



Truth wears no mask, bows at no human shrine, seeks neither place nor applause: she only asks a hearing.

VOL. XXXIX.

CHICAGO, JANUARY 16, 1886

No. 21

JANUARY 16, 1886.

RELIGIO-PHILOSOPHICAL JOURNAL.

5

For the Religio-Philosophical Journal.  
**WAS HE A SPIRITUALIST?**

Reminiscences of President Lincoln.

BY PROF. W. H. CHANEY.

Having read the articles by Messrs. Poole and Herndon, and observing that the latter inclines to the opinion that Mr. Lincoln was a materialist, I think I can make some explanations which will prove of interest to both Spiritualists and Materialists.

During the winter of 1865-6 I made the acquaintance of Col. Miller, in New York City. He was the inventor of "Miller's Steam Condenser," and made an agreement with me to act as agent for him to introduce it. It will thus be seen that our relations were very intimate. Besides he was one of the most earnest Spiritualists I ever met. He was then between sixty and seventy, but told me that his wife was less than thirty, and lived in Washington. Her maiden name was "Bell" Laurie, and her father had been for thirty years an appointee in the post office. Mr. Laurie, wife and children, were all mediums, and gave frequent sances for members of congress and other distinguished personages at Washington. Isabel, then his wife, was the principal medium. In this way Miller first became acquainted with her and wanted her for a wife, because such a wonderful medium. He was negotiating the sale of his condenser at the time, and demanding a million dollars for it. Perhaps this circumstance was not without its weight on the Laurie family, in bringing about this marriage, for I am positive there was never any love between the Colonel and his wife.

From Colonel Miller I first learned about Mr. Lincoln having become a Spiritualist soon after his inauguration. Some senators were telling their experiences one day when the President expressed a curiosity to attend one of the Laurie sances; not that he had the least faith in spirit communion with mortals, but would like to investigate the jugglery practice. A sance was arranged and he received such wonderful tests that his materialistic ideas were greatly shaken, and after a few more sittings he became a confirmed Spiritualist. But these things were not proclaimed to the public, and this explains why Mr. Herndon was not aware of the change from materialism.

In the spring of 1866, I read in a Washington paper that Judge Carter had granted a divorce to Isabel Miller from her husband, decreeing to her the guardianship of the children, and also decreeing to her all the rights previously granted to Col. Miller by letters patent for a certain steam condenser. The news was a great shock to me and I hurried to the Colonel for an explanation. Without the least warning, I read the item to him. On looking up I saw he was gasping for breath like a dying man and unable to speak. He had never seen the publication of the summons, nor had he even a hint concerning the matter until I read the item to him. But I soon learned that his distress was all on account of losing the condenser. He said he was very poor—was actually supported by his friends—that Bell never loved him; that she had been having a hard struggle to keep herself and children, and he did not blame her. But the condenser; it had been his pet for eight years; he had been offered half a million for it, and now to lose it—he broke down sobbing. As a lawyer I knew that I could procure a reversal of the decree so far as the condenser was concerned, but I would not tell him so. I was not only his attorney and agent, but his friend, and yet I would not reveal to him what his rights were. Was I not false to my client? Perhaps I was, if judged by the law of the land, but I was true to humanity. I would not have it on my conscience that I had been instrumental in destroying the last hope of that poor young woman and her helpless babes. An orthodox God might have done so and then sent her to school for stealing a loaf of bread for her starving children, but orthodoxy is played out with me.

I asked Col. Miller if he would be satisfied if Bell would convey to him one half interest in the condenser. O, yes, he would be perfectly satisfied and he would never trouble either her or the children. On this I drew up an agreement, under seal, which he signed and entrusted to me to deliver to her on her signing one transferring one-half of the condenser to him. Thus armed I went to Washington and made the acquaintance of the Laurie family, stopping at the hotel where the old couple were staying. Here Bell came to see me, and I explained matters, saying I would continue to act as agent for both her and the Colonel if she would sign the transfer. She refused until she had consulted some patent right attorneys, and when she learned that I might have got the whole away from her had I been disposed, she ceased to regard me with suspicion, and accepted me as her friend. Her father and mother were also extremely grateful to me. Thus it will be seen how I became very intimate with the Lauries.

I remained in Washington two or three weeks. One day, soon after my arrival, I mentioned the subject of mediumship to Bell. We were in the large hotel parlor, and probably thirty persons, ladies and gentlemen, sitting about in groups. I desired Bell to allow me to accompany her to the piano and witness its tipping to the music, while she played. She objected because a poor performer and because there were some very fine pianists present, but said if I would accompany her to her father's house, out in the suburbs, that she would then gratify my desire. In turn I objected on the ground that I might afterwards suspect that she had some concealed machinery at her father's, for tipping the instrument, whereas it was hardly possible at the hotel. After much argument and persuasion she finally consented. I escorted her to the piano and took a seat by her side. She began playing and there was a hush of voices; but it was only for a moment, and I noticed expressions of contempt on the faces of nearly every one present. Bell faltered and would have stopped had not conversation been resumed, and all interest was thus withdrawn from her. Then she began playing a march, and instantly the piano tipped, keeping time with the music. In a moment all gathered about, crowding close to the instrument and vainly trying to discover the cause of the tipping. The diffidence which Bell had shown now all disappeared; her eyes had a far-off look and she appeared like an enthusiast at a sacred shrine. When she had finished the tune I took her seat and tried to raise the piano with my knee, placing my foot on the pedal, as hers was placed, but found that I could not exert a pound pressure unless I withdrew my foot from the pedal. This was one of the best tests of a physical manifestation that I ever witnessed, for the piano weighed nearly half a ton.

During my stay Mrs. Laurie told me many things connected with President Lincoln. Hundreds of times he had consulted Bell, and she preserved scores of his notes, in his own handwriting signed "A. Lincoln," inviting Bell to come and give him a private sance. It will be remembered that for a long time matters connected with the war went wrong, but when Washington, La Fayette, Jackson, etc., began to be listened to by Lincoln, things went better. Mr. Lincoln consulted these grand old patriots in matters of state as well as war. Sometimes his cabinet would be unanimous in their opposition to some of the President's measures, but when the spirits assured him he was right he would hold out against the whole world. But all these things were profound State secrets, and even at the time Mrs. Laurie made the revelations to me and showed me the notes in Mr. Lincoln's well-known chirography, it was under the seal of secrecy, and I have faithfully observed it for more than twenty years; but now that so much has been said about it, and there is no longer any reason for silence, I do not feel that I am violating confidence by making this publication.

I have spoken of many matters not strictly pertinent to the main issue, in this case, in order that I might account for my familiarity with the important events, and now for the gratification of the reader, I will add a brief explanation of those facts.

Years before, Col. Miller had put one of his condensers in the Navy Yard at Washington, where it was still at work. Bell and her mother went with me to see it. The engineer assured me that it would condense steam and return it to the boiler at a temperature of 180° Fah. This resulted in a great saving of fuel. About the time the Colonel attached the condenser to a boiler at the Navy Yard a syndicate was forced to buy his patent right. After witnessing its operation they offered him half a million of dollars—counting it down on a table, thinking to tempt him by the sight of the gold, but he stood out for a million. Mr. and Mrs. Laurie and Bell were present, as they all assured me, and coaxed the Colonel to accept it, but he would not yield a particle. Then the capitalists swore that they would sooner spend half a million in preventing him from selling it than give him a penny. The result was that nothing could ever be done with it. The Colonel had many friends besides myself, in both New York and Washington, but our efforts were all in vain. He died in poverty. Mr. Laurie and wife and Bell are all dead and of the children I know nothing.

In conclusion I will relate an incident illustrative of the character of good old Abe, and also showing the esteem in which he held the Laurie family. Mrs. Laurie told it to me with tears in her voice as well as eyes. It was in 1861. Desertions had become so common among the soldiers that it was found necessary to enforce the death penalty most rigorously. A soldier from Maine went home on a furlough. The illness and death of a sister caused him to stay until the thirty days had expired. Then he started, and on landing from the cars in Boston a policeman touched him and asked to see his furlough. Innocently he showed it and was promptly arrested as a deserter. The policeman would get a reward of thirty dollars, and although the soldier assured him he was going back himself, the policeman put him in irons and took him to his regiment near Washington. There was a court martial; the policeman swore the poor fellow's life away and he was sentenced to be shot at sunrise. A friend to whom the soldier had told everything, mounted a horse after dark, and started for Washington to get a reprieve for thirty days that the soldier might obtain proofs of his statement. It was past midnight when the friend presented himself at the White House. Mr. Lincoln had just retired, leaving strict orders with the sergeant on duty not to allow any one to disturb him, as he had been broken of his rest for several nights. The friend told the sergeant the circumstances, but still he could not admit him. But the sergeant softened enough to tell him that he had orders to admit Mrs. Laurie at any hour, day or night. Then the friend rushed for Mrs. Laurie and told her the strait he was in. Scarcely stopping to dress, she hurried to the White House, reprieve in hand, and was instantly admitted to the room where the President and his wife were asleep. Mr. Lincoln aroused himself with great diffidence. In a few words she explained her mission, which he seemed to understand intuitively more than by his consciousness. Without speaking he motioned her to hand him a pen from the table, and as he put his name to the reprieve, with a moistened eye and trembling lip, he said: "Thank you, Mrs. Laurie; never fear to arouse me on an errand of mercy like this." The reprieve arrived just in time to prevent a murder. The story of the soldier was corroborated and his life spared. I think President Lincoln was warm hearted enough to be a Spiritualist.

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