

Behind the Revolution

How the Explosion in Spirit Communications Was Ignited

As impressed by spirits upon the mind of the Honorable John Worth Edmonds,
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It is now about one hundred years since Sweedenborg¹ proclaimed to the world that he had personal intercourse with the spirit-land. It was the first instance since the days of Jesus that spirit-communication to such an extent had been known among men. There had been occasional instances during the previous fifteen or sixteen centuries, in which there had been spirit-intercourse, in which the spirit had made repeated attempts to open communion with man. But the intercourse through him, proclaimed to the world by him, was of a more extended and marked character, and had attracted the attention of mankind to a greater degree than anything since the Crucifixion. When he died, unlike most men, when he entered the spirit world, he knew all about the existence on which he entered, in consequence of his previous experience. He at once discovered how much of what he had taught was true, and how much erroneous; and how much it would benefit mankind if the knowledge he had acquired when in the body could be diffused abroad among them generally. In this respect he was far ahead of many who had long preceded him in their entrance in the spiritland. He felt it to be at once his mission to endeavor to extend that knowledge, in order that he might elevate man from the depression with which ages of ignorance, bigotry, and superstition had afflicted him. He therefore devoted himself exclusively to that object, and sought for aid throughout the whole spirit-world; reasoning with some, importuning others, demonstrating to inquiring minds the reality of which they had no conception; calling on philosophers

for their assistance, and upon affection for its aid; in fine, invoking throughout by considerations not only affecting man's elevation upon earth, but his elevation and happiness in the next sphere, their cooperation in this great work. This labor of his was conducted with the earnestness that could flow only from the most settled and thorough conviction of the reality and practicability of spiritual intercourse.

That conviction which attended him in his passage from this world to the spirit-land was increased a thousand-fold by what he witnessed there.

It is important to notice here, that these untiring and strenuous efforts of his, causing him to range far and near, high and low through the regions of space, necessarily caused him to be known to vast numbers of spirits, as being engaged in that work, and as having had experience in his earthly life. But when he had succeeded in attracting the attention of spirits to the subject to an extent sufficient to insure adequate cooperation, it became primarily a subject of inquiry, *How it was to be done*.

The mere proclamation through one or a few persons, it had already been discovered in his own case, amounted to little or nothing. To a few only could a knowledge of it be brought home, and with fewer still could any belief be produced. The very slight progress of the Sweedenborgians for a hundred years is evidence of that. Hence the importance of the inquiry. How was it to be done? Man was so sensuous, so material, so mere animal in his nature, that the mere address of mind to mind could not effect the great purpose in ages.

Even the teachings of Jesus, if they had been, like Swedenborg's, unaccompanied by anything addressing itself to man's animal nature, would have been almost as ineffectual as his. The miracles, as they were called, which attended the mission of Jesus, were powerful if not essential elements in the propagation of his doctrines. Hence it was apparent that some mode of reaching man's physical perceptions must be devised, and that not through one person only, as in the case of Jesus or through a few — a score or two, as in the case of his immediate disciples — but, if possible, through great numbers; thus not only diffusing the knowledge abroad among men, but affording the most satisfactory evidence against the charge of collusion. And it was reasoned that, as in the case of Jesus and his disciples, in the case of Swedenborg himself, and in the case of others through which spiritual communications had been made in past times, a peculiar condition of their physical nature had allowed it, so that same condition existing in many others, as it necessarily must, might be availed of to effect the great end in view. Therefore the first direction of the minds engaged in this work was to affect the greatest number of those whose physical condition would permit them to be affected. Clairvoyance and psychometry were something toward it, paving the way, as it were, like John in the wilderness; but still there was wanting the evidence addressed to the senses, which man's physical condition so imperatively required. At length, through the combined efforts of those engaged in the work, and chiefly through the practical philosophy of Franklin, the mode of communication by raps was discovered. When at length it was learned on earth that a communication could be had with spirits by rappings (and it was a considerable time after the discovery had been made in the spheres), then the spirits sought out others whose physical condition permitted the raps to be heard through them also, and thus rapping

mediums were noticed in other sections of the country. At first, as you will all remember, this spirit-intercourse was held almost entirely by rappings. Various other phases of it, now known, have gradually grown up since then, and are the result of the progress thus far made.

When the mode of communication by raps was discovered, it was manifested in this country in preference to any other, for two reasons. First, it was the country of Franklin. Second, this country was in the enjoyment of greater mental freedom than existed in any other part of the world, or had ever been known in it; for here man was free to investigate whatever he pleased, because truth was left free to combat it. As the intercourse through physical manifestations extended and progressed, and men became believers in spiritual intercourse, they became (by virtue of a law whose existence and operation the wiser spirits know full well) more and more capable of being approached by spirits, until moral and mental manifestations (call them which you will) have extended and are extending to a still wider range than physical manifestations have ever obtained. Thus vast numbers have been found in this sphere of existence, through whom, either by mental or physical manifestations, disembodied spirits have been able to communicate with man in the form. Now this has not been by a miracle, a prodigy, a special providence, or the suspension of God's immutable laws, but it has been in accordance with, and in execution of those laws. Hence the power of spirits out of the body to commune with spirits in the body is not confined to a few, but belongs to all, as a part of their nature.

There may, it is true, be exceptions of spirits too material and gross to approach up to the level of your stage of existence; but, with that exception, all in the spirit-world, whether wise or foolish, progressed or undeveloped, vicious and evil-disposed, or virtuous and holy, can alike exercise the prerogative of communing.

As the knowledge of this new discovery was diffused abroad among the inhabitants of the spirit-world, it was received by them with an interest far more intense than any of which you can conceive; and is strongly in contrast with the obstinate blindness with which mankind in this sphere receive it.

Many spirits, bound to the earth by the strong ties of attachment for those whom they have recently left, are anxious to commune with them. Many who have too long ago passed from earth to have any such personal ties, are still drawn to earth by the propensities which have marked their life here, and which still linger around them. Some wish to commune from an unselfish desire to alleviate the condition of mankind. Others, alas! feeling still the passions which tainted their mortal career, desire to commune in gratification of their fear, their hatred, their envy, or their jealousy. And, I repeat, that as the reality of spiritual intercourse was the natural result of man's progression, all these various classes of spirits could commune, the one as well as the other.

But many found this difficulty. Mankind had so long been in the habit of bowing to the authority of names, that neither mediums, nor persons in the flesh communicating through them, were willing to receive communications unless they bore the sanction of some great or distinguished name, or some name which would of itself have influence upon medium or interrogator. For instance, how often have you yourselves seen when a spirit has attempted to communicate, that the first question was, "Who are you?" Not what do you teach? but who are you? And how often have you seen, when an unknown name has been given, that the spirit has been repelled and not permitted to commune at all! Now this has been observed in the spirit-world over and over again, and the knowledge of it extends all through and among those who have attempted to have communion. And those who have either had a name that

was odious among men, or one obscure and unknown, have found that by this besetting propensity of man to worship the authority of name, they were to be entirely excluded from the privilege of intercourse if they attempted to do so in their own name. And this privilege, so much more highly prized by them than you, they were to be deprived of by your perverseness, if they truly told you who they were.

It is not strange, therefore, that very many, either from an over-anxiety to commune, or from a careless disregard of what they deemed a trivial falsehood, assumed false names; and among all those who have been falsely personated, there has been no one more frequently so than Swedenborg; for the simple reason, that there is no one in the spirit-world so generally known as him as identified with this new discovery. And many of those who assume his name do not know but that on earth, among you, he is regarded in the same light in connection with this matter. Hence they so often take his name, and because they suppose it will be the most acceptable to you.

Let it be not supposed, however, that all those who thus falsely assume his name intend to teach falsehood, or to make a statement in any other respect untrue. They perceive that the price they must pay for communing is this false personation, apparently harmless to them, for they cannot help asking themselves, "Why do men care so much more for name than for substance?" But they intend in all else to teach truthfully as far as they know. Some, indeed, having learned what Swedenborg did teach, suppose they are teaching exactly his doctrine now. But there are some who, for mischievous purposes, assume a false character, and teach false doctrine to deceive and mislead.

Out of this general statement the danger of spiritual intercourse may be discovered. Out of these crudities and false teachings the truth must be sifted, as must often be done in mere mundane matters. We have but one guide, but

one protector against the errors which may thus mislead. That guide is the free, unbiased, candid exercise of our reason; that protector is pu-

riety of intention, holiness of thought, and a firm reliance upon the providence of God.

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¹ As spelled in the original document: *Spiritualism*, by John W. Edmonds and George T. Dexter, published by Partridge & Brittan, 1853. The text quoted here, from pages 282-288, was given in response to a question concerning the validity of claims that various mediums were channeling the spirit of Swedenborg, who is generally considered to have been one of the greatest geniuses mankind has produced. For more information, see the biographies of Edmonds and Swedenborg in the Legacy Files.