Bridging the
River of Death
AND
How I Know
the Dead Return

BY...

W. T. STEAD,
Editor of “The Review of Reviews.”

Reprinted from “The Harbinger of Light.”

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA:
E. W. COLE, Book Arcade, Melbourne
345 George St., Sydney
67 Rundle St., Adelaide
1918.
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A Sequel to
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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA:
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BRIDGING THE RIVER OF DEATH.

By W. T. STEAD.

Those to whom the subject is entirely new may rub their eyes in amazement, and ask whether it is possible that a responsible journalist who, like myself, is actively engaged in the affairs of this world, conducting his own business, and maintaining his journalistic position, could speak gravely of bridging the grave, and holding communication with the other world as if it were as practical a proposition as tunnelling the Channel or cutting the Isthmus of Panama. The best answer to those persons is to describe the following case, which occurred within the last twelve months. It is one of many such, but it is so complete in itself that I prefer to select this as an illustration of the kind of evidence that is convincing an ever-increasing number of inquirers as to the reality of the bridge across the grave.

A lady friend of mine in a good position, well known in the world of letters and society, had the misfortune last winter to lose by sudden bereavement an intimate and much-beloved friend. She was as one distracted, the light of her life seemed to have gone out, and for days she could neither eat nor sleep. In her distress she communicated with me, not really venturing to believe that it was possible that out of the darkness and blackness of the great shadow she might be able to receive some cheering word that would tell her of the continuance of the life and the love of her friend. But even before she met me she had received the evidence for which she sought. As I knew all the parties concerned I can speak at first hand as to what happened. My friend knew an Eastern lady, who, seeing the extremity of her distress, thought that it would be well to hold a meeting with a well-known medium in London of the name of Williams, whom I have frequently met at the seances at General Turner’s. She went listlessly into a darkened room in which the medium was sitting with her friend and two other ladies. The medium shortly afterwards went into a trance, and in the eerie silence and darkness of the room
my friend vainly wondered, half despairing, whether there
could be any truth in the theory of the return of the dead.
Thus musing, she was suddenly startled by hearing herself
addressed in clear terms, audible to all those in the room,
by her pet name. The voice was the voice of her dead
friend. She answered, he replied. She felt the touch of his
hand upon her shoulder. Then the invisible hand touched
the watch of the deceased which she was wearing in her
bosom, causing a thrill as of a powerful electric shock to
pass through her body. The voice continued to speak to
her, assuring her of his unfailing devotion, of his desire to
watch over her welfare, to advise her concerning a mutual
acquaintance, and finally taking leave of her in the same
terms with which they had always been wont to part. The
deceased was a total stranger to everyone in the room
excepting my friend. They heard what was said, but they
did not understand what was meant or to what it alluded.
But to my friend there could be no doubt she had talked
with him whose body she had seen laid in the grave but
a few days before.

Fired with a new-born faith, she desired to have more
permanent evidence than the memory of the vanished voice.
She went to Mr. Boursnell, a septuagenarian photographer
in Shepherd’s Bush. Her identity was strictly concealed.
I saw Boursnell afterwards and closely questioned him, and
found he had no idea as to who had been his sitter. He
had a vague idea that she was a duchess, which she was not.
Hardly had she seated herself in the studio when Mr. Bour­
snell, who is clairvoyant and clairaudient, told her that she
was accompanied by a gentleman who had only recently
passed over into the spirit world. He said that she was wear­
ing something that belonged to him. With this gentleman was
another who resembled him in appearance. He had passed
away some years before, and the elder gentleman said,
“Tell her that I have met Reggie” (I have altered the
name). Now Reggie was the name of her friend’s brother
who had died abroad some years before. My friend then
asked Mr. Boursnell whether he thought he could get his
photograph. As always, Mr. Bournsell expressed his
inability to say whether or not the spirit form could impress
itself upon the plate, but he said he would try. When he
was doing so he said he received another message from the
invisible sitter which he at once recognised as referring to the circumstances in which he met his death. Nothing whatever was said to Mr. Bourneill to give him a clue as to the identity of the person for whom his sitter was sorrowing; but, to her immense delight, when the plate was developed his portrait appeared plainly visible standing beside her. There was no doubt as to the resemblance. It was he, and no one else than he; yet he had not been in the spirit world a week when he returned and was photographed in the way I have just described. After that many communications were received from time to time, but to only one of these I will refer for two reasons. First, because it proves the reality of the guardian care which is sometimes exercised by those who watch over us on the other side; and, second, because it was one of the cases directly connected with Julia's Bureau.

Julia's Bureau has one office in London at Mowbray House, and also a quiet residential retreat in the suburbs, a house standing in its own ground amid trees, near water, in surroundings which are conducive to free and undisturbed communication with the other side. Sitting at a table in the Library one Monday night, one of Julia's staff was surprised to hear a name rapped out. She was not a physical medium, and not accustomed to receive messages otherwise than by automatic hand-writing. That evening her hand refused to write automatically, and, the movements of the table attracting her attention, she asked who was present, and received in answer the name of the deceased friend of the lady whose story I have just told. The recipient when the name was rapped out had nothing to lead her to associate it with anyone. It was a Christian name, but she had no information as to the identity of its owner. On asking why this person had come, she received, by the process of question and answer, the table rapping out the words letter by letter, a warning addressed to the lady in question, begging her not to use her motor car for a week, and saying that if she did use it in that week she would have an accident and would be run down, whereas if she postponed her journey till the following week no casualty would happen.

My colleague in the Bureau carefully noted the contents of this strange message, and reported it to me the next day,
saying that she had no idea from whom the message came, nor did she like to send it on, being an anonymous warning of an improbable accident. There might be nothing in it, and if the lady acted upon the warning and postponed her drive until the following week no one could say whether there was a justification for the warning. On reading the message, however, I recognised at once the name of the friend of the lady, and, therefore, sent the warning on to her, advising her to check it by direct communication through automatic hand-writing. The lady lived some fifty miles out of town. The letter was posted between one and two o'clock on Tuesday morning. I heard nothing more about it until six o'clock on Wednesday night, when I received a telegram from the lady in question, stating that she had just received my letter, and was much surprised at its contents, for she had left home on Tuesday morning before my letter arrived, and had only found it on her return. On driving through London on her way home on Wednesday afternoon a motor omnibus had turned the corner of the street on the wrong side of the road, and, the street being slippery and wet with rain, it was impossible to avoid a collision. The motor 'bus struck the rear of her motor car, completely wrecking it, and the occupants of the car had a narrow escape from sudden death. The remains of the car were left in London, and its occupants, in a more or less bruised and wounded condition, were forwarded home by train, to find waiting the warning which had arrived too late to avert what might easily have been a fatal catastrophe. All the documents concerning this case of prevision are in order, and will be submitted to proper authorities. The evidence is complete in every particular, nor is there a weak link in the whole chain.

What do these facts suggest? Unless the whole narrative is a tissue of romantic fiction, here is a case in which a friend was able to return from beyond the grave within a week to comfort the survivor, to manifest his presence by touch, by a direct voice, by conversation couched in the old familiar terms which could not have been known to the medium. Further, that he was able to show himself to a clairvoyant, to bring with him his brother who had predeceased him, and to impress his picture upon a photo-
Bridging the River of Death.

Graphic plate in the studio of a photographer who never heard of his name or knew of his existence. Further, that he promised to watch over the safety of his friend, and in fulfilment of that promise sent a warning nearly two days in advance of the event as to a motor car accident which actually happened, which he had foreseen, and from which he had in vain endeavoured to save her. If such things, oh! sceptical reader, had happened in your experience, so that you knew the truth of them beyond any manner of doubt, would you continue to deride the idea of bridging the grave? Would you not, on the contrary, feel that we were within measurable sight of establishing communication with the other side on a firm and scientific basis?

One more incident and I have done. It illustrates the possibility of holding intelligent conversation with disembodied spirits of friends under circumstances which preclude all possibility of fraud or hallucination. In the year 1884 it was my good fortune to meet General Gordon at his sister’s house at Southampton. The interview which took place led directly to his throwing up his appointment on the Congo and accepting the commission to go to Khartoum to extricate the garrisons from the Soudan. It was an historic interview which made an abiding impression upon my mind. There was with me a brother officer, a great personal friend of General Gordon’s. Nineteen years after Gordon had met his death, when Khartoum was captured, in company with the same officer, I had a sitting with a medium well known on the Continent, of the name of Mr. Alfred Peters. Towards the close of the seance, greatly to my astonishment, without the slightest expectation either on the part of my friend, or myself, Mr. Peters was controlled by an intelligence, whose identity neither of us could for a moment doubt. It was exactly as if General Gordon himself had taken his seat in the chair. His mannerism, which was very marked, his quick, brusque, humorous mode of speech was exactly reproduced. He took up our old conversation at Southampton twenty years ago, asked me if I remembered about matters, some of which I did remember, and some of which I had forgotten, and none of which the medium could possibly have known. He talked away with the same keen intelligence, political acumen and dogmatic assurance which distinguished him.
during his physical life. He recognised us both, spoke to us both in the same friendly fashion, and poured out a stream of conversation that was a mixture of theology, mysticism, and high politics, and his personal reminiscences bore in every sentence the true Gordon stamp. I have had many remarkable sittings in my life, but I do not remember any seance in which the control was more absolutely perfect. The character of General Gordon was strongly marked. He was intensely original, full of personality, and at the same time he had been dead so long that the medium, Mr. Peters, who was a mere boy when Gordon died, could not possibly have acquired his habits of speech, his mode of thought, or his recollection of the topics which he discussed with me twenty years before, nor does he (Mr. Peters) to this hour know who it was that controlled him, for General Gordon, in his usual peremptory fashion, said, "Don't tell this boy who it is that has been talking through him. I want to use him again, and I can use him more easily if he does not have any idea as to who I am."

I saw Mr. Peters the other day and asked him closely about that seance with a view to holding another, but I found him in utter ignorance as to the spirit who had made such vigorous and effective use of his organs of speech.

Those and other things give me every assurance, based upon absolute knowledge, that the veil between this world and the next is wearing very thin, and that I think we may be on the verge of a development of human faculties which will render it possible for that which is now the privilege of a very few to become the common inheritance of the whole race.
THE UNSEEN WORLD A REALITY.

An Address by W. T. STEAD.
(July 4th, 1909).

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I speak to-night with a sense of peculiar responsibility. I have given up public speaking, as the strain was more than I could stand in addition to my journalistic and other work. To-morrow is my sixtieth birthday, and I do not think I can end my fifty-ninth year better than by bearing my testimony to you, most of whom I have never seen before, and shall probably never see again, as to the words of truth that have proved my greatest help and inspiration.

I was talking the other day to a distinguished statesman, a High Churchman, who said, "Religion depends chiefly in reliance upon the unseen." If he be right, religion in this country is in a very bad way. Cecil Rhodes told me that whenever he met a Jew he always asked him if he ever heard in the Synagogue any reference to a future life. He never met a Jew who gave an affirmative answer. I have applied the same test to many churches. It is seldom you hear an expression of real faith in another world from any Christian pulpit, and very seldom any reference to ministering angels and spirits. The fact is the Church has become practically materialistic. I hope that we possess in Spiritualism the means of a real revival of religion. But many Spiritualists are tinged with materialism; you do not like people to talk about religion, and I hope you will bear with me when I tell you I detect a materialistic note in many of your publications. Most of you are Atheistic the greater part of your time. You never can do wrong unless you cease to believe in God as a living force. We never can mourn or lament without having first lost faith in God. The great mission of Spiritualism is to make men spiritual. It is not the extension of materialism into the other world. That is a damnable error. The peculiar notion that Spir-
tualism teaches that there is no such thing as retribution for a life lived in selfish neglect of the duties to God and humanity has no foundation; in fact, no spiritualist teaches an everlasting hell. I do not think any religious man believes it.

But behind the doctrine is an eternal truth. As a man leaves this world, so will he wake in the other world. You may find yourself in a state of utter, outer darkness if you have lived a loveless, selfish life on earth.

I remember David McCree, who was turned out of his church, saying to me: "I do not object to hell; I want to rehabilitate it." Men have got rid of the idea that life here entails consequences hereafter.

A friend of mine, a distinguished foreign lady, living in London, some time ago began to work the spirit-indicator. She was only a beginner. Imagine her astonishment when the name of a great personage was spelt out. Slowly, letter by letter, he gave his name, and then in pathetic terms begged her to pray for him. "Where are you?" asked my friend. "It utter darkness; pray for me, pray for me." He was not an exceptionally bad man; he had only lived a life of thoughtless indifference and self-indulgence. Soon after, he came again: "Why have you not prayed for me; why have you not kept your word?" "But I have prayed for you, in church, and all your countrymen, too, have prayed for you." "That matters nothing. I want, and must have, the fervent prayer of a loving soul." "But what is your condition?" "I do not know; I am like a ship-wrecked sailor, in darkness and loneliness on an unknown shore. Oh, if you could only tell my relations of my experience it might help them to avoid my fate." The same thing may await for you and me. We think we are just men and women; in reality, we are spirits spending a few years of education in this world (which is but as a preparatory school for a larger life), who in a few years will pass on to another state in which our position will be governed by the use we have made of our life here.

I do not want anyone present to be able to say that he stood within the range of the voice of W. T. Stead and that he did not warn him to flee from the wrath to come.
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But while it is necessary to say this, Spiritualism is at the same time one of the most beneficent agencies for interpreting the love of God. Eighteen months ago my eldest son passed into the other world. I heard his first cry as a new-born infant; I caught his last sigh as he passed into the unseen. I had always said I would never make my final pronouncement on the truths of Spiritualism until someone near and dear in my own family passed into the great beyond. Then I should know whether Spiritualism stood the test of a great bereavement, bringing life and immortality to light. And I am here to tell you that the reality of my son's continued existence, and of his tender care for me, have annulled the bitterness of death.

You remember what Lowell said: "Console me if you will, but all the consoling can never make death other than death." I can say Spiritualism has made death other than death for me. That boy had been for thirty-three years my joy and my pride. I had trained him in the hope that he would succeed me and carry on my work. The very day he died I came up at 11.30 a.m. to appoint him as my assistant editor. That night at 11.30 p.m. I saw him die. The blow was so sudden. I did not know he was seriously ill. When I saw him breathe his last I knew our Father had other plans, and that the boy I had trained to work for me here was going to work for me on the other side. And that hope has been gloriously fulfilled. The telephone helps us to realise this kind of communication. When my boy was here our offices were connected by telephone, and it is much the same now. He writes to me through several mediums; he shows himself to my friends. I myself have seen his materialised face. One friend has seen him at least three times fully materialised, as was our Lord after His resurrection. He is here to-night beside me. I am as sure of that as I am of the fact that I am speaking to you. When I realise the difference it makes to have this knowledge, and to be without it, I feel I must testify to you as to the reality of the unseen world around us. The reality of the unseen world is the doctrine out of which all the religions of the world have been fashioned, the bed-rock whence they have all been hewn.

Yet people recoil from you when you ask them to investigate. How wretched all such people will feel if when they
come back no one sees them, no one hears them, no one
senses their presence. The first bitter experience of many
is that those on this side have suddenly become stone-
blind, stone-deaf, utterly oblivious of the presence of their
departed friend. A meeting like this will prepare those
who are left behind to be kinder to those who come back.
What miserable wretches are we if we do not try to spread
this glorious truth. We are, many of us, tainted with more
than a touch of Pharisaism. One thing certain is that the
Pharisee goes to hell far sooner than the publican.

I know my son would not care to come back to earth,
that he is enjoying vistas of usefulness and ever-widening
knowledge that fill existence with increasing interest. Am
I not bound to communicate to my fellows what has been
such a joy to myself? Ought we to sit in our corner con­
tentedly munching our cake all to ourselves? Is that right?
What answer can we make to our elder brother, Christ,
when He meets us and asks: ‘What have you done for My
other brethren?’ You may say: ‘Lord, I took in ‘The
Two Worlds’ and read ‘Light’; I went to the meetings
when there was a specially interesting medium.’

Oh, you miserable wretch! All religions recognise the
responsibility of man to his Maker. All agree that we shall
have to render an account as to what we have done with
our life. How many times have you, have I, for that mat­
ter, ventured to point out to those about us that the course
they are pursuing, if it is loveless and selfish, can end in
nothing but a fearful looking forward to come.

I have been a journalist for forty years. I do not know
a single leader-writer who warns his readers that they will
have to answer for their actions in a world to come.

Do not say I am reproaching you. I feel my own failings
as much as any one. Some of you may believe that Jesus
Christ never existed. If He never did exist, then it is
high time that someone set about realising the ideal. Others
of you share my belief that He exists as our leader to
a better world. I will tell you about the beginning of my
mediumistic career so far as I am a medium. When I was
in Holloway gaol one Christmas—you are all so busy catch­
ing trains and ringing up telephones that you never have
time to listen to the voice of your souls—I had been trying
to write a letter to a poor girl who had been rescued. She was finding the new life very dull and was in danger of falling back, and it was suggested that if I were to write to her it might have some influence over her for good.

I left the letter unfinished to attend morning service, and was looking down from the organ loft on my six hundred fellow prisoners when I heard a voice: "Why are you telling that girl to be a Christian? Never tell anyone any more to be a Christian. Always tell them to be a Christ." My mind revolted, and I said: "What blasphemy." But the voice went on: "The word Christian has become a mere label covering much of self, little of Christ."

I pondered the matter deeply. I wrote to all those on whose judgment and spiritual insight I felt I could rely—to Cardinal Manning, to Hugh Price-Hughes, to Josephine Butler, to Benjamin Waugh, and others. What would these spiritually-minded men and women think of it? With one exception all said: "These words contain the essence of the Christian religion."

Ever since then I have always passed on this message to my fellows. What does it mean? First; that you have to love all beings, not only the nice ones, the attractive ones, but those who seem less attractive, even repulsive. Secondly, you must sacrifice yourself for the well-being of others. Thirdly, you have to interpret the love of God to those around you. Each of you is the centre of a group of souls to whom, if you are not a Christ, perhaps no other interpreter of the love of God and the character of Christ can be sent.

When you return to your home to-night you may be able to say a kindly word or do a sympathetic action. And you do not speak that word, you do not perform the kindly deed. You are not a Christ. You speak the word, you show your sympathy by your actions, and you are a Christ to those persons. Even though you may call yourself an Atheist you are God's Christ to those people.

On Christmas Eve I was writing a letter to my wife, to tell her what my message was, and I was just about writing this sentence: "And a voice came to me and said, 'Be a Christ,' and I have not been able to get this voice out of
my mind.'" In the middle of the sentence I heard the Christmas bells ring, and laid down my pen to listen to their chiming. When I took up my pen what do you think I found I had written? "'Be a Christ,' and I have not been." Friends, I had written the truth, and I left the sentence as I found it.

There are all round us here those whom we have loved and lost, and they know what is going on. How do you think they feel when they see you leading loveless, selfish lives, and know the future that awaits you? They are anxiously waiting to see whether your hearts will be touched. This place holds perhaps 2000, and there may be 5000 spiritual intelligences around us. Some loving friend or relative may be asking of some here: "Will he turn? Will she yield?"

But my last word is not of warning but of triumph. Christ came to bring not only peace—peace is a negative thing—but joy, joy supreme in the absolute assurance that God is in His heaven, and that, therefore, all is right with the world.

FROM THE DEAD OR THE LIVING.
A Reply to Criticism.

W. T. Stead in Review of Reviews.

Mr. Frank Podmore is getting on. In his "Mesmerism and Christian Science" (Methuen, 12/6) he shows that he is capable, for a season, of admitting the reality of facts, such as the cures wrought by Christian Scientists; but if we may predict the future from the experience of the past, it will probably not be long before Mr. Podmore goes back on Mrs. Eddy as he went back on Spiritualism. He is built that way. It is also satisfactory to see that he is beginning to feel that the Psychical Research Society needs some defence. That the best way of making the Psychical Research Society worthy of its title would be the resigna-
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tion of Mr. Podmore, Mr. Piddington, and one or two others whom I need not name, has not yet dawned upon Mr. Podmore. Nevertheless his article, "From the Dead or the Living?" in the new Fortnightly, may be accepted as a sign of grace. It is true it is but a feeble sign, but we must not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. The article takes my article, "How I Know the Dead Return," as its text; but its chief object is to magnify the importance of the cross-correspondences obtained from Mr. Myers by the aid of three automatic writers. The cackling of the S.P.R. over these correspondences reminds us of the hysterical elation of an old maid of a hen when she has laid her first egg. It is perhaps natural, and, as a humane person, I sincerely hope that no super-Podmore may arise to prove that it is but a wind egg after all.

When we turn to what Mr. Podmore has to say about my article, I suppose I ought to be crushed by being told that I have not taken pains to lift my records above the level of the fairy tale. But when I find that I have already done almost everything that Mr. Podmore admonishes me I ought to have done, I manage to survive; for it is Mr. Podmore's ignorance, not my neglect, that is at fault. In the Fortnightly I was writing, not for a committee of experts, but for the public at large; but if Mr. Podmore had taken the ordinary precaution of looking up the records of his beloved S.P.R., he would have found that dates, notes, and all other particulars which his righteous soul desiderates were supplied by me at the time to no less notable a Psychical Researcher than Mr. F. W. H. Myers. "We want to know this," says Mr. Podmore; "we want to know that." Well, if he wants to know it very much why does he not take the trouble of getting to know? The materials have been in the possession of his Society for more than fifteen years. "We don't know the spirit photographer." There is no one so ignorant as those who won't know. Does Mr. Podmore think that he ought to receive a postcard every morning telling him that the name and address of the photographer was Mr. Boursnell, Upper Richmond Road? Really in future when writing for Mr. Podmore it will be necessary to send him a copy of the multiplication-table whenever I venture upon the statement that twice two make four. "We don't know the medium who
received a message from E.M.’’ But her name has been published, and if Mr. Podmore had not seen it, it could have been supplied to him for the asking. ‘‘The friends who saw E. M.’s apparition after death’’—they also are not shrouded in mystery, but being private persons I did not print their names in a narrative to which the addition of unknown names would have carried no weight. ‘‘We don’t know the lady of the broken umbrella—unless, indeed, she was identical with E. M.’’ There is, in short, no limit to what Mr. Podmore does not know. But if he did not know ‘‘the lady of the broken umbrella,’’ Mr. Myers did. He had all the particulars of the incident at the time. He investigated it personally. He had the lady of the broken umbrella down to Cambridge as his guest. He published in the Proceedings of the S.P.R. his conviction that she was a good witness. And she was not ‘‘E. M.’’ Was there ever a more charming illustration of the Pormorean method as to how not to find out facts which are as plain as a pikestaff, and as obvious as the nose upon your face? ‘‘We want to know,’’ in Mr. Podmore’s assertion, interpreted by Mr. Podmore’s practice, means—‘‘We don’t want to know. We neglect to read our own records, and we refrain from asking the one person who could tell us what it is we pretend we want to know.’’ This being so, it is small wonder that Mr. Podmore should pitifully bleat a dozen times over, ‘‘We don’t know,’’ ‘‘We don’t know.’’ Of course he does not know, and he never will know so long as he persists in the present idiotic method that is called ‘‘research’’ by the S.P.R., the first principle of which appears to be that of never seeking for information where they know it can be found.

As to the rest of the article, it is useful as an illustration of the perverse ingenuity with which every conceivable test as to the authenticity of alleged communications is explained away and rejected as worthless. For Mr. Podmore, whose reason recoils from accepting the simple and obvious explanation given by all returning intelligences as to the origin of their communications, has taken to his soul, as the diabolus ex machina, an entity which he names alternately the secondary self, the personified subconsciousness, the trance personality, the dream-self. And this uncanny monster he credits with a lack of morals, an
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absence of scruple and an abnormal cunning. It is a supreme example of Art for Art's sake. And as we have to deal with an author whose mimicry is as subtle as it is unscrupulous, and one who can withhold read the secret thoughts of the sitters, no evidence either of phrasing memory, idiosyncrasy, or even of sealed letters is worth anything. "In short, the only evidence that can satisfy must consist in evidence of the present activity of an active and individual intelligence."

It is well to know that there is some evidence that can satisfy Mr. Podmore. The evidence as to the continuous activity of the actual and individual intelligence of Julia A. Ames is infinitely more abundant, continuous, and convincing than the evidence of the more or less chaotic cross-correspondence upon which the S.P.R. lays such touching stress. The Bureau at Mowbray House is conducted under the constant personal direction of Julia A. Ames. She is present every morning in her chair at the circle, is consulted about every important detail of business, and she gives her decisions with characteristic serenity and emphasis. Sometimes they are taken by clairaudients, sometimes by automatic writing by different automatists, who are proud to act as her secretaries. And whether by clairaudience or by one of three or four different secretaries, there is no inconsistency in her messages. We are in the constant presence of the clear, practical, earnest intelligence which twenty years ago inhabited the body of Julia A. Ames, and can have as little doubt of her identity and her activity as the clerks in an office could have of the identity and activity of a managing director who directed the office through a long-distance telephone.
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A Record of Personal Experience.

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A Record of Personal Experience.

By W. T. STEAD.

Cecil Rhodes once told me that early in life he had devoted much thought to the question whether or not there was a God. He came to the conclusion that there was a 50 per cent. chance that there was a God, and therefore that it was a matter of the first importance to ascertain what God wanted him to do. In like fashion I would ask the reader to consider whether or not there is any proof that the conscious life of his personality will persist after death. If he examines the evidence he will probably come to the conclusion that there is a certain per cent. chance that such is the case. He may put it at 50 per cent., at 90 per cent., or at 10 per cent., or even at 1 per cent., off chance that death does not end all. In face of the fact that the immense majority of the greatest minds in all ages have firmly believed that the personality survives death, he will hardly venture to maintain that he is justified in asserting that there is not even a 1 per cent. chance that he will go on living after his body has returned to its elements. Of course, if he should be absolutely convinced that not even such an irreducible minimum of a chance exists that he may be mistaken, if he thinks that he knows he is right and that Plato and the Apostle Paul were wrong, I beg him to read no further. This article is not written for him. I am addressing myself solely to those who are willing to admit that there is at least an off chance that all the religions and most of the philosophies—to say nothing of the universal instinct of the human race—may have had some foundation for the conviction that there is a life after death. Put the percentage of probability as low as you like, if there be even the smallest chance of its truth it is surely an obvious corollary from such an admission that there is no subject more worthy careful and scientific examination. Is it a fact or is it not? How can we arrive at certainty on the subject? It
may be that this is impossible. But we ought not to despair of arriving at some definite solution of the question one way or the other, until we have exhausted all the facilities for investigation at our disposal. Nothing can be less scientific than to ignore the subject and to go on living from day to day in complete uncertainty whether we are entities which dissolve like the morning mist when our bodies die, or whether we are destined to go on living after the change we call death.

Assuming that I carry the reader so far with me, I proceed to ask what kind of evidence can be produced to justify the acceptance of a belief in the persistence of personality after death, not as a mere hypothesis, but as an ascertained and demonstrable fact.

I.

The recent applications of electricity in wireless telegraphy and wireless telephony, while proving nothing in themselves as to the nature or permanence of personality, are valuable as enabling us to illustrate the difficulties as well as the possibilities of proving the existence of life after death.

In order to form a definite idea of the problem which we are about to attack, let us imagine the grave as if it were the Atlantic Ocean, as it appeared to our forefathers before the days of Christopher Columbus. In order to make the parallel complete, it is necessary to suppose that the Atlantic could only be traversed by vessels from east to west, and that ocean currents or strong easterly gales rendered it impossible for any voyager from Europe to America to return to the Old World. We shall thus be able to form a simple but perfectly clear conception of the difficulties which I am now about to discuss.

If Christopher Columbus, after discovering America, had been unable to sail back across the Atlantic, Europe would after a time have concluded that he had perished in an ocean which had no further shore. If innumerable other voyagers had set out on the same westward journey and had never returned, this conviction would have deepened into an absolute certainty. Yet Christopher Columbus and those who followed him might have been living and
thriving and founding a new nation on the American continent. It would have been impossible for them to convince those they had left behind of their continued existence. Europe would have regarded America as

That undiscovered bourne from whence
No traveller returns.

And their friends and relatives would have mourned the brave

Who went but who return not.

Yet all the while Christopher Columbus and his gallant men would have been living under better conditions than those which prevailed in the land of their birth.

What would have happened in those circumstances? In all probability the faith even of the most ardent believers in the reality of Columbus's great vision would have grown dim. If it did not altogether die out, it would be due to the fact that from time to time, in the dreams of the night, their friends saw him alive and well in a strange new world. But everything would be shadowy and unreal as a dream.

Now let us transport ourselves from the time of Columbus to our own day. We must assume that the original physical impossibility of crossing the Atlantic from west to east still continues. But in the intervening centuries the men who had crossed from east to west have increased and multiplied, and have built up a great nation with an advanced civilisation on the American continent. Like us they discover telegraphy, like us they invent and use the telephone. After a time they discover and apply the principle of wireless telegraphy, and after that they perfect the wireless telephone.

The terrors of the unknown would not daunt for ever the intrepid spirits of European explorers. A ship or ships would be equipped to cross the Atlantic. When their crews and passengers landed on the further shore they would discover, to their infinite amazement, not only that a vast continent existed within five day's steam from Liverpool, but that those who were thought to have perished had founded a great Commonwealth in the New World. What would immediately happen?
The newcomers, finding themselves unable to return, would at once endeavour to utilise all the resources of modern science to enable them to communicate their great discovery to the Old World. They would endeavour to perfect and extend the use of wireless telegraphy, so as to enable them to flash the good news to their friends on the European shore. At first they would fail from the lack of any receiving station on this side. But after a while, by some happy chance, a wireless message from America might be caught on some sea coast Marconi station.

When that message arrived, how would it be received? In all probability it would be fragmentary, incoherent, and apparently purposeless. It would be set down to some practical joker, or regarded as some random message sent out from somewhere in Europe. And so for a long time the attempt to communicate information would fail. After an interval a more coherent message would arrive. Efforts would be made to answer, but the replies might not arrive when anyone was in attendance at the other side; the instruments might not be properly attuned, the messages might be so mutilated as to be unintelligible. A few cranks who had never lost the faith, traditional and dim, that there was a world beyond the seething waste of waters, would go on experimenting, wasting time and money, and exposing themselves to the ridicule of the scientific world.

At last, after innumerable disappointments, it is possible that the captain of the last exploring expedition might succeed in getting through a message, clear, direct to the point, such as this:

From Captain Smith, of the Resolute s.s., to Lloyds, London. Alive and well. Discovered new world filled with descendants of Christopher Columbus and his men.

What would follow the receipt of such a Marconiogram? It would probably arrive so many years after the expedition had sailed that no one would at first remember who Captain Smith was. When the records were looked up, and the existence of the ship and its commander recalled, there would be some sensation, and a good deal of discussion. Efforts to reach the unknown land would be renewed, but the majority of practical, common-sense men of the world would regard the message as a practical joke, while
men of science would prove to their own complete satisfaction the absolute impossibility of any such new world existing, and, a fortiori, of any such message being authentic.

But after a time more messages would come. Some method would be discovered of despaking replies and of receiving answers. At last the scientific world would wake up to the recognition of the fact that a prima facie case had been made out for the strange, the almost incredible, phenomena that seemed to point to the possibility that there was another world beyond the Atlantic, and that its inhabitants could, by means of wireless telegraphy, communicate with Europe. The difficulties they would encounter would be the identical difficulties which confront us in our quest for certainty as to life after death. But with patience and perseverance and careful allowance for the obstacles in the way of trans-oceanic intercourse, the existence of the American continent would in the end be established as firmly as I believe the existence of the Other World is very soon about to be established, beyond all question or cavil.

II.

I will now leave the illustration and address myself directly to an explanation of the evidence which has convinced me of the reality of the persistence of personality after death.

I may make the prefatory remark that I have what is called the gift of automatic handwriting. By that I mean that I can, after making my mind passive, place my pen on paper, and my hand will write messages from friends at a distance; whether they are in the body or whether they have experienced the change called death makes no difference.

The advantage of obtaining such automatic messages from a friend who is still on this side of the grave is that it is possible to verify their accuracy by referring to the person from whom the message comes. I may say, in order to avoid misapprehension, that in my case the transmitter of the message is seldom conscious of having transmitted it, and is sometimes surprised and annoyed to find that his unconscious mind had sent the message. As an illustration of this I will describe one such experience that occurred almost at the beginning of my experiments.
A lady friend of mine, who can write with my hand at any distance with even more freedom than she can write with her own, had been spending the week-end at Haslemere, a village about thirty miles from London. She had promised to lunch with me on Wednesday if she returned to town. Late on Monday afternoon I wished to know if she had left the country, and placing my pen on the paper I mentally asked if she had returned to London. My hand wrote as follows:

"I am very sorry to tell you I have had a very painful experience, of which I am almost ashamed to speak. I left Haslemere at 2.27 p.m. in a second-class carriage, in which there were two ladies and one gentleman. When the train stopped at Godalming the ladies got out, and I was left alone with the man. After the train started he left his seat and came close to me. I was alarmed and repelled him. He refused to go away, and tried to kiss me. I was furious. We had a struggle. I seized his umbrella and struck him, but it broke, and I was beginning to fear that he would master me, when the train began to slow up before arriving at Guildford Station. He got frightened, let go of me, and before the train reached the platform he jumped out and ran away. I was very much upset. But I have the umbrella."

I sent my secretary up with a note saying merely I was very sorry to hear what had happened, and added, "Be sure and bring the man’s umbrella on Wednesday." She wrote in reply, "I am very sorry you know anything about it. I had made up my mind to tell nobody. I will bring the broken umbrella, but it was my umbrella, not his."

When she came to lunch on Wednesday she confirmed the story in every particular, and produced the broken umbrella, which was hers, not his. How that mistake occurred in the transmission of the message I do not know. Perhaps by the solitary inaccuracy to emphasise the correctness of the rest of the narrative. I may say that I had no idea as to the train she was travelling by, and had not the slightest suspicion that she had experienced so awkward an adventure.

I may say that since then, for a period of fifteen years, I have been, and am still, in the habit of receiving similar
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automatic messages from many of my friends. In some the percentage of error is larger, but as a rule the messages are astonishingly correct. This system of automatic telepathy from friends who are still in their bodies and who are in sympathy with me is for me as well established as the existence of electric telegraphy, or any other fact capable of verification every day.

The next question is whether this system of automatic telepathy between the living—which corresponds to wireless telegraphy on land—can be extended to those who have crossed the river of death—an extension which corresponds to the transmission of Marconigrams across the Atlantic.

Upon this point I will again relate my own experience. I had two friends, who were as devoted to each other as sisters. As is not unusual, they had promised each other that whichever died first would return to show herself to the other in order to afford ocular demonstration of the reality of the world beyond the grave. One of them, whose Christian name was Julia, died in Boston shortly after the pledge was given. Within a few weeks she aroused her friend from her sleep in Chicago and showed herself by her bedside, looking radiantly happy. After remaining silent for a few minutes she slowly dissolved into a light mist, which remained in the roof for half an hour. Some months after the friend in question came to England. She and I were staying at Eastnor Castle, in the West of England, when Julia came back a second time. Her friend had not gone to sleep. She was wide awake, and again she saw Julia as distinct and as real as in life. Again she could not speak, and again the apparition faded away.

Her friend told me about the second visit, and asked me if I could get a message from Julia. I offered to try, and next morning, before breakfast, in my own room my hand wrote a very sensible message, brief, but to the point. I asked for evidence as to the identity of the transmitter. My hand wrote, "Tell her to remember what I said when last we came to Minerva." I protested that the message was absurd. My hand persisted and said that her friend would understand it. I felt so chagrined at the absurdity of the message that for a long time I refused to deliver it. When at last I did so her friend exclaimed, "Did she
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actually write that? Then it is Julia herself, and no mis-
take.” “How,” I asked, bewildered, “could you come to
Minerva?” “Oh,” she replied, “of course, you don’t know
anything about that. Julia shortly before her death had
bestowed the pet name of Minerva upon Miss Willard, the
founder of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and
had given her a brooch with a cameo of Minerva. She
never afterwards called her anything but Minerva, and
the message which she wrote with your hand was sub-
stantially the same that she gave to me on the last time
when Minerva and I came to bid her good-bye on her death-
bed.”

Here again there was a slight mistake. Minerva had
come to her instead of Julia going to Minerva, but other-
wise the message was correct.

I then proposed that I should try for more messages.
My friend sat at one end of a long table, I sat at the
other. After my hand had written answers to various
questions, I asked Julia, as another test of her identity, if
she could use my hand to call to her friend’s memory some
incident in their mutual lives of which I knew nothing.
No sooner said than done.

My hand wrote: “Ask her if she can remember when
we were going home together, when she fell and hurt her
spine.” “That fills the bill,” I remarked, as I read out the
message, “for I never knew that you had met with such
an accident.” Looking across the table, I saw that my
friend was utterly bewildered. “But, Julia,” she objected,
“I never hurt my spine in my life.” “There,” said I,
addressing my hand reproachfully, “a nice mess you have
made of it! I only asked you for one out of the thousand
little incidents you both must have been through together,
and you have gone and written what never happened.”

Imperturbably my hand wrote, “I am quite right; she
has forgotten.” “Anybody can say that,” I retorted; “can
you bring it back to her memory?” “Yes,” was the reply.
“Go ahead,” I answered; “when was it?” Answer:
“Seven years ago.” “Where was it?” “At Streator, in
Illinois.” “How did it happen?” “She and I were going
home from the office one Saturday afternoon. There was
snow on the ground. When we came opposite Mrs. Buell’s
house she slipped her foot on the kerbstone and fell and hurt her back." When I read these messages aloud her friend exclaimed, "Oh, that's what you mean, Julia! I remember that quite well. I was in bed for two or three days with a bad back; but I never knew it was my spine that was hurt."

I need not multiply similar instances. The communication thus begun has been kept up for over fifteen years. I have no more doubt of the existence and the identity of Julia than I have of the existence of my wife or of my sister.

Here we had the appearance of the deceased in bodily form twice repeated on fulfilment of a promise made before death. This is followed up by the writing of messages, attested first by an allusion to a pet name that seemed to reduce the message to nonsense, and secondly, by recalling to the memory of her friend with the utmost particularity of detail an incident which that friend had forgotten. No other medium was concerned in the receipt of these messages but myself. I had no motive to misrepresent or invent anything. As my narrative proves, I was sceptical rather than credulous. But things happened just as I have put them down. Can you be surprised if I felt I was really getting into communication with the Beyond?

III.

It will be said by some of those who will not give me the lie as to the accuracy of the foregoing narrative, that it does not carry us beyond telepathy from the living. This may be admitted if telepathy from the unconscious mind is regarded as an actual fact. In this case the unconscious mind telepathed what the conscious mind of the transmitter had entirely forgotten. The hypothesis of telepathy from the unconscious mind of the living can be invoked to account for almost any message said to be transmitted by the dead. But there is one class of messages for which telepathy from incarnate minds, conscious or unconscious cannot account. That is the class of messages which relate neither to past nor present events, but which foretell an event or events which have still to happen.
Julia, on the very day on which she gave me the test messages recorded above, made a prediction, which was given me not really as a prediction but as a friendly warning intended to save another friend from making engagements which she would not be able to keep, as at a certain time she would be three thousand miles away in England. My friend laughed the warning to scorn. The prediction was twice repeated, and both times treated with contempt. Engagements were entered into which, when the time came, had to be cancelled, because my friend found it necessary to go to the distant place which Julia had named, and as Julia had predicted.

It will be objected that the prophecy in this case may have helped to bring about its own fulfillment. Let us admit that for the sake of argument. The same objection cannot be urged against the next item of evidence I am about to produce. Some years ago I had in my employment a lady of remarkable talent, but of a very uncertain temper, and of anything but robust health. She became so difficult that one January I was seriously thinking of parting with her, when Julia wrote with my hand, "Be very patient with E. M.; she is coming over to our side before the end of the year." I was rather startled, for there was nothing to make me think that she was likely to die. I said nothing about the message, and continued her in my employ. It was, I think, about January 15th or 16th when the warning was given.

It was repeated in February, March, April, May, and June, each time the passage being written as a kind of reminder in the body of a longer communication about other matters. "Remember, E. M. is going to pass over before the end of the year." In July E. M. inadvertently swallowed a tack. It lodged in her appendix, and she became dangerously ill. The two doctors by whom she was attended did not expect her to recover. When Julia was writing with my hand, I remarked, "I suppose this is what you foresaw when you predicted E. M. would pass over." To my infinite surprise she wrote, "No; she will get better of this, but all the same she will pass over before the year is out." E. M. did recover suddenly, to the amazement of the doctors, and was soon doing her usual work. In August, in September, in October, and in November, the
warning of her approaching death was each month com­
municated through my hand. In December E. M. fell ill
with influenza. "So it was this," I remarked to Julia,
"that you foresaw." Again I was destined to be surprised,
for Julia wrote, "No; she will not come over here naturally.
But she will come before the year is out." I was alarmed,
but I was told I could not prevent it. Christmas came.
E. M. was very ill. But the old year passed, and she was
still alive. "You see you were wrong," I said to Julia,
"E. M. is still alive." Julia replied, "I may be a few
days out, but what I said is true."

About January 10th Julia wrote to me, "You are going
to see E. M. to-morrow. Bid her farewell. Make all neces­
sary arrangements. You will never see her again on
earth." I went to see her. She was feverish, coughed
badly, and was expecting to be removed to a nursing hos­

goal, where she could receive better attention. All the time
I was with her she talked of what she was going to do to
carry out her work. When I bade her good-bye I wondered
if Julia was not mistaken.

Two days after I received a telegram informing me that
E. M. had thrown herself out of a four-storey window in
delirium, and had been picked up dead. It was within a
day or two of the end of the twelve months since the first
warning was given.

This narrative can be proved by the manuscript of the
original messages, and by the signed statement of my two
secretaries, to whom, under the seal of secrecy, I communi­
cated the warnings of Julia. No better substantiated case
of prevision written down at the time, and that not once
but twelve times, is on record. However you may account
for it, telepathy, conscious or unconscious, breaks down here.

IV.

The lady whose intitals were E. M., and whose tragic
fate I have just described, had promised me that if she
died before me she would do four things. She had con­
stantly written automatically with my hand during her life.
She promised, in the first place, that she would use my
hand, if she could, after death, to tell me how it fared
with her on the other side. In the second place, she pro-
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mised that, if she could, she would appear to one or more of her friends to whom she could show herself. In the third place, she would come to be photographed, and, fourthly, she would send me a message through a medium, authenticating the message by countersigning it with the simple mathematical figure of a cross within a circle.

E. M. did all four. (1) She has repeatedly written with my hand, apparently finding it just as easy to use my hand now as she did when still in the body.

(2) She has repeatedly appeared to two friends of mine, one a woman, the other a man. She appeared once in a dining-room full of people. She passed unseen by any but her friend, who declares that she saw her distinctly. On another occasion she appeared in the street in broad daylight, walked for a little distance, and then vanished. I may say that her appearance was so original it would be difficult to mistake her for anybody else.

(3) She has been photographed at least half a dozen times after her death. All her portraits are plainly recognisable, but none of them are copies of any photographs taken in earth life.

(4) There remains the test of a message accompanied by the sign of a cross within a circle. I did not get this for several months. I had almost given up all hopes, when one day a medium who was lunching with a friend of mine received it on the first attempt she made at automatic writing. "Tell William not to blame me for what I did. I could not help myself," was the message. Then came a plainly but roughly drawn circle, and inside it the cross. No one knew of our agreement as to the test but myself. I did not know the medium, I was not present, nor was my friend expecting any message from E. M.

Is it surprising, then, that after such experiences I have no more doubt of the possibility of communicating with the so-called dead than I have of being able to send this article to the Editor of the "Harbinger of Light"?

V.

I have referred to spirit photography. Let me disarm any sceptical reader by admitting that nothing is more easy than to fake bogus spirit photographs, and further that an expert conjurer can almost always cheat the most
vigilant observer. The use of marked plates, which I handle, expose, and develop myself, no doubt afford some protection against fraud. But my belief in the authenticity of spirit photographs rests upon a far firmer foundation than that of the fallible vigilance of the experimenter. The supreme test of an authentic spirit photograph is that a plainly recognisable portrait of a dead person shall be obtained by a photographer who knows nothing whatever of the existence of such a person, and that no visible form shall be seen by the sitter in front of the camera.

I have had such photographs, not once, but many times. I will here only mention one. The photographer whose mediumship enables him to photograph the Invisibles is a very old and rather illiterate man, to whom this faculty was at one time a serious hindrance to his photographic business. He is clairvoyant and clairaudient. During the late Boer war I went with a friend to have a sitting with him, wondering who would come.

I had hardly taken my seat before the old man said: "I had a great fright the other day. An old Boer came into the studio carrying a gun. He fairly frightened me, he looked so fierce, so I said to him, 'Go away; I don't like guns.' And he went away. Now he's back again. He came in with you. He has not got his gun now, and he does not look so fierce. Shall we let him stay?"

"By all means," I replied. "Do you think you could get his photograph?"

"I don't know," said the old man; "I can try."

So I sat down in front of the camera, and an exposure was duly made. Neither my friend nor I could see any other person in the room but the photographer and ourselves. Before the plate was removed I asked the photographer:

"You spoke to the old Boer the other day. Could you speak to him again?"

"Yes," he said; "he's still there behind you."

"Would he answer any question if you asked him?"

"I don't know," said the old man; "I can try."

"Ask him what his name is!"
The photographer appeared to put a mental question, and to listen for a reply. Then he said:

"He says his name is Piet Botha."


"That's what he says his name is," doggedly replied the old man.

When he developed the plate there was seen standing behind me a hirsute, tall, stalwart man, who might have been a Boer or a Moujik. I said nothing, but waited till the war came to an end, and General Botha came to London. I sent the photograph to him by Mr. Fischer, who was Prime Minister of the old Orange Free State. Next day Mr. Wessels, another Free State delegate, came to see me.

"Where did you get that photograph," he asked, "the photograph you gave to Mr. Fischer?"

I told him exactly how it had come.

He shook his head. "I don't hold with superstition. Tell me, how did you get that portrait? That man did not know William Stead—that man was never in England."

"Well," I replied, "I have told you how I got it, and you need not believe me if you don't like. But why are you so excited about it?"

"Why," said he, "because that man was a near relative of mine. I have got his portrait hanging up in my house at home."

"Really?" I said. "Is he dead?"

"He was the first Boer commandant killed in the siege of Kimberley."

"And what was his name?"

"Pietrus Johannes Botha," he replied, "but we always called him Piet Botha for short."

I still have the portrait in my possession. It has been subsequently identified by two other Free Staters who knew Piet Botha well.
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This, at least, is not a case which telepathy can explain. Nor will the hypothesis of fraud hold water. It was the merest accident that I asked the photographer to see if the spirit would give his name. No one in England, so far as I have been able to ascertain, knew that any Piet Botha ever existed.

VI.

What is wanted is that those who profess to disbelieve in the existence of life after death should honestly attempt to define the kind of evidence which they would consider convincing. I have narrated in this paper what seems to me conclusive evidence of the continuance of personality after death. All of these incidents occurred in my own personal experience. Their credibility to my readers depends upon their estimate of my veracity. These things actually occurred as I have written them down. Supposing that they had happened to you, my reader, could you refuse to admit that there is at least a prima facie case for a careful exhaustive scientific examination into the subject? What more evidence, what kind of evidence, under what conditions, is wanted, before conviction is established?

I ask no one hastily to accept anything on other people's testimony. It is true that all people are not mediums, any more than all telephones can take Marconi messages. I am fortunate in being my own medium, which eliminates one possible hypothesis. But there are plenty of honest mediums, some possibly in your own family, if you cared to seek for them.

One last word. For the last fifteen years I have been convinced by the pressure of a continually accumulating mass of first-hand evidence of the truth of the persistence of personality after death, and the possibility of intercourse with the departed. But I always said, "I will wait until someone in my own family has passed beyond the grave before I finally declare my conviction on this subject."

Twelve months ago this month of December I saw my eldest son, whom I had trained in the fond hope that he would be my successor, die at the early age of thirty-
three. The tie between us was of the closest. No one could deceive me by fabricated spurious messages from my beloved son.

Twelve months have now passed, in almost every week of which I have been cheered and comforted by messages from my boy, who is nearer and dearer to me than ever before. The preceding twelve months I had been much abroad. I heard less frequently from him in that year than I have heard from him since he passed out of our sight. I have not taken his communications by my own hand. I knew him so well that what I wrote might have been the unconscious echoes of converse in the past. He has communicated with me through the hands of two slight acquaintances, and they have been one and all as clearly stamped with the impress of his own character and mode of thought as any of the letters he wrote to me during his sojourn on earth.

After this I can doubt no more. For me the problem is solved, the truth is established, and I am glad to have this opportunity of testifying publicly to all the world that so far as I am concerned, doubt on this subject is henceforth impossible.
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