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SPIRITUALISM AT THE WEST.

CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN THE BELIEVERS IN

THE HARMONIAL PHILOSOPHY

IN ST. LOUIS,

AND

THE REV. DR. N. L. RICE.

“ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”—*Old Testament.*

“ Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering, to go in.”—*New Testament.*

“ Then, here's freedom to him that can read—  
Here's honor to him that can write;  
For none ever fear'd  
That the truth should be heard,  
But him that the truth would indict.”

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PRINTED FOR THE ASSOCIATION OF THE FRIENDS OF PROGRESS OF CINCINNATI.

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CINCINNATI:  
LONGLEY BROTHERS, PRINTERS,  
169½ WALNUT STREET.  
1854.

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# C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

OF THE

## ST. LOUIS SPIRITUALISTS AND THE REV. DR. RICE.

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*St. Louis, January 23d, 1854.*

REV. N. L. RICE, D. D.

DEAR SIR :—

Inclosed please find two papers marked "A" and "B" respectively. That marked "A" contains a series of propositions which embody, as the undersigned suppose, the leading doctrinal tenets of the prevailing orthodox denominations. That marked "B" embodies the leading propositions which those who are seeking to discover and establish a "Harmonial Philosophy," believe to be true and maintainable, and opposed to those set forth in "A."

We, the undersigned, are of the latter class. In our examination of the comparative merits and absolute truths of the doctrines set forth respectively in those two series of propositions, we have been actuated alone, so far as we can discover our own motives, by a desire for truth. To our minds, the evidence against those of "A" and in favor of those of "B" is overwhelming. Yet because of the immense moment of the question at issue, we are anxious to have the opposing doctrines tried in the crucible of a thorough and searching debate, that the pure gold may come out tried in the fire, and the dross be detected and cast aside. We therefore respectfully invite and earnestly request you to kindly discuss with us, publicly, the points of difference presented in the above mentioned two series of propositions.

We invite you to discussion for two reasons—1st, Because the Protestant clergy of this city have, in their letter to Dr. O. A. Brownson, acknowledged you as their ablest debater; 2d, Because from many hints dropped in your discourses from time to time, we believe you have confidence in truth and the common sense of the public, and hence no confidence in the usual reason for declining a debate, to wit: "No good results from popular discussions." This is a reason becoming a Romanist,



who calls to mind the mighty results of popular discussions between Luther and his antagonists. But a Protestant should hesitate to urge it.

The series of "A" may be modified to meet your actual views, if they fail in their present form to present them correctly on the points involved.

S. J. FINNEY will conduct the discussion in favor of "B."

You will please indicate your reception or rejection of this invitation as early as possible; and in case of acceptance, the preliminaries will be immediately arranged.

Respectfully and obediently,

Your fellow-citizens,

P. E. BLAND,  
A. MILTENBERGER,  
JNO. LAUGHTON,  
H. STAGG,  
WM. C. ANDERSON,  
ROBT. P. SIMMONS,  
DANIEL B. HUNT,  
WM. HAMMOND,  
C. P. MONE.

WM. H. MANTZ,  
J. H. LUSK,  
J. S. FRELIGH  
E. LIVERMORE,  
W. A. WHITING,  
P. C. MUNRO,  
D. B. THAYER,  
N. F. HYER,

P. S.—Please address your reply to P. E. Bland, Esq., Chairman of the Committee.

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#### PROPOSITION "A."

1. The Bible is the Word of God, being a full revelation from Him to man—in itself complete, and never to be either enlarged or diminished.
2. A being exists, the antagonist of God and all righteousness, called the "Devil," "Satan," "Beelzebub," &c.
3. Man was, at, and sometime after his creation, perfect in his intellectual, moral and physical nature.
4. Man being thus perfect, he yielded to the counsel and persuasions of the Devil, and violated a divine command, and in consequence fell from his high estate, cursed of God with total depravity and eternal death.
5. That God so loved man in his present fallen condition, that He sent his only Son to die upon the cross, and thereby redeem man from the effect of the curse. This Son was Jesus Christ—very God and very man, and he, together with God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost, constitute the Holy Trinity—the Everlasting God.
6. Men are saved by the favor of God, through faith in Jesus Christ; and those dying out of his favor and faith are heirs of eternal death by inheritance from the original progenitors of the race, and remain to all eternity in the torments of Hell.
7. After death, and at some remote day in the future—the day of general judgment—the souls of men will be arraigned, tried, and a decree rendered in each case, by virtue of which the faithful pass into Heaven, becoming angels of light and transcendant bliss on the one hand, and the unfaithful on the other are consigned to Hell.



## PROPOSITION "B."

1. That Nature is God's Revelation, and her laws the only infallible standard of truth.

2. That man is a progressive being—becoming by a law of his nature, better, nobler, and more God-like, and will in time, as a race, become pure and righteous.

3. That "evil" is a relative term, and originates in the misuse of things, principles and faculties, in their use good; which misuse is occasioned by ignorance or misdirection.

4. That death is the process of transition from the earthly to the spiritual life: that by this process, the man is separated from the body forever, and in his spiritual form, commences his new life, possessing precisely the same mental and moral attributes which he possessed before.

5. That the spirit entering the spirit world, is drawn by spiritual attraction to such society as corresponds to his or her mental and moral condition—*Similes Similibus*—and the enjoyment of all is in just proportion to their moral and intellectual elevation.

6. That all, even the lowest, entering the spirit world, may progress, forever rising higher in the scale of being, and becoming purer, and lovelier, and grander.

7. That men, women and children from the spirit world, may and do communicate with those on earth, and that such communication is full of good to the race.

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 DR. RICE'S REPLY.

January 24th, 1854.

To Messrs Bland, Miltenberger, and others:—

GENTLEMEN,

Your favor, of the 23d inst., inclosing some fourteen propositions, which you desire me to discuss with a gentleman you name, was duly received. Though I hold myself bound to defend the religion of Christ against infidelity and error, whenever circumstances demand such labor at my hands, and in whatever way I may judge most effective I must respectfully decline the debate you propose:

1. When I engage in public discussion, I must have an equal share in the statement of every proposition. But you have cut out my work for me without even consulting me. I fear your friend does not well understand the right of debaters, especially of the challenged party—or if he does, he seeks advantages which *truth* does not need or desire.

2. You have prepared *too much* work for me. I can bear as much labor as most men, but the human system is frail. I see before me no less than *fourteen* propositions, embracing directly and indirectly, all the leading points of religion, natural and revealed. To do even tolerable justice to these points, would require from one to two months of steady debating!



I cannot undertake such labor ; and I am sure the people of this city would leave the debaters "alone in their glory," long before the last proposition could be reached.

3. The propositions on your side, to say nothing of those you desire me to affirm, do not suit me. I do not know that I understand them. They are vague and verbose, certainly prepared by some one whose ideas are much confused. I fear they were prepared by your champion ; and if so, I should anticipate a scattering debate. For instance, your first proposition says : " Nature is God's Revelation," &c. Now, there is no word in the English language more indefinite than the word "nature." What do you mean by it ? Something *created* ? or something eternally existing ? How much do you include in the word ? Do you include the whole material universe with all its phenomena ? or all the intelligent spirits in the universe, and their phenomena ? or do you include both ?

Your second proposition is still more incomprehensible. You say "Man is a progressive being, becoming by a law of his nature, better, nobler, and more God-like." Do you mean that every individual man is, by a law of his nature, constantly becoming better ? Or do you mean that by a law of human nature, every man's children will be better than their father ? Or do you mean that there is a law of progress which does not affect individuals, but is operative upon nations or generations of men ? That it affects the mass without reaching the individuals composing the mass ? Then you say man "will in time, as a race, become pure and righteous ?" What am I to understand by man's becoming pure "as a race ?" Do you mean that whilst *individuals* will continue impure, the "race" will be pure ? Or that all the individuals of the race will, at some future period, be pure ? Or that some future generations of men on this earth will be pure ? If this last be your meaning, what particular advantage would it be for the present generation to know it ?

You tell us of a *law* of man's nature which causes his progress. What is the nature of this law ? Is it physical, mental, or moral, or all three ? Does it act and produce its results irrespective of the voluntary respect of individuals ? If so, what good would result from proving it, since its operation is the same whether known or unknown ? Does this law operate uniformly in all ages, and in all parts of the world ? And can we determine by the progress it has made in past ages, about how long it will require to make man perfect "as a race ?" You say men will become pure, righteous, noble, God-like. By what standard do you propose that we shall estimate his moral attainments ? If I use one standard, and you use another, I fear that even the law of progress in our nature could not save us from confusion. You have no standard except "nature's laws ;" and unless you and your friend have more knowledge than any man with



whom I have the pleasure to be acquainted, you are very imperfectly acquainted with her laws. And you will excuse me for doubting whether the law of progress in human nature has done very much more for you than for the rest of mankind. On the whole, I fear it would require so much time to ascertain the meaning of the words and phrases of this proposition, that we should be obliged to leave the merits of it unexamined.

Your third proposition is no better than those just noticed. You say that “‘evil’ is a relative term,” &c. Now, unfortunately, the experience of mankind shows too conclusively that evil is something more than “a term.” You say, it is “relative,” but you do not state to what it is *related*, but explain its origin, namely: “In the misuse of things, principles and faculties.” Very vague terms these. But the “misuse” which produces the “relative term” “evil,” you say, is caused “by ignorance or misdirection.” That is, “misuse” of things, principles and faculties, is caused in some cases, by ignorance, and in others, misdirection.” I am at a great loss here, gentlemen. Misdirection, you say, causes “misuse.” But what causes misdirection? Or is misdirection a principle? What is it? And then you do not tell me whether your proposition relates to natural evil, or to moral evil, or to both; or whether you make any distinction between them.

Your sixth proposition, gentlemen, transcends all my limited powers, namely: That all, even the lowest, entering the spirit world, may progress, forever rising higher in the scale of being, and becoming purer, lovelier and grander,” You say they “*may*” progress. But does not your second proposition state that by a law of his nature man *does* progress? Does this law cease to operate after death? If not, why do you say, those in the spirit world “*may*” progress? But you say, all in the world *may* be forever becoming “purer.” It must be an awful impurity to require an eternity to entirely remove it. But does not your second proposition state, that man, “*in time*,” “will become pure and righteous?” I cannot debate contradictory propositions; nor can I consent to debate about an eternal process of purification.

Your closing proposition is, like all the others, perfectly vague. You state that the communication of disembodied spirits with the inhabitants of earth, “is full of good to the race,” “Good” is a very comprehensive term. What kind of good do you mean? And by the word “full,” do you mean that no error is thus communicated?—that all the communications received are infallibly true, and all the impressions made are morally good! Gentlemen, you must excuse me for declining to discuss such propositions as these. And with regard to those propositions you wish me to affirm, what propriety would there be in denying the doctrines of revealed religion with a man who denies the truth of Revelation, I



which only those doctrines can be proved? To what source of evidence could we mutually appeal.

4. If I were disposed to engage in the proposed debate, I should desire to know of what body of people is Mr. Finney the accredited representative? I have duties too numerous and too important to admit of spending time in debating with every traveling lecturer who may conclude that the law of progress in human nature has been especially operative in him. I understand that Mr. F. belongs to the class of persons commonly called "spiritualists." Have they agreed upon any system of principles? and would they subscribe to the propositions you have sent me? If I am correctly informed, they have as yet no fixed system; and if they had, do they authorize Mr. F. to become their champion? It will be time enough, I think, for Christian ministers to demolish their system, when they shall have agreed what it is. Perhaps before I could demolish these propositions, the law of progress might carry the spiritualists quite to another territory.

5. I am not sure that I should have *fair play* in such a discussion. I am informed that our spiritual lecturers are generally *mediums*, and often speak as they are *impressed* by the spirits. Whilst I might suppose myself contending with Mr. F., then, I might really be encountering Thos. Jefferson or Benj. Franklin or Lord Bacon. Now I should hesitate to meet such men in debate, even when they are in this lower sphere. I cannot therefore, run the hazard of meeting them after they have been so long in a higher sphere—especially without previous notice.

On the whole, I am strongly of the opinion that the "Harmonial Philosophy" is not ready to be discussed. Indeed your letter informs us that it is a thing not yet discovered. For you say, Mr. F. and his friends "are seeking to discover and establish a Harmonial Philosophy." Now, gentlemen, I think you ought not to ask me to do battle against a thing not yet *discovered*. I might not know how to strike it. Go on and discover it; and be good enough to inform me when you find it and "establish" it, and I will take a look at it. Shallow Philosophy, like weak-minded men, is talkative and boastful. A little depth diminishes the noise.

I have written more than I intended, gentlemen, because I have no doubt but that you consider the matter important, and because I can, perhaps, thus satisfy you, that great swelling words, such as these propositions contain, are not philosophy, and are not generally found in company with it.

Very respectfully,

N. L. RICE.

P. S. In the hurry of transcribing, a slight verbal difference will probably be found in one or two sentences, between the letter as now published, and the letter as sent to the committee.



## REPLY TO DR. RICE.

St. Louis, February 4th, 1845.

REV. N. L. RICE, D. D.

DEAR SIR:

Yours of the 24th ult., in answer to ours of the 23d ult., came duly to hand. We need scarcely say that it was unsatisfactory, and its spirit and tenor not such as we had a right to expect.

It is remarkable that when asked for the proof of the doctrines you teach you assume a hostile attitude, and seem to think that, on such occasion, the usual courtesies observed among gentlemen are to be dispensed with. This is a significant fact! No geometrician will endeavor to ridicule a candid inquirer who asks him to demonstrate the truth or his science, or to examine an opposing theorem.

In declining the proposed debate, you allege that you do so “though you hold yourself bound to defend the religion of Christ against infidelity and error.”

If you mean by this to assert that we have assaulted or in any degree opposed the religion of Christ, we think you will find it harder to *prove* what you have written in this respect than to write it. We challenge you to the *proof*. True, we do discard as unholy, that vast system of religion composed of incongruous elements which theologians have built up and misnamed “the religion of Christ.” But Christ being his own expounder, what similarity does their religion bear to his?—Theirs is complex, and so difficult of understanding that even your most learned divines do not pretend to be competent to expound it in full, *mystery* being one of its chief and acknowledged attributes. His was remarkable for its wonderful simplicity.—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.” Here it is,—supreme love to God, and love to neighbor as to self; and, mark you, he says “*on these hang all the law and the prophets*”—that is, these two are the *fundamental* doctrines of his religion.

Our good sir, we fear if the “religion of Christ”—sublime in its very simplicity, and ever glorious in its purity, beauty and practical excellence—were to meet our modern orthodox Christianity, the two would find themselves total strangers to each other, with scarce a tie of sympathy between them. Where are the points of similarity? “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” says the one—the other, through one of its learned teachers, says, practically, There is no time to endeavor, by the only possible and effective means, to set the neighbor right who has honestly embraced a heresy which will lead him to eternal death.—“Important duties,” such as keeping straight the home flock, and looking after the tempo-



ralities, must not be neglected—sooner let him be accursed. Oh, thou hollow phantom that callest thyself Christianity, but art not, hast thou forgotten what Christ said? That when one has gone astray the ninety and nine are to be left, and the estray diligently sought for until found, and when found there is more joy over it than over the ninety and nine that went not astray? But you say, you “feel bound to defend Christianity (orthodoxy) from infidelity.” Do you mean the infidelity of Christ, wherein he denied the truth and righteousness of the Mosaic teachings touching divorce, retaliation, &c?—for orthodoxy assumes as one of its fundamental propositions, the plenary and infallible inspiration of these Mosaic teachings, and hence their truth and righteousness. Surely, sir, while orthodoxy rests upon the platform of Moses, we can scarcely be more infidel to it than is Christ himself.

But further. You feel bound to make this defense “whenever circumstances demand such labor at your hands.” If you be right and we wrong, do not circumstances demand that labor *now*?

Look abroad and calculate the proportion of believers in your system, to the disbelievers. Are there not in this community ten skeptics to one who receives without question or doubt? Your Church is full of skepticism, and what you term infidelity is making its inroads upon all denominations. There was never a time when the public mind was so generally awakened to inquiry touching the bases of the prevailing religious dogmas, or when men were more disposed to form their religious opinions upon the weight of evidence. It strikes us, therefore, that if your system of religion thinks it can risk itself before a scrutinizing public, on its merits, circumstances now demand its defense; not by one who retreats behind a pulpit in assailing its opponents, but by one who meets them in fair, open, and honest debate.

But lastly, “you hold yourself bound to make this defense in whatever way you may judge most effective; that is, “the end justifies the means!” This is *Jesuitical* enough for a Protestant parson!

The grounds upon which you decline the proposed debate are,—1st, that when you engage in public discussion, you must have an equal share in the statement of *every* proposition. This is a novel idea to us. If you looked to a personal triumph merely, instead of the triumph of *truth*, as the ends of the discussion, then give you an equal share in the statement of the opposing propositions, and you could so contrive to weaken them by their mode of statement, as much to embarrass, if not even render them indefensible. Do you not, in this demand, “seek advantage which truth does not need or desire?” Though we don’t profess to be familiar “with the rights of the challenged party,” yet we feel confident that the rules of common sense will support us in asserting that the advocates of



each system should have the privilege of stating their own propositions, and thus make them, by the terms of their statement, as forcible as may be.

But you say, "we have cut out your work for you, without even consulting you." Here we make with you an issue of *fact*, and we rest upon our letter for proof. Surely you were oblivious to the following clause: "The series of 'A' may be *modified to suit your actual views, if they fail in their present form to present them correctly on the points involved.*"

2d. You urge that the proposed debate would require too much time and labor. You think one or two months of steady debating would do but tolerable justice to the subject to be discussed. How is it that you have spent so much time and labor sermonizing in the usual way, preaching from Sabbath to Sabbath for twenty years or more, but have not time to discuss the great doctrines which are *fundamental* to your sermons?

Why, sir, if you will give to the world a clear and absolute demonstration of the doctrines propounded in the series of "A," you will impart to it a new impulse. You will banish that secret infidelity which lurks in the very bosom of your Church. You will place your preaching on a solid foundation, strengthen the faith of believers, and draw around your standard hosts of honest men, who, with their present light, are compelled to doubt, and thus, on your hypothesis, snatch thousands of immortal souls "as brands from the burning." We say this because it is preposterous to suppose, that after such a demonstration a single "infidel" within its reach would remain. Who, within the reach of Euclid's demonstrations, have ever been infidel to his propositions? Clear, unequivocal demonstrations, which have nothing to dread from the scrutiny of the advocates of an opposing theorem, is what the age requires. "Want of time" may be alleged, but you will be told that foundation truths are paramount, and if there be no time to *demonstrate them*, there should be no time to *build upon them*.

We had no thought of circumscribing you as to time. We supposed seven discourses of *an hour each* would amply suffice *us* for the establishment of our series of propositions. Not that volumes might not be written upon them, but that we intended to be straightforward and certain in our proofs.

You think "the discussion would require from one to two months of steady debating." If you expected us to occupy half that time in the affirmative, there would be left you one month. One hour a day would give you thirty discourses of an hour's length each, in which to establish your propositions. How significant this fact—seven propositions require thirty days for their argument! Why, Doctor, an alert geometrician in less time would demonstrate every proposition in Euclid. That which is capable of a *conclusive demonstration* requires little time for its argument. What



are we to suppose, then, but that your only reliance would be upon proofs merely approximative and inferential,—and such proofs, when many are converged upon the proposition in question, may render its truth *probable* but *never conclusive*. Suppose this were so of that proposition which you acknowledge to be fundamental to all others—“the plenary inspiration of the Bible”—would not the foundations on which you have built all your sermons crumble under you, since its *absolute*, not its *probable* truth, has been your primary assumption?

We did not intimate that the discussion should be constant;—one evening a week would render the labor easy and the discussion effective. It was no transient excitement which we had in view, but a calm and searching investigation, with a view to ascertain which of the opposing theories, involving questions of the utmost moment, possesses most *truth*. Our object was to learn, and we were willing to take time for it; nor do we suppose our fellow-citizens so indifferent to the truths of the higher life, as to leave the discussion unattended while conducted with candor and intelligence.

3d. You object to our propositions, characterizing them as “vague and verbose, certainly prepared by some one whose ideas are much confused.” If we had expected you to resort in your reply to *petty quibbles* about *words*, where the intended sense was obvious, we might have been more careful in the selection, and even appended to them definitions, so that even *you* might understand them.

But let us see if there be any grounds for your objection, save in the *necessity* of your case.

We had a right to be understood in the ordinary sense of our words, and for the purpose of ascertaining this we refer you to Noah Webster, the received standard in lexicology. You say, “there is no word in the English language more indefinite than the word ‘nature.’” Webster says, “nature is a word that comprehends *all the works of God—the Universe.*” Are not the “whole material universe, with all its phenomena, and all the intelligent spirits in the Universe and their phenomena,” integral parts of “all the works of God?” If so, the sense is clear, and if you failed to understand us, the fault is yours, not ours.

You say, “our second proposition is more incomprehensible than the first.” It is true that the word *man* is used in several different senses; for instance, man is opposed in its aetatal sense by boy, its sexual sense by woman, and in its generic sense by beast. Now can any uncertainty exist in which of these senses we used the word *man*?—and if we used it in its generic sense, does it not comprehend “all mankind—the human race?” Taking this word, then, in its obvious—its generic sense—the expressions, “man is a progressive being,” and the “human race is pro-



gressive," are synonymous, and a *man's* comprehension must be limited indeed to whom either is incomprehensible.

A little reflection would have satisfied you that "the progress of the race" does not necessarily involve the progress of "every individual of the race." The Presbyterians generally have "progressed" out of the dark superstition of predestination. Could the same be said of Dr. Rice? The bulk of the race may advance, while some of its individuals stand still. The people of the United States are, by a law of their civil being, progressing in wealth and intelligence; but the same could not be said with truth of "every individual" of the people. Nor yet, that "every man's children are better than their father," for the race might advance, while the children of some might retrograde—precisely as a community may grow richer, while the children of some of the rich may become poorer.

You ask us if we mean "there is a law of progress which does not affect individuals, but operates upon nations and generations of men—that it affects the mass, without reaching the individuals composing the mass?" Your question is absurd; for how can it operate upon nations and generations without affecting the individuals composing them?

Again, you are at a loss to understand what we mean by man becoming "pure and righteous as a race"—we are unable to perceive the necessity of your difficulty. Using the word "man" in its generic sense, in the sense of "humanity," we simply intended to affirm that there will be a time when mankind, individually and collectively, will on this earth be pure and righteous. We used the phrase "as a race" as a qualifying term, expressing the idea of the sum of humanity, involving the components, and as the whole could not be pure while some of the component parts were impure, we supposed its use would place in a clear light our meaning, yet we will not contend that this or any other words we have used are the best which could have been selected. When we prepared our propositions and sent you our letter, our attention was given more to "principles" and doctrines than to "verbiage," and earnestly addressing, as we supposed, an earnest man, we neither expected a captious verbal criticism in the reply, or afterwards in the debate, had you acceded to it.

But you inquire, "if the future righteousness of man on earth be our meaning, what particular advantage would it be to the present generation to know it?" Suppose, in turn, we inquire of you if the doctrine of election and reprobation be true, (and one Dr. N. L. Rice has written a book to establish it,) what is the use of preaching? Why have you devoted your youth and mature manhood to the work of saving men's souls, when you hold that from eternity every man's final destiny was fixed by the Almighty as unalterably as his throne? Act, our good sir, on your sug-



gestion, and permit each to pass on in the line of his destiny, unless you expect to thwart the councils of the Omnipotent.

But, since you ask us "what the advantage to the present generation to know" that man, by reason of his progressive tendencies, will eventually become righteous on earth, we will briefly state how we suppose such knowledge would be advantageous.

The doctrines of the fall of man, total depravity in consequence of that fall, original sin and condemnation under it, and the vicarious atonement, or human redemption, by "faith without works,"—are all essentially the converse of the eventual righteousness of man, by reason of his own inherent tendencies to good. They deny him the natural capacity to accomplish good, and place it beyond the range of human endeavor; and for maintaining the contrary we are branded as "infidel," (very wicked people.) These doctrines, instilled into the infant mind before its powers of discrimination are sufficiently strong to decide between the true and false, have a tendency to produce precisely that moral state which they claim to be *natural* to man. Man is taught that he is totally corrupt, and so far as you make him believe it, so far you make him so. What process more surely debases man or boy, than that of giving him a thoroughly mean opinion of himself? Who that entertains it can ever hopefully put forth an effort to do well? You assure him that he can do nothing, that he and his fellows are totally depraved, and if he believes you, can he respect himself or them? Oh! what an abhorrent doctrine, repulsive to all the nobler sentiments of human nature, and demoralizing just in proportion to the extent of its reception—a doctrine which, instead of cherishing among men esteem and friendship, inflames disgust and hatred, rendering every man loathsome to himself and his fellows!

Now, although the human soul has power to resist this dire doctrine, so far as in general to reject it, except in theory, yet its theoretical reception has been sufficient to poison to a very considerable extent the natural fountains of human excellence, and counteract the progressive tendencies of man.

Suppose we demonstrate our proposition, then you perceive this doctrine is swept from the mind, and man, having confidence in himself—assured that by exertion he can advance—presses forward to accomplish for himself a holier and a better destiny.

With this demonstration also falls that doctrine, so much cherished, and you will admit, if untrue, extremely unholy and demoralizing—the "vicarious atonement," by which every man lays over his peccadilloes on the shoulders of the *innocent*—asks forgiveness—goes his way and sins again; and so repeats the operation, the process being so cheap and easy that it may really be regarded as a license for sin. And this be-



cause every man expects by means of its facilities, before death, to wipe out the sins of a lifetime, and thus go to the spirit-world, a spotless angel of light. But this doctrine gone, each man feels that he stands upon his own merits—that there can be *no forgiveness*, and hence, that his position and happiness, here and hereafter, must be determined by his *acts* and the *motives* prompting them.

Here will be a mighty impulse imparted to the upward tendency of human nature. If, therefore, goodness and happiness be related to each other, you will surely not deny the advantages which will result to the present generation from the knowledge of the truth of this proposition. If your doctrine be fallacious, what a cruel deception!—what disappointment must await the soul that has trusted to its efficacy, when he enters the spirit life, and beholds himself in his real character, stained and marred by the sins which he had supposed were “washed out in the blood of Christ.”

If one would strive to be a good man by calling into exercise his own powers, and cultivating the better qualities of his nature, you tell him that the thing is impossible, nay, impious and *infidel*. Now, let our proposition be demonstrated—let the present generation know its truth—and at once those hoary doctrines, which have rested as an incubus upon the bosom of humanity, will vanish as a dream, and the lines of human destiny begin to brighten.

You ask us what is the nature of that law of man's nature which causes him to progress? Newton asserted the law of gravitation, but did he propose to explain its nature? What is it? You may say it is the tendency to the centre. What is the law of human progress? We say it is the tendency of human nature to become better. Its *existence* is the great question now, not its *nature*.

You ask, “does it act and produce its results, irrespective of voluntary agency?” We ask you, in answer, does gravitation act and produce its results, irrespective of other influences? It is precisely because the progressive tendency does not act and produce its results, irrespective of voluntary and other agencies, that all the individuals and tribes of the race have not equally progressed. “Voluntary agency” and other forces, may assist, or may counteract this law.

The rapidity of human advancement is a subject of speculation, which is not involved in our propositions.

You think, in discussing man's progress, confusion would result from a want of an agreed standard of moral attainments. We are willing to accept as our standard, the maxim of the great Judean, which he deduced from natural law, to wit: “Supreme love to God, and love to neighbor



as to self." If you repudiate this, we will admit that the law of progress has been unfortunately embarrassed in your individual case.

As to what you say respecting our knowledge of nature's laws and what the law of progress has done for us, we have simply to say, that justice is more becoming a Clergyman than attempted sarcasm at the expense of justice. If we had made any boastful claims of superior learning or greater advancement in morals than we concede to others : or if our letter contained a tithe of the arrogance which abounds in yours, then we would concede we were obnoxious to your remarks in this respect. Whilst we are far from professing acquaintance with "*all* the laws of nature," we are satisfied that we do know *some* of her laws about the consistency between which and your system of faith, you would rather not be questioned.

"On the whole," you "fear it would require so much time to ascertain the meaning of the words and phrases of this proposition, that we should be obliged to leave the merits of it unexamined." Truly, we perceive from your *penchant* for petty verbal criticism, that such a result would be all that could be hoped for in a discussion with you on this or any other proposition.

3d. Of our third proposition you tell us it is no better than those before mentioned—"incomprehensible, vague, and verbose."

Now this proposition consists of three distinct statements. 1st, "That evil is a relative term." 2d, "That it (evil) originates in the misuse of things, principles and faculties;" and 3d, "That misuse is occasioned by ignorance or misdirection," (misfortune was the word in the original draft, the copyist erroneously substituting misdirection.)

Of the 1st you say : "Unfortunately the experience of mankind shows too conclusively that evil is more than a term." But Noah Webster says : "*cold is a relative term.*" Now we suppose you are ready to exclaim, Tut, tut, Webster! the experience of mankind shows too conclusively that cold is something more than a term.—Has it not blocked rivers, piled up mountains of ice, destroyed armies, and caused immense human suffering?" Do you not suppose, sir, the old gentleman's ideas were "much confused" when they permitted him to write such folly? Or peradventure you deem him too poor a scholar to understand the terms he uses? Well, we are content to be ranked as fools with such company.

When we say evil is a relative term, we mean simply that it is related to good, as cold is related to heat—good being positive to evil—heat to cold. Our bodily temperature is the standard by which we sensationally measure heat and cold. So our moral conceptions are the standard by which we measure good and evil. And thus we find that what is termed good in one age is termed evil in another, simply because the moral temperature, so to speak, has become changed—more elevated; that is, higher conceptions of good prevail. In illustration of this, we cite you to the



fact that concubinage, and a plurality of wives were declared righteous under the Mosaic dispensation, and largely practiced by David and Solomon. These practices were good to the moral sense of that age. But how abhorrent to the moral sense of this age! Why is this? Not surely because these practices are worse now than then, but because our moral conceptions are higher than those prevailing in the time of David and Solomon. So you perceive that our ideas of evil must be relative to our moral conceptions of good, as the idea of cold is relative to our physical temperature. Hence, "evil is a relative term."

As to the second member of this proposition, wherein we affirm "that evil originates in the misuse of things, principles and faculties," &c. You say of these last words, "very vague terms, these." What! do you call "things," and "principles" and "faculties" mere terms, after your criticism upon us for calling "evil" a term? But you say they are vague. Have they not as well established meanings as any other words? and are we very culpable for supposing the *Doctor* would understand them? We will illustrate our meaning:

Steam is a thing, and in its use, is good—yet what terrible evils have resulted from its misuse? Gravitation is a principle—in its use good; but in its misuse has been made the means of destroying human life. Reason is a faculty—good in its use, yet by its misuse man is enabled to overreach and oppress his fellows. In the whole catalogue of evils, think of one, if you can, which is not traceable to the misuse of something, or some principle or some faculty, in its use good.

The third statement of this proposition affirms that this misuse is occasioned by ignorance or misfortune, [misdirection—see ante.] It is attributable to ignorance when the act is voluntary; to misfortune, when it is involuntary and purely accidental.

Our statement is founded on two postulates. 1st, That all the works of God are in their use good, and tend to man's happiness; and the converse in their misuse. 2d, That all men seek happiness in all they do. From these, if true, it follows that if all men understood the use and misuse of what God had thrown around them, they would cleave to the one and eschew the other. Therefore use is due to knowledge—misuse to ignorance, except in case of accidental misuse.

Your criticism on "misdirection" we will not notice, since the word was inserted through mistake of the copyist.

Passing by our fourth and fifth, you say, "your sixth proposition transcends all my limited powers." We will not dispute your word, although we had supposed you possessed at least ordinary understanding:—Nor will we blame you for your weakness, for doubtless nature has made you as you are.

Suppose our second proposition does assert that man by a law of hi



nature "*does* progress," and that we say in our sixth—that the lowest in the Spirit World "*may* progress." What then? Is there a contradiction as you alledge? Only to your "limited powers," as any one will see who desires to understand the two propositions and can hold two ideas in his head at once. We say man *does* progress on earth, and we would say man *does* progress in the Spirit World; because we believe the bulk of mankind both in this and the next world are progressing, while individuals in both worlds are stationary or possibly retrograding. The words of our second proposition looked to masses—in our sixth to individuals—hence, in both they are true, and the two propositions are without the shadow of a contradiction.

You say "the impurity must be awful which requires eternity to entirely remove." Quite as awful, we suspect, as that which requires *more than an eternity* in the flames of hell to purge it!

We do state, in our second, that "man will, in time, become pure," and nowhere are we in conflict with this statement. You present us as affirming, in our sixth, that man, in the spirit world, will be "forever becoming purer," and in an "eternal progress of purification." Thus you desired to make our sixth, not only to contradict our second, but appear in itself absurd. Our sixth neither affirms that "eternity will be required to remove impurity," nor that there is an "eternal process of purification;" nor yet that in the spirit world man will "be forever becoming purer." These are your own constructions, into which either your "limited powers," too limited to grasp and apply the most obvious rules of construction, have ludicrously entrapped you, or into which you were forced by the desperate necessities of your case, for some plausible excuse, when you dared not meet Mr. Finney on the one hand, and had exulted over Brownson's defeat on the other.

Our sixth consists of three clauses: 1st, That all, even the lowest, entering the spirit world may progress; 2d, Forever rising higher in the scale of being; 3d, Becoming purer, lovelier and grander. Where do you find "forever becoming purer," &c.? where do you find an eternal process of purification, in this proposition? The very punctuation is against you—the printer would have told you better. You lift the word "forever" from its place in the second clause, where it qualifies the word "rising," and transfer it over into the third clause, where it obviously was never intended to go, and make it qualify the word "becoming," doing violence alike to grammar, to justice and to common sense. We are astonished to find you risking yourself on such transparent unfairness.

In cases of doubtful meaning, the rules of construction require a statement to be so construed as to support a rational sense, if capable of one. But you reverse the rule. You, by your construction, twist a rational



statement into absurdity. This done—a false position manufactured for your adversary—then you draw upon your highest mental faculty—the faculty of ridicule—and ply it with might and main on the very absurdity you yourself have created. Now, really, our good Sir, do you think that such a course is becoming a grave divine?

Of our closing proposition you say that “it, like all the others, is perfectly vague.” Vague, we believe, means “uncertain— indefinite;” and perfectly vague means “totally uncertain—totally indefinite”—something not susceptible of any sense. It does not follow that propositions are vague merely because an opponent says so; nor yet because he may ask sundry questions respecting the meaning of its words. Some opponents will say anything, and most words are used in several senses. But since you characterize our propositions generally, as “vague,” and this one as “perfectly vague,” let us analyze it, to see how much truth there is in your assertion.

It is composed of two statements: 1st, That men and women from the spirit world, may and do communicate with those of earth. Here something is asserted of men and women—what men and women? Ans. Those from the spirit world. What! are there men and women in the spirit world? Ans. Yes, if the people who have left the earth are there, and have not lost their identity. But what is affirmed of these men and women? Ans. That they communicate. With whom do they communicate? Ans. With those of earth. But who are meant by those? Ans. Men and women. Do you think, sir, that sensible people will think it possible that this statement was “vague,” even to one of your “limited powers?”

The 2d statement, to wit: “And that such communication is full of good to the race,” is quite as certain and definite as the first. Here something is affirmed of communication. What communication? Ans. That affirmed in the first statement, to wit: Between men and women of the spirit world, with those of earth. What is affirmed of this communication? Ans. That it is full of good. But what do you mean by “full” and “good?” Ans. The one, according to Webster, means “abounding in,” the other, “benefit, advantage;” by the phrase “full of good,” then, we mean “abounding in benefit.” To whom is this communication good? Ans. To the race. What race? To the human race.

Why, sir, this proposition is remarkable for its plainness and certainty of meaning. When you characterize it as “perfectly vague,” what other than one of these two conclusions can we form? to wit: 1st, That by reason of your very “limited powers,” or some other mental weakness, your understanding is so defective that you cannot form a correct judgment upon any proposition? Or, 2d, That you are ready to assert whatever might advance your present purpose. Indeed, you give us to



understand, that "*the most effective way*" is your motto. When you are thus at fault in your statement respecting the perfect vagueness of this proposition, do you suppose we can believe what you have said of the others ?

You tell us this proposition, "like all others, is perfectly vague." But then you only level your objections at two words, both of which are as well understood as any in the language. You tell us "'good' is a very comprehensive term." We grant it. And here we are amused at finding you subject to your own criticism. A moment ago you were ridiculing us for saying that "'evil' is a term." We "fear" your memory is as "limited" as your "powers." When you asked us, touching the law of progress, "What good would result from proving it?" what did you mean by the word "good?" If it be vague for us, is it less so for you? Yet who but a caviller would have thought of questioning your meaning? Less hair splitting about words, Doctor, and *some* attention to ideas would do you much *good*.

Again, you ask, if by "full" we "mean that no error is thus communicated?—that all the communications received are infallibly true, and all the impressions made are morally good?" In answer, we ask you if you believe communication among men, oral and written, to be full of good to the race (beneficial to the race)? If so, are all human communications infallibly true, and all the impressions made morally good? The two cases are precisely parallel, and the application similar. Under the pretense of quarreling with our vagueness—a trick which you freely play throughout your letter—you really are striving covertly to discuss the merits of the proposition. Well, if spirit communication be not good, because some communications are false, and perhaps some impressions made are not morally good, throw it aside; but at the same time be consistent, and cast aside all intercommunication among men.

4. You say you have not "time to spend in debating with every traveling lecturer who may think that the law of progress in human nature has been especially operative in him." When did Mr. Finney ever make such claim? If never, how will you justify your statement? Or do you deem it a trifle to misrepresent another? or perhaps you claim it as your prerogative to trample upon truth in your haste to slur an opponent.

But Mr. F. is a "traveling lecturer." Was not Doctor Brownson, also? "Ah, but Dr. B. came by invitation of his friends." Very well—so did Mr. F. "Yes, but of what body of people is Mr. F. the *accredited* representative?" We think it likely his credentials might have been quite as forthcoming as Dr. B's. We doubt extremely whether either could have produced the parchment of their accreditation from any "body of people." "O, but Finney is the champion of the Spiritualists, and they have no fixed system. Might not Mr. Brownson have objected to



you, the champion of Protestants, on the same ground? Might he not have said, they have no "fixed system"—"it will be time enough for a Catholic to demolish their system when they have agreed among themselves what it is?" "But what propriety in discussing the doctrines of revealed religion, with one who denies revelation, by which only they are proved?" And what the propriety of a Catholic debating the doctrines of *the Church* with a man who denies the traditions and infallibility of *the Church* by which those doctrines are sustained? Whatever you may urge to excuse your retreat from Finney, Brownson might have urged the same in excuse of his retreat from you—your cases are alike; and whatever judgment ye meted unto him, the same, promise the Scriptures, shall be measured to you again.

You say, "perhaps before I could demolish these propositions, the law of progress would carry the Spiritualists quite to another territory." Now this is nearest the truth of all you have said. Drop the "perhaps," and it will be quite true; for death, when it comes in a ripe, old age, is a progressive process; and we all expect it *some time or other* to pass up to "another territory," and this were a forlorn hope if you had first to demolish these propositions.

5. You are not sure you shall have "*fair play*"—Mr. F. is a "medium," and "whilst you might suppose yourself contending with him, then you might be encountering Jefferson, Franklin, or Bacon." You were invited to meet Mr. F., who is in his own strength at least your equal—the interference of the gifted dead in such a combat were quite unnecessary.

But of what acts were these distinguished men guilty while on earth, that you charge them with readiness to deal with you unfairly? And suppose they had so far forgotten the proprieties which they observed while here, as to pitch in where they were not promised, would not that spirit, whose aid you are wont so devoutly to ask, fly to your rescue? Or do you fear the "Holy Spirit" would be an unequal match for these gifted sons of earth? Think you he could not manage them? or is he careless of the interest of his friends? or peradventure your experience has convinced you that *your* calling on him for assistance is a mere farce? Where is your *faith*, Doctor?

You say the "Harmonial Philosophy" is not yet ready for discussion—we are only seeking to discover and establish it, and we ought not to ask you to battle against "a thing not yet discovered." When did we ask you to discuss the one or to do battle against the other? You are, indeed, a man of ridicule, but you wield no honest shafts—you distort your opponent into something unnatural, by imputing to him what he never thought or said, or twisting his words from their true intent, then level all your gathered power at the creature of your own imagination. We ask you to dis-



cuss your own system of theology, and you tell us "the Harmonial Philosophy is not ready for discussion!"

True, the propositions "B"—the converse of your theology—we believe to be parts of the Harmonial Philosophy; but shall they not therefore be discussed, and merely because the entire system of Harmonial Philosophy is not yet established?

Although Copernicus did not pretend to have discovered the whole of Astronomical Science, yet he asked the priests to investigate a few of its truths which he had discovered? Do you not pity his folly? Had you lived in that dark age to which your wisdom seems congenial, we think you would have reminded the old astronomer "that shallow philosophy, like weak-minded men, is talkative and boastful—a little depth diminishes the noise." You seem to entertain the singular idea that a system must first be established, then its parts discussed. In this notion you resemble the old woman who charged her son never to enter the water until he had first learned to swim!

You say our propositions contain "great swelling words." Now, it so happens, that there is not such a word in our whole series. True, we do speak of man becoming on earth "nobler and more God-like," and becoming, in the Spirit World, "purer, and lovelier, and grander." If these words appear to you "great and swelling," it is only because you entertain so mean an opinion of your kind as to deem it impossible that there could be aught in him corresponding to such terms.

We trust we have been able to satisfy you that sophistry is not logic, nor is ridicule argument, and that neither of them is Christianity, or likely to be found in company with it.

In conclusion, we will say we can not blame you for declining the debate—it would have too greatly imperilled your all as a theologian. We are even willing to throw the mantle of charity over the petty manœuvres to which you were compelled to resort in covering your retreat, since you had not the courage, like Brownson, to face the music, and back square out, honestly and above board. And besides, you were in a tighter place, since you had found no excuse for him when in like circumstances, but were disposed to goad him well. And further, there is this also in your favor: Brownson did not stand in terror of any spirit which might aid you; for although you are regularly in the habit of asking one to help you, it has never been known to do so yet; while you believed, if you are to be believed, that you would be in danger of encountering some spiritual assistant of Mr. F., viz: Jefferson, Franklin, or Bacon. No, we will not blame you for believing that "prudence is the better part of valor."

We remain, very obediently, Your fellow citizens,

P. E. BLAND, A. MILTENBERGER, H. STAGG, and others.



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