

The President's Medium

John Conklin, Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation

John Benedict Buescher



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[REDACTED]. Conklin had made his 1856 tour accompanied by his fellow trance medium Levi Judd Pardee to cities in upstate New York — Syracuse, Albany, and Buffalo — and then on into Ohio, to Cleveland and Cincinnati. While they were in Buffalo, they met with a gathering of

⁹⁰ "The President Elect a Spiritualist — He Calls on Conklin the Medium and Gets a Good Test — The Country Safe," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 18, 1861. *The Banner of Light*, March 23, 1861, copied the *Plain Dealer* story about Conklin recognizing Lincoln, but ran it on a back page in an inconspicuous place and prefaced the article "The President a Spiritualist," with these words: "The Cleveland Plain Dealer is responsible for the following:" and no other comment. The article here from the Plain Dealer says it is quoting *The Spiritualist* from New York, but there was no such paper. More than likely, the quote is from Conklin's own newspaper, *The Principle*.

⁹¹ Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 301. This she published in 1870. I do not see that anyone has been able to carry this obviously important account (if true) of Hardinge's, made nearly a decade after it was supposed to have happened, back to an original source roughly contemporaneous with the event. Nor have I been able to do so. As a result I have to withhold judgment on its veracity.

spiritualists, and then were accompanied back to their lodgings by Stephen Albro, the editor of Buffalo's spiritualist newspaper, the *Age of Progress*. An article in the *Spiritual Magazine* in 1862, entitled "The Civil War in America Predicted," reminded its readers of what happened then, as published at the time by Albro:

On Sunday evening last, at the close of the meeting at the Hall, we accompanied Mr. Pardee and Mr. Conklin to the room occupied by the latter gentleman. Whilst sitting and conversing by the stove, the right hand of Mr. P. was extended to us. We clasped it, and looking up into his face perceived that he was entranced, and that we were shaking hands with a spirit. The friendly visitant spoke to us most acceptably, and as an old acquaintance. At the close we desired the spirit to convey the name which it bore when in the physical form. Just as we made the request the medium's hand grasped ours most fully: his form was straightened up, his countenance began to change, his voice underwent a change of tone, and he spoke as follows: 'Another would speak to you. I was known by the name of Andrew Jackson when a resident of your sphere; and I come to-night, my venerable friend to bear witness before the Eternal, that this, thy beloved country, is to feel the fire and sword. Let it go forth, through thy journal to my people — mine because I love them. Tell them — though I would fain weep in proclaiming it — that they are to pass through more than revolutionary agonies. I know this if I know anything. The voice of the times speaks it in my ears clearly and distinctly. I would that this people knew where they stand, and that their rulers could feel the issues of a few years to come. Then would they forsake their fleshpots and eat of the pure meat of righteousness and justice. They are, as it were, pitching pennies, whilst the nation's heart throbs convulsively under the heavy load that threatens to stop and still its motion.

"If you could, my friend, see mighty minds, as I see them, engaged in the work of maturing events, then would you know to a certainty, that the foundations of your States are to be shaken to their lowest depths. What! While the ship of State is irresistibly driving towards the breakers, your statesmen are deeply immersed in the business of aggrandizement!

"The false watchers on the tower may cry, "ALL IS WELL" — but I say, ALL IS WRONG — that is, in the government. To me, the White House looks like a black mass; it is fair without, but it is full of corruption and dead men's bones. Here and there, like a stray white sheep, is found in the national councils a pure man. The end of all this cannot be escaped.

"Your country's worthies, who have gone before, with one united solemn voice, proclaim to your people the horrors of CIVIL WAR! Nothing short of that can serve as a stepping-stone to a better and more righteous condition. Causes will rush out into effects; and those who fought in the past to give you independence and a country, by divine wisdom unto them given, are engaged in the work which shall pass you through the fire, so that, purified, the nation may come out redeemed by the influence from the higher life, depending upon Heaven, not upon politicians, and sustained by the influence from the higher life.

“You will live to see this; but fear not. God by his spirits will guide and protect those who stand fast by truth and justice. I have done.”⁹²

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⁹² *Spiritual Magazine* 3.9 (September 1862): 425; for the same remembrance, see *Banner of Light*, July 6, 1861, and for an earlier reprinting of the *Age of Progress* story, see “How to Try the Prophets,” *Spiritual Telegraph*, July 5, 1856. Chicago industrialist and eccentric spiritualist Thomas Richmond claimed after the War that he had received a message before the War from the spirit of John Quincy Adams by way of spirit medium John Murray Spear that predicted it — Thomas Richmond, *God Dealing with Slavery: God’s instrumentalities in emancipating the African slave in America: spirit messages from Franklin, Lincoln, Adams, Jackson, Webster, Penn, and others; to the author, Thomas Richmond* (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1870), 72-74. Other Spear followers, notably Simon C. Hewitt, predicted political — if not cosmic — cataclysm, and a breaking up of the Union in the years immediately before the war.

⁹³ For a fuller discussion of this, see John B. Buescher, “Across the Dead Line: Lincoln and the Spirits during the War and Reconstruction Era Washington,” http://spirithistory.iapsop.com/jb_buescher_across_the_dead_line.pdf

⁹⁴ A Citizen of Ohio [David Quinn], *Interior Causes of the War; the Nation Demonized and Its President a Spirit-Rapper* (New York: M. Doolady, 1863) 94-95. An article — surely a newspaper reporter’s deliberate hoax — that supposedly detailed a long séance at the White House attended