two brief, wonderful hours, perfect clairvoyance of mortal things. Each of the family responded to my unspoken wish by improvising a verse of song, then all joined in a choral of benediction. The sweet bells pealed out, and the invisible musicians gave us a parting pæan, and so closed the seance with this strangely gifted family. I subsequently learned from the friend who had introduced me,—himself the most intimate associate of these persons,—that they regarded with abhorrence the idea of communion with the spirits of the dead; indeed they *strenuously denied* even its possibility. I have some reason to think they wished to convert me from my heretical belief in this respect.

The nobleman whom we visited had in early youth, it seems, received his "illumination" through visions, and the visitation of

what he deemed to be "an angelic messenger" from the Most High. He had selected his wife, and reared his children, entirely under this heavenly guidance, sometimes conversing face to face with the same "angel" who had at first conferred his mission upon him, but still oftener conducting his whole scheme of life by the influence of the *Spiritus Mundi*, which he regarded as the Holy Ghost of apostolic times, not as the material God of the Christians, but as a direct procedure from the Most High, or the Spirit of God poured by influx into the minds of those who in humble faith and high aspiration put themselves in the Pentecostal attitude of waiting for his coming. At times the walls of their Oratory were shaken, the floors quivered, exquisite perfumes were wafted through the chamber, and deeply occult meanings were revealed to them in the philosophy of color, tones, and perfumes. I could write a volume on the significant and instructive ideas derived from these persons, did space permit. At present I can but add that though there was a speciality in the sublimity and exaltation of these persons' spiritual views, I have met many other highly endowed persons in Europe, who attributed, as they did, their great gifts, not to individualized spirits, but to the *Spiritus Mundi*, or Soul of the World, communicating to mortals through influx. Such were the opinions cherished, I believe, by the interesting family of the Bertolacci, the friends of William and Mary Howitt. Like the French nobleman above referred to, Mr. Bertolacci claimed that much of his childrens' education was obtained at their seances, and in a little pamphlet put forth on the subject of their experiences, more marvels are related of them than I should care to repeat, yet all the phenomena which fell in such abundant profusion on this family were attributed, as in the former case, to direct influx from God, and not in any way to the agency of spirits. Numerous other instances have been presented to me of the same kind; indeed I can recall the experiences of some of the most remarkably endowed families and individuals of my acquaintance in Europe, as being believers in the direct agency of the *Spiritus Mundi*, and utter disbelievers in the influence of spirit friends, or the souls of humanity.

\* \* \* \* Whilst admitting the constant ministry of our angel



friends, are we so very sure that there is no higher power than them capable of reaching us? No higher being controlling them and influencing us through these nameless intuitions? Are we so sure that there is no collective soul-element in the world, operating upon and through matter, as the soul acts through the body, infilling men and spirits both with more than finite perception, and gleams of more than finite wisdom?

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Whilst I gratefully, lovingly attribute to my precious angel-friends all care, guidance and watchful ministry that they are capable of rendering, I am day by day, hour by hour, more and more startled by gleams of the wonderful powers of the human spirit itself, and I have yet to learn that the singular realms of intelligence we so vaguely attempt to define as intuition, instinct, presentiment, or even spiritual impression *alone*, are not due in a great measure to our contact with the ocean of spiritual life over which our barques are drifting from the shores of time to eternity.