

A Spirit's View of Mediums

This is the testimony of the spirit of a woman who, prior to her physical demise, was a practicing Spiritualist. In this instructive excerpt from the book, *Heaven Revised*¹, she relates her first experience of a Spiritualist meeting from the spirit's viewpoint. This section was extracted, with minor typographic and punctuation adjustments, by Miles Edward Allen in May of 2014.

I had from the first been anxious to return to the earth and communicate with the dear friends I had left there; and when I realized that I had not sufficient knowledge for that, I was still anxious to be permitted to go where such communication was held, and behold from the spirit side of life that which I had often beheld and taken part in from the earthly side. True to my belief in Spiritualism I had faithfully attended the weekly circle, and had received the various manifestations and communications with more or less credence.

Though my faith was founded on a rock and could not be shaken, there had, nevertheless, always been a feeling of dissatisfaction, away down deep in my heart, that the words of inspiration which were addressed to us from the spirit spheres, were not more inspired, more worthy of the source from which they emanated, or were supposed to emanate. The time finally arrived when I was permitted to attend the very circle of which I had once been a member.

A dozen or more persons sat in a semi-darkened room, clasping one another's hands. Around them were circles upon circles of spirits, of every grade, all anxiously awaiting an opportunity to communicate with those of Earth. Of the mortals present three or four were recognized mediums, possessing diverse gifts. Two or more of these were attended by their little familiar spirits, through whose agency the communication of others was usually received.

Various motives had brought the remainder of the circle thither. Some were actuated merely by curiosity. One or two came with an earnest and honest desire to investigate. The larger number were simply anxious to hear from their departed friends. But of the entire number, not more than one or two were really seeking spiritual light and truth; and each one attracted around him spirits whose moods and motives corresponded with his own. There were idle, mischievous spirits, bent on having a good time; there were earnest spirit investigators, ready to second the efforts of mortals; there were those who had recently departed from the earth, and were most eager to send back a word of comfort; there were high and pure spirits who sought an opportunity for impressing mortals with the grand truths which Spiritualism holds in reserve for those who truly desire them.

A clairvoyant first spoke, and described the spiritual forms which were presented to her vision. As I listened to the descriptions, I — who beheld the spirits described — looked at Margaret in amazement. A youth nearing manhood was represented as an infant, still dressed in earthly baby habiliments. A man apparently in the prime of life, grand and glorious in his presence, was depicted as decrepit with age, and wearing an earthly garb of a quarter of a century ago. In no case did age, appearance, or garments in any way correspond with the actual presence before me; and when a spirit from one of the

¹ Duffey, Eliza Bisbee, *Heaven Revised: A Narrative of Personal Experiences After the Change Called Death*, Religious-Philosophical Publishing House, 1889, pp. 87-93.

lower spheres, with a mischievous leer upon his countenance, gained possession of the medium, and I heard a description of Jesus with the crown of thorns upon His head, giving also the name of Jesus, my disgust and indignation had reached their height.

I turned to Margaret with impatient angry words: "Was clairvoyance after all only a delusion?"

"No, my child. You do not understand. Let me explain. Neither mortal eyes, nor spirit eyes in mortal form can behold spirit. It is too ethereal to be perceived. But for purposes of identification it is possible to impress the medium's brain so that he believes that he sees; and in order to make the identification complete, this impression is almost invariably of the spirit as it appeared while still dressed in mortality, the impression corresponding with the memory of friends. It is not a delusion; it is not even a deception.

"But those who are content to stop at this phase of spirit manifestation, and seek nothing further, know nothing whatever of Spiritualism. They accept the guarantee for the thing itself; that which is offered in testimony of truth for the truth."

"But why was that deception about Jesus permitted?"

"Truly that was a deception; but when you visited the lower spheres, was it not explained to you that spirits of a low grade, who have no clear perceptions of right and wrong, take pleasure in deluding humanity? It affords them rare amusement. The ignorant and credulous offer themselves as willing victims to this class of spirits."

"But how can humanity protect itself from the impositions of this class?"

"The way is very plain. Let mediums themselves in their personal characters rise above them, and they cannot approach them for purposes of evil; on the other hand, let mankind at large bring to the study of these phenomena its reason and its judgment. Let it not take all spiritual utterances on faith, simply because they are

spiritual in their source. Let it discriminate between the good and the evil, the wise and the foolish, that which if accepted will benefit, and that which will prove injurious.

"But to return to the subject of mediums, study this clairvoyant, and see what she is."

I did so, and her character was revealed to me, showing me that she was not only ignorant and credulous, but with no clear convictions of duty, no just conceptions of the importance of her mission as a medium of communication between the two worlds. The display of clairvoyant powers concluded, one spirit after another took possession of her organism for a brief time. The communications of those who wished to speak to Earth friends were for the most part brief and unsatisfactory, though several names were correctly given. Why was this? In answer, the power was given to me to perceive in part the method of communication. The impression was made upon, and the work performed through, the brain of the medium, and this being dull and untrained, responded but faintly to the touch of spirit hands. One of the higher band of spirits found opportunity to attempt communication through her; but what a look of dismay and discouragement came over him, when he heard his brilliant thoughts dulled, the truths he would utter obscured, his meaning perverted, and his very language murdered, in passing through the channel of this woman's intellect. Disappointed, he soon ceased his efforts, and again a degraded spirit stepped in, and with scarcely a break in the discourse, proceeded at some length with a jargon of ideas, and a grammar eliminated of all recognized rules; and when he concluded, he announced the name of one of the most brilliant statesmen America has ever known. This name was received with a rapture of delight by a large number of those present, while the boon companions of the mischievous invisible were equally expressive of their pleasure. Oh, it was rare fun for them.

Then a second medium was controlled by one or more spirits. I could look into his heart and see good impulses there, but also impurity

and lack of high principle. He, too, though not so much the plaything and jest of mischievous immortals, drew around him only a lower class of spirits, and nothing of any real spiritual value was received through his mediumship; and as I studied him, I saw that it was impossible that there ever would be, until he was radically changed. This instrument, like the other, gave forth only weak and discordant notes, even when played upon by master spirits, because it was imperfect and out of tune.

A third medium opened her lips in her turn, and I waited anxiously to see and hear what would be the message, and how delivered. Again I was given that inner perception of character. I saw a woman of weakly good impulses, superstitious in her nature, and with a zeal for her faith which was only excelled by her ignorance. Only partially controlled by unseen powers, she allowed her eagerness and imagination to run away with her. She mistook her own impulses for genuine impressions from the Spirit world, and that which she gave was a medley of truth and falsehood, reality and delusion — the whole so debased by ignorance and misconception as to be utterly worthless. Yet the woman did not intentionally deceive. She was a victim of her own zeal and her own mental delusions, while other victims, enshrouded in the same mental and spiritual darkness as herself, listened intently and even reverently to what she said, and accepted her words without question.

"You see," said Margaret, "what we have to contend with in our attempts to establish communication between the material and spiritual worlds? Not only must man look through a glass darkly in his attempts to behold the light, but the glass is too often unnecessarily obscured by ignorance, folly, and evil. We need patience."

Almost disheartened, I then turned my attention to the fourth and last medium, to see if any hope were left for the communication of truth from the Spirit world. As I studied her from my vantage ground of the Spirit world, from which we can look through the disguises of the

flesh, I found that she was a woman of quick perceptions, keen discernment, true to the heart's core, and fully appreciating the privileges and duties which fell to her because of her peculiar gift.

I had known all these four mediums while I was still in the flesh, and had gained a tolerably accurate estimate of their different characters, but had never realized as now, the important bearings these characters and acquirements had upon their mediumship.

As I still regarded the fourth speaker, I noted that she was surrounded only by bright spirits. As others approached her, they seemed restrained at a certain distance by some invisible barrier which, try as they would, they could not pass. She was herself true, and therefore as a medium she uttered words of truth. She was intelligent, and did not unwittingly pervert the truth. All her desires and aspirations seemed to be directed heavenward, and the cry of her soul seemed to be: "Oh, make me worthy—make me more worthy of the mission to which I am appointed!" And a bright band of angels, as if in response, encircled her head with a glowing diadem of stars, while their hands were extended above her in benediction. Even she was not perhaps fully capable of becoming the messenger of communication from the brightest and best of those who have passed to the Spirit-world from the Earth life; but then how few there are—where can they be found?—who are thus in all things capable?

But still another shock was in store for me. Words were spoken in which there was much wisdom—words which were not unworthy of almost any source; but when a name illustrious in the annals of literature, whose possessor had passed to spirit life more than a generation ago, was given. I felt my heart sink within me. I knew the spirit thus named was not present. I had already sufficient knowledge to feel assured that he passed onward to a sphere whose inhabitants do not return to earth. Was there, then, no dependence to be placed in the utterances of mediums? Were even the best liable to self-deception?

Margaret, ever watchful, divined my thoughts. "Look," said she, pointing upward. As I obeyed her I beheld, or seemed to behold — for if it was not sight, it was a perception as strong as the sense of seeing — a succession of links extending from sphere to sphere, and from spirit to spirit, and on this chain of links the thought has been conveyed, originating far heavenward, and descending from spirit to spirit, until it had finally found utterance on Earth. Oh! these wonderful spiritual bonds which can bring Earth in communication with the higher spheres, and bind all together as a perfect whole!

On this occasion I realized, as I had never before, the difficulties which beset the Spirit world in its attempts to establish communication with earth. Mortals themselves are very ignorant of the necessary conditions. Then their imperfect natures draw around them more or less degraded spirits, who naturally interfere with, if they do not utterly thwart, the efforts of the higher and purer ones. Then mediumship being, as it might be said, an accident of the physical and mental organization, mediums are as a rule quite unprepared for the work required of them. Untrained, too often the reverse of spiritual in their natures, too often without a sense of moral responsibility; from such harsh, discordant instruments, though their keys be touched by angel fingers, mortals can never hope to hear the melodies of heaven.

The first need of Spiritualism is conscientious, pure-minded mediums, fully recognizing the grave responsibilities resting upon them, and seeking to fit themselves in every way for their work. How clearly I see now, as I did not see in Earth life, that the more fully mediums cultivate themselves in every direction, intellectually as well as spiritually, do they lessen the labor of their spirit visitants who have a work to do on Earth, and can only perform it satisfactorily by the help of mortal agency. The wiser, purer and truer is the medium, not only will a higher class of spirits be attracted, but truth itself will be less adulterated in passing through his or her intelligence. As water to the spectator apparently takes on the color of the glass which contains it, so must the nature of the medium tinge and modify all that to which he or she gives utterance.²

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² The reader should be aware that this material was produced, via automatic writing, by a medium, and so it should be subjected to the same critical analysis it recommends for other communications.