

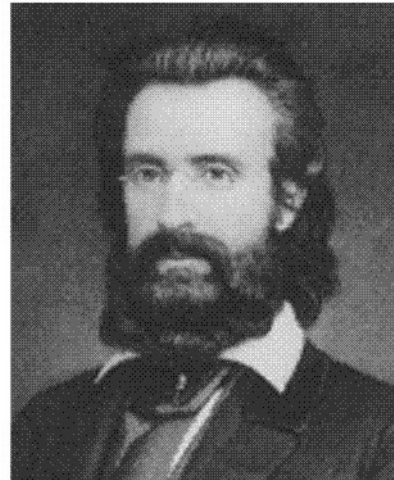
Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910)

Like Emanuel Swedenborg before him and Edgar Cayce after him, Andrew Jackson Davis is remembered as a “seer” – in effect, a clairvoyant able to enter into a higher state of consciousness and access information otherwise unavailable to humans. In a trance state, he could diagnose illnesses and recommend cures and give lengthy lectures on esoteric subjects, in spite of the fact that he had a very limited education. He is said to have been able to read closed books and to see the body as if it were transparent. He discussed the existence of Neptune and Pluto before their actual discoveries, predicted air travel, and discoursed on the theory of evolution a decade before Darwin published “On the Origin of Species.” His primary teachings, however, were on death and man’s state after death.

“Death is largely a cleansing process, and is the hope of the world, not its point of darkness,” was written through him. “So beautiful are its siftings, strainings, and other processes, that the active causes of passions and appetites are dropped and left on earth with the gross materiality. So beautiful is the law of progress, that even the active effects that accompany the individual cannot be perpetuated (as evils and discords) throughout eternity. Why? Because in the center of this universe a positive power reigns, breathing its spirit throughout the illimitable spaces; and by the slow workings of its progressive laws, it cleanses all personalities of their transient imperfections. Only eternal good can eternally exist.”

He went on to say that his mission was to teach the importance of preparing for death while

in this life. “The sooner you begin, the farther you will find yourself in the path of harmonious life.”¹



Born in Blooming Grove, New York, Davis is said to have heard spirit voices as a child, one of them clear enough to persuade his father, a shoemaker, to move to Poughkeepsie, New York. In 1843, at age 17, he attended a lecture by Dr. J.S. Grimes on the subject of mesmerism, later called hypnotism. The subject interested him and shortly thereafter he was put into a trance state by a Poughkeepsie tailor named William Livingston. In this mesmeric trance, Davis found that human body became transparent to his spirit eyes, permitting him to accurately diagnose physical disorder. As he explained it, each organ had a special luminosity, which was diminished where disease was present. In 1844, Davis had a strange experience in which he reportedly went into a semi-trance and found himself 40 miles from his home. During this journey, he claimed to have experienced a state of mental illumination in which he met Galen, the ancient Greek physician, and Swedenborg, the 18th Century

mystic, both of whom enlightened him on the true nature of things.

Prior to his "illumination," Davis saw only the external aspects of the material world, but he was now able to see the internal. "When I entered into the interior for association with higher things, when in communion with principles and ideas, or with the beauties and glories and blissfulness of the Summer-Land, when contemplating the beatitudes of the state future to man, I never thought of or felt these outward things," he explained. "My room at such times was never seen; nor was my body necessary to me; neither did I realize my circumstances. I was in communication with the spheres of real life, and they with me. We had formed a true nuptial relation."²

Davis soon began taking dictation from spirits while in a trance or magnetized state and giving lectures in New York City while in the trance state. He came to be known as the "Poughkeepsie Seer." He rejected the idea advanced by some that he was an "intellectual speculator" or a theorist. "...I do not stand before you in any such capacity," he wrote. "I am not a theorist; not an imaginationist, not a lawyer. My position is that of a person, who, without forethought or intellectual preparation, became slowly acquainted with realities and scenes that were transmitted, or 'impressed,' day by day, from a higher sphere, until two whole years had transpired; and then, at the end of those two years, by a blessed mental unfolding, which only the spiritual metaphysicians can truly explain to your understanding. The beautiful memories which had been thus gradually deposited within me came out and stood in the foreground, and said, 'Rememberest thou these things?' – instantly my external life, with its memories, was blended and married sweetly at the altar of the 'superior condition!'"³

For his lectures, Davis was mesmerized by Dr. S. Silas Lyons, while Rev. William Fishbough recorded his words. In 1847, James Victor

Wilson, a New Orleans author and journalist wrote: "The world will shortly be apprised of a triumph in clairvoyance through the celebrated Mr. Davis, which it will be totally unprepared for. During the past year this uneducated, unsophisticated, and amiable young man has been delivering verbally, day by day, a comprehensive, well-planned, and extraordinary book relating to all the vast questions of the age; to the physical sciences, to nature in all her infinite ramifications; to man in his innumerable modes of existence; to God in the unfathomable abysses of his love, wisdom, and power. Thousands of persons who have witnessed him in his medical examinations or scientific disclosures, live to testify to the astonishing exaltation of mind possessed by Mr. Davis in his abnormal state. The two new planets of our system, conjectured recently, were described in Davis's manuscripts fourteen months ago, namely March 15 and 16, 1846."⁴

The book referred to by Wilson was titled *Principles of Nature*, published in 1847 when Davis was only 21. While the book was received favorably by many, some critics pointed out that much of it was similar to the writings of Swedenborg. These critics apparently did not grasp the possibility, or probability based on Davis's initial illumination, that it was Swedenborg who was communicating through Davis at times. Davis's supporters pointed out that Davis, who had had just five months formal education, had never read the works of the Swedish mystic.

In *Principles of Nature*, Davis's hand recorded: "It is a truth that spirits commune with one another while one is in the body and the other in the higher spheres – and this, too, when the person in the body is unconscious of the influx, and hence cannot be convinced of the fact; and this truth will ere long present itself in the form of a living demonstration. And the world will hail with delight the ushering in of that era

when the interiors of men will be opened, and the spiritual communion will be established.”⁵

In his diary, on March 31, 1848, he recorded: “About daylight this morning a warm breathing passed over my face and I heard a voice, tender and strong, saying, ‘Brother, the good work has begun – behold, a living demonstration is born.’ I was left wondering what could be meant by such a message.”⁶ On that very same day, the so-called “Rochester Knockings,” involving the Fox family, began.

Dr. George Bush, professor of Hebrew at the University of New York, said that he had heard Davis correctly quote Hebrew and correctly answer impromptu questions put to him as tests while in the clairvoyant state. Initially, Bush declared that everything coming through Davis was a profound and elaborate discussion of the philosophy of the universe, and applauded it all for its soundness of principle, clearness of illustration, order of arrangement, and encyclopedic range of subjects, adding that he knew of no work of any single mind that exceeded it. However, when Bush later discovered that some of Davis’s teachings conflicted with what he took to be truth, he claimed that deceiving spirits were working through Davis in spite of his honest intentions.

Over the next 40 years, until 1885, Davis would author 30 books, most of them philosophical in nature, although some were health-related. In his 1852 book, *The Great Harmonia*, Davis wrote that man evolved from animals. This was six years before Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace announced their theory. “...man is not the result of any special creation of Deity, but an issue of the stupendous system of nature, whose myriad forms, substances, essences, and principles have, step by step, ascended the spiritual path or universal progression,” he wrote. “On the summit of this boundless empire of life stands man in his ordinary or rudimental state – a reservoir of everything beneath him, and the splendid

representative of all the perfections and energies of the grosser worlds of life which move in nature’s broad dominion.”⁷

Among the subjects discussed in *The Great Harmonia*, which went through 40 editions, were: the misapplication of reason; the relation of man to nature; the law of progress; the animal nature in the human mind; the duality of man; the law of adaptation; man’s interior life; how Jesus was made a great moral reformer; dreams; natural psychology, the religion of sympathy; Peter’s vision; the psycho-sympathetic state of the mind; the true position of Swedenborg; the true doctrine of incarnation; Zoroaster, Moses, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and Krishnah; skepticism; the spiritual state; the contradictions of inspired men; the magnetic process; action of mind upon the body in disease; and the universal fallacy, to name just a few.

“It will be found that human happiness, liberty, and virtue are as much within the control of the combination of mind, as the locomotive is under the power of the skillful engineer,” he penned in the 1852 classic. “Hence, when man shall convert bad physical and social conditions into good and healthy influences, the moral wilderness will blossom as the rose, and the lion and lamb of the interior man will lie down together in peace.”⁸

At some point in time, Davis began to remember his trance messages and was able to write books based on what he referred to as “some process of inner perception.”

When New York State outlawed the practice of spiritual healing in 1880, Davis entered medical school and obtained degrees in both medicine and anthropology so that he could continue to heal, often without payment.



¹ Davis, Andrew Jackson, *Death and the After-Life*, Colby & Rich, Banner Publishing House, 1865, pp. 96-98.

² Davis, Andrew Jackson, *Morning Lectures*, C. M. Plumb & Co., Publishers, 1865, p. 308.

³ *Death and the After-Life*, pp. 54-55.

⁴ Harding, Emma, *Modern American Spiritualism*, University Books, 1970, p. 24.

⁵ <http://www.fst.org/spirits3.htm>.

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⁷ Davis, Andrew Jackson, *The Great Harmonia*, The Austin Publishing Co., 1924, p.52 (reproduction of 1852 book).

⁸ _____ p. 26.