

136.1  
L856

# SPIRITUALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

BY

GEORGE LONGRIDGE,

*Priest of the Community of the Resurrection*

*Author of "The History of the Oxford Mission to Calcutta,"*

*"The Joy of Redemption."*

A. R. MOWBRAY & CO. LTD.

LONDON: 28 Margaret Street, Oxford Circus, W. 1.

OXFORD: 9 High Street

MILWAUKEE, U.S.A.: The Morehouse Publishing Co.

†

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

First impression, 1918

New impression, 1919

261376

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
CAUSES OF THE PRESENT RECRUDESCENCE OF SPIRITUALISM - - - -	1
SPIRITUALISM NOT A NEW DISCOVERY - -	3
NOT A NEW RELIGION - - - -	4
WHAT SPIRITUALISTS CLAIM - - - -	6
THE METHOD - - - -	9
1. THROUGH MEDIUMS - - - -	9
The Character of the Controls -	11
The Character of the Mediums -	15
How Far are the Messages Due to Telepathy ? - - - -	18
The Subliminal Self - - - -	23
Communications which are said to exclude the possibility of Tele- pathy or Subliminal Activity -	25
Instances of False Messages - -	29
2. AUTOMATIC WRITING - - - -	31
3. TABLE-TILTING - - - -	33
WHAT IS THE EXPLANATION ? - - - -	34
WHAT HAS SPIRITUALISM GIVEN US ? - -	38
THE DANGERS OF SPIRITUALISM - - - -	39
DOES SPIRITUALISM LEAD TO INSANITY ? -	43
SPIRITUALISM AS A RELIGION - - - -	47
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS - - - -	50



# SPIRITUALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

“I AM sorry I am late, but I have been talking to my brother!” So a visitor apologized to a friend of mine the other day. My friend knew that the brother had been killed at the Front some months before, and that the speaker had just come from a spiritualist séance. This is the kind of thing many people are saying and doing in these days.

## CAUSES OF THE PRESENT RECRUDESCENCE OF SPIRITUALISM

Without doubt the cult of Spiritualism has of late greatly increased. There are, I think, two reasons for this:—

1. As regards the general public this recrudescence of Spiritualism is largely due to the war, and to the sorrow as well as to the strain and excitement which the war has caused. Thousands have lost those who are nearest and dearest to them,

B

and under the burden of their sorrow many eagerly embrace anything that holds out the hope that they may in some way establish contact with those who have fallen. Again, the general strain and anxiety of these days cause many people to be attracted by what is startling, and by what professes to be in touch with the supernatural.

2. A second reason, which appeals to a much smaller circle, is the scientific interest which has been awakened in regard to the phenomena of Spiritualism. Scientific men are now seriously investigating these phenomena. I wish to draw attention to this because I am sure that Spiritualism cannot be treated as mere trickery or humbug. There is no doubt much fraud mixed up with it, as men like Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir William Barrett frankly admit, and of which I shall say something further on ; also there is much that is vulgar and trivial. But it is undeniable that many of the phenomena are real ; though no scientific men speak of them as *supernatural*, but rather as *supernormal*—a distinction which it is important to bear in mind, as it reminds us that the phenomena of Spiritualism

are not religious but scientific. These, I think, are the two main reasons why the subject has become specially prominent just now.

#### SPIRITUALISM NOT A NEW DISCOVERY

Again, it is important to remember that there is nothing new in Spiritualism. Many people seem to imagine that it is some wonderful and new revelation ; but it has been known in the world from time immemorial. For thousands of years messages which profess to come from the dead have been given through mediums. Automatic writing has been common enough in past ages. The Planchette, for example, has been in use in China as a means of conversing with evil spirits for many ages. Necromancy, or holding communication with the dead, is spoken of in the Old Testament, and was always condemned and forbidden by God. In Egypt, in ancient days, Spiritualism was probably developed to a much greater extent than it is now. In Rome, in the last century before Christ, well-known people were placed under police supervision for summoning the spirits of the

dead.<sup>1</sup> Let no one, then, think that modern Spiritualism is a new discovery. It is practically as old as human society. What is new is that it is now being seriously investigated by scientific men, not—and this, again, I wish to emphasize—as a new religion, but as a legitimate subject of scientific inquiry.

#### NOT A NEW RELIGION

Sir William Barrett, a leading scientific professor, and himself a believer in the genuineness of the phenomena of Spiritualism, has written some very wise words as to the danger and foolishness of making it a religion. "The unseen around us is," he says, "tenanted by many spiritual creatures whose influence is sometimes good and sometimes evil. Hence the apostolic injunction to 'try the spirits,' i.e. use our moral judgement, and not be led astray by the foolish but common notion that every communication that comes from the unseen is good, and worthy of credence. In fact the messages often spring from, and are invariably influenced by, the medium's own sub-

<sup>1</sup> F. W. H. Myers, *Classical Essays*, p. 20.



conscious life. Moreover, the Apostle saw clearly, as every Christian sees, that the foundation of spiritual life, which consisted of *faith* in a risen Lord, is seriously imperilled when the seen is substituted for the unseen, the phantasms of the spiritualistic séance for the realities of the kingdom of heaven, which cometh not with observation.

“The same peril exists to-day, and always will exist. This every thoughtful and reverent mind must admit; and it is a distinct warning against making a *religion* of Spiritualism. But this is not an argument against the study of the phenomena as a branch of psychical or psychological science.”<sup>1</sup>

What has to be remembered is that, while specially trained scientific minds may investigate Spiritualism as a matter of purely scientific inquiry, it is quite another thing, and in many ways a very dangerous thing, for ordinary people to use it either as a new form of religion or to meddle with it out of curiosity or the love of what is strange and occult.

<sup>1</sup> Sir W. F. Barrett, *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, pp. 33, 34.

## WHAT SPIRITUALISTS CLAIM

What do modern spiritualists claim as their great discovery, and as the great help which Spiritualism has to offer, especially to those who have lost relations and friends in the war? They claim, I gather, two things:—

1. To have proved personal survival after death.
2. To have established communication with the departed.

As regards the first of these claims—to have proved personal survival after death—no instructed Christian has ever doubted this. Christians have always known it, and known it on grounds infinitely stronger than any which spiritualists claim to have produced. To Christians the Resurrection of our Lord is, and always has been, the absolute assurance that we shall live and retain our identity after death. It is part of the Christian Creed. No one can read S. Paul's Epistles without seeing how this belief was a firm conviction in his own mind and how it permeates all his teaching. Let any one who doubts this read the passages cited

below.<sup>1</sup> This knowledge we Christians have received, not through mediums, or table-tiltings, but through the word of a living Person, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As regards the second of their claims—to have established communication with the departed—there are several questions which may be asked. Is it possible? Is it desirable? What has Christianity to say about it?

As to these questions, Christianity frankly admits that communication with the departed is possible. In the Old Testament times, and in the Christian Church, it has always been believed; and there are on record many perfectly authenticated instances of such communications. But—and this is most important to remember—when such communications have been made they have always been spontaneous and unexpected. The whole initiative, so to speak, has been on the side of God. The communication has been established by Him, without any

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv; Phil. i. 21-23, iii. 11-14, 20, 21; Col. iii. 1-4; 1 Thess. iv. 15-18; 2 Tim. i. 16-18, ii. 11, 12, iv. 6-8; Titus i. 2; also Heb. iii. 18-iv. 1, vi. 2, xi. 5, 16, 35, 39, 40, xii. 1, 22, 23.

action on the part of those on earth to whom the communication has been made. Christians have always shrunk from any attempt to obtain such external communications themselves; and all efforts to secure them, by mediums or otherwise, have always been forbidden by the Church.

Now the whole method of Spiritualism is directly contrary to this. It is a definite attempt, by definite means, to effect a contact with the departed, and to obtain, at the will of those on earth, communications from those in the other world. It is true that spiritualists affirm that those in the other world have an eager desire to get into external touch with those they knew on earth, and that Spiritualism is only helping them to satisfy their desire. But what proof is there of this? How is it that the great saints who might help us so much have never spoken? Moreover, there is no hint that God has any concern in the matter, or that the communications are in any way dependent on His will. Or perhaps it is fairer to say that spiritualists take for granted that if communication can be established, it must be right to try and effect it.

## THE METHOD

Let us now pass on to consider the methods by which spiritualists seek to establish this communication with the departed. They are, speaking generally, three :—

1. Through mediums.
2. Through automatic writing.
3. Through table-tilting.

Let us consider each of these three methods.

### I. THROUGH MEDIUMS

A medium is a man or woman who, in a trance or semi-unconscious state, becomes the instrument through which an unseen personality, called "a control," delivers the message which the departed wishes to send.

A sitting with a medium takes place in an ordinary room, either in full daylight or in a subdued light or in darkness. The medium, after waiting quietly, goes more or less into a trance, and then speaks. The medium does not profess to speak his or her own words, but the words of an unseen intelligence—the

c

“control,” who professes to be speaking the message which the departed one wishes to send.

There are therefore four personalities involved in a spiritualistic séance :—

1. The sitter—the person who wishes to get into communication with a departed friend.

2. The medium—whose voice speaks the message from the departed one.

3. The control—the unseen intelligence who speaks through the medium.

4. The departed one—who delivers his message to the control, through whom it is delivered to the medium.

(In table-tilting the communicator, i.e. the departed one himself, often takes control and speaks directly through the agency of the table without any medium ; and I believe this is sometimes the case with automatic writing.)

In a spiritualist séance, then, it is to be noticed that the message does not come direct, but through the agency of two persons, i.e. the medium and the control. There is therefore always the possibility of the messages being coloured by the minds of those through whom it comes.

*The Character of the Controls*

It is also interesting to notice the character of the controls, i.e. those unseen intelligences who are supposed to be in close relation to the departed, and through whom the messages sent by the departed are delivered to the medium.

We may take as examples the controls mentioned in Sir Oliver Lodge's widely-read book *Raymond*. The controls of Mr. Vout Peters, one of the mediums consulted by Sir Oliver Lodge and his family, are two ;—one called "Moonstone," apparently a North American Indian, or possibly an East Indian Yogi, or hermit and one who in this life was presumably a heathen. The other is named "Red-feather," which also seems to indicate a North American Indian.

The control of Mrs. Leonard, the other medium, is a little coloured girl called Feda, who sometimes talks broken childish English, and exhibits the characteristics of the child races. What this means will perhaps be clearer if I quote from some of the sittings in which Feda speaks. The following is from the account of a sitting at which Lady Lodge was the inquirer.

Lady Lodge asks Feda if Raymond can tell her where she got some flowers for his birthday.

M. F. A. L. :—“ Can he tell the kind of flowers I put for him on his birthday ?”

(Feda, *sotto voce* :—“ Try and tell Feda.”)

“ Doesn't seem able to get it.”

“ Don't think he knew. I can't get it through.”

“ Don't think I don't appreciate them. Sees some yellow and some white.”

“ He thinks it is some power he takes from the medium which makes for him a certain amount of physical sight. He can't see properly.”

M. F. A. L. :—“ Can he tell me where I got the flowers from for his birthday ?”

(Feda, *sotto voce* :—“ Flowers doesn't grow now. Winter here !”)

“ Yes, they do. Thinks they came from home.”

(Feda, *sotto voce* :—“ Try and tell me any little thing.”)

“ He means they came from his own garden.”

(“ Yes, they did. It was yellow jasmine, cut from the garden at Mariemont.”—  
M. F. A. L.)

Feda :—“ Paul's worried 'cos medium



talk like book. Paul calls Feda 'Imp.' Raymond sometimes calls Feda 'Illustrious one.' I think Yaymond laughing! Always pretending Feda very little, and that they've lost Feda, afraid of walking on her, but Feda pinches them sometimes, pretend they've trodden on Feda. But Feda just as tall as lots of Englishes."<sup>1</sup>

Paul mentioned above is Paul Kennedy, a young officer killed at the Front, whose mother consulted Sir Oliver Lodge about Spiritualism, and who told his mother he had met Raymond in the spirit world.

Again, at the beginning of the same sitting, Lady Lodge says "So glad to meet you, Feda." Feda answers "Feda love you and Soliver best of all. SLionel and SAlec too she love very much."<sup>2</sup> Though Feda often speaks naturally, yet she often lapses into this childish way of speaking. And in passing I would wish to pay a tribute to Sir Oliver Lodge's extreme fairness in recording such passages in conversations with Feda—passages which he must have known would lead many to treat the whole matter with contempt.

<sup>1</sup> *Raymond*, pp. 235, 236.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Other controls are mentioned in *Raymond* in connection with a celebrated American medium, Mrs. Piper. One is Dr. Phinuit, who claimed to have been born in Marseilles, and to have studied at Metz and other places, but who on investigation was found never to have existed at all. The other was termed "Rector." "A Monsieur Sage, who has written a book on Mrs. Piper, which has been translated into English and published with a preface by Sir Oliver Lodge, discussing Dr. Phinuit at some length, from an analysis of his utterances, which sometimes lasted an hour, states that he was vulgar, inconsistent, and untruthful; lying not for the sake of lying, but showing no hesitation in resorting to it when it got him out of a difficulty."<sup>1</sup>

Now what strikes one about these controls (and I gather they are typical examples of many others) is that they are hardly the sort of persons one would expect to be intermediaries between those in Paradise and those on earth. A pseudo-French doctor, whose standard of truth is, to say the least, somewhat elastic, an Indian Yogi,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Halifax, *Raymond: Some Criticisms*, p. 22. (Mowbray and Co.)

a North American Indian, an illiterate child, are hardly the instruments one would expect to be used by God for conveying messages from those in His keeping to their sorrowing relations on earth.

### *The Character of the Mediums*

Another point is the character of the mediums. Are they as a rule trustworthy? That there are both men and women who possess psychic gifts, and are therefore capable of acting as mediums, and who are perfectly honest, no one will deny. Those used by Sir Oliver Lodge, for example, or Mr. Home, a well-known medium with whom many scientific men of the highest character have held sittings, are examples. But, on the other hand, those who are most emphatic in their belief in the phenomena of Spiritualism state quite plainly that there is a great deal of fraud and trickery among many mediums, especially among those who have made it their profession. Sir William Barrett, in his book on *Psychical Research* says "The repugnance with which the whole subject is widely regarded is very natural; for the alleged phenomena only

occur in the presence of a 'medium,' and usually in darkness; moreover a class of paid professional mediums has arisen, several of whom—a particularly detestable class of rogues—have been caught in bare-faced trickery." <sup>1</sup> And again, in his book *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, he says "As regards the general and uninstructed public it is obvious that these phenomena . . . lend themselves to gross abuse by those charlatans and rogues who prey upon the credulity or distress of mankind. . . . Silly and credulous folk listen to and pay for the rubbish that is told them by would-be astrologers, fortune-tellers, crystal-gazers, *et hoc genus omne*. There are genuine cases of clairvoyance and of prevision and premonitions. But these genuine cases are exceptional, and rarely to be found in a certain class of advertizing mediums who swindle the public." <sup>2</sup>

The writer goes on to say that complete confidence cannot always be placed in mediums who are themselves honest. "There are, I am sure, many honourable and gifted professional mediums far removed from the charlatans referred to in the last paragraph. The mischief

<sup>1</sup> pp. 211, 212.

<sup>2</sup> p. 256.

largely arises when the ignorant public go to such honest psychics and expect an immediate return for their money. The natural tendency of the medium is not to disappoint the sitter, and the temptation therefore arises to supplement genuine by spurious phenomena. It cannot be too often insisted on that supernormal gifts are rare and elusive, and require patience, knowledge, and discrimination on the part of the inquirer. It is for this reason that I should rather dissuade than encourage uninstructed persons to resort to professional mediums. Even those who yearn to pierce the veil for 'the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still' would in my opinion, *if they have not Christian faith*, do better to rest content with a perusal of the evidence for survival that is now being accumulated by rigorous and laborious expert inquiry."<sup>1</sup>

Again, speaking of a very well-known medium, Eusapia Palladino, who had great notoriety about the year 1895, Sir W. Barrett says, "Although Eusapia appeared to have supernormal powers of a genuine kind, she is a medium of a low type who has been convicted of imposture

<sup>1</sup> *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 257.

both in England and America, and with whom, therefore, I should not care to have any sittings. Her case," he adds, is, he fears, "too often typical of paid professional mediums who sit for psychical phenomena."<sup>1</sup>

With regard, then, to "controls" and "mediums," through whom the supposed messages from the departed come, we cannot fail to notice that, as regards the controls, some have proved to be untruthful; others, like Feda, are childish and illiterate; or of queer origin, such as Moonstone and Redfeather; while people most interested in Spiritualism and most competent to judge say frankly that, among professional mediums, there are many who are quite untrustworthy; and even in those who are honest there is the tendency to add to the supposed genuine messages other statements, in order to satisfy the sitter.

*How far are the Messages due to  
Telepathy?*

But it is maintained that, in spite of this, there are many mediums who are perfectly

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 67, 68.

honest and trustworthy ; and I do not for a moment wish to question this. But, one is led to ask, is the message which they deliver necessarily one from the spirit world ? How far is the information they give derived merely from earthly sources ? Is it from the sitters round the table, or from others related to the sitters or interested in their investigations, though not present at the moment ? In other words, what part does telepathy, or thought transference, play in the matter ? I take it that it is established beyond doubt that the thoughts of one person can be transferred to the mind of another person, even when the two people are far apart. Many instances of this are on record.<sup>1</sup> Also it is established that this transference of thought can take place without any direct effort on the part of the agent or the percipient. It may be done without either of the two people being conscious of it. Sir W. Barrett, writing of telepathy in his book on *Psychical Research*, says, "How telepathy is propagated we have not the remotest idea. . . . It is highly probable that the conscious waking self of those concerned sometimes takes no part in the

<sup>1</sup> See Sir W. Barrett, *Psychical Research*, chap. viii.

actual telepathic transmission. The idea or object thought of in some way impresses itself on the subliminal self of the agent [i.e. the person with whom the thought originates], and this impression is transferred, doubtless instantaneously, across space, to the subliminal self of the percipient [i.e. the person who receives the thought]. Here, however, a favourable moment may have to be awaited before the outer or conscious self can be stimulated into activity; for delay in the emergence of the impression is often noted.”<sup>1</sup>

Now the sitter in a spiritualistic séance is obviously thinking of the person from whom it is hoped a message may come; his mind is both consciously and unconsciously full of the details as well as the broad outlines of the life and, to a certain extent, of the thoughts of the departed one; also, in many cases, he is conscious of the sort of answers he wishes to receive. What, then, is more likely than that these thoughts are telepathetically conveyed to the mind of the medium, and so form the substance of the message which the medium delivers? In fact, many of the answers given by mediums

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-109.



can be clearly accounted for on this theory. Take, for example, the answers supposed to come from Raymond about "Mr. Jackson," a peacock belonging to Sir Oliver Lodge which had lately died. Sir Oliver Lodge asks Raymond, through Feda, "Do you remember a bird in our garden?" Feda, after some questioning between herself and Raymond, says, "Yes, he does." Then Sir Oliver Lodge says, "Well, don't let us bother about birds. Ask him, does he remember Mr. Jackson?" This is obviously to make Feda suppose that Mr. Jackson is a man, instead of the name of the peacock. Here again Feda stumbles a good deal and eventually says she thinks Raymond is mixing him up with a bird, and speaks of a pedestal. The peacock had lately died, and was to be stuffed and put on a pedestal.<sup>1</sup> This incident Sir Oliver Lodge considers to be a good piece of evidence, though he does admit the possibility of telepathy.<sup>2</sup> Knowing as we do the extraordinary way in which the thoughts of one person can be transmitted to another, is it unreasonable to conclude that in this case telepathy is the real solu-

<sup>1</sup> *Raymond*, pp. 256, 257.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

tion? Sir Oliver was thinking of the peacock; he knew it had died and was to be stuffed and put on a pedestal; and further, he knew the answers he wanted to receive. There is nothing in the whole incident, therefore, which could not be accounted for by telepathy. And what may have happened in one case may surely happen in many others. It has been said, though I do not know on what authority, that it is a remarkable fact, and one that should always be remembered, that no information has ever been received by spiritualists which was not at the time in the mind of some living person.

“It is a quite tenable hypothesis that her (the medium’s) subconscious mind is, at all times, taking photographs, as it were, of the minds of those with whom she comes in contact. Then the automatic power would appear to constitute merely the developing process applied to the photographs taken, so that they may be described by the ‘medium’ and others.”<sup>1</sup>

“Even accepting as something seriously to be reckoned with the evidence offered

<sup>1</sup> *Immortality*, p. 248. By various writers. (Macmillan & Co.)

by the S.P.R., we clearly need much more investigation before we can be assured that mediums possess any spiritistic source of information. But the belief of the ordinary spiritualist runs far in advance of anything for which the annals of the S.P.R. offer evidence.”<sup>1</sup> The writer of these words also says “From visits of my own to mediums, and from what others tell me, I have formed the opinion that all that is commonly obtained from a professional medium is, at best, a dramatic reproduction of what is, consciously or unconsciously, in the sitter’s mind. By a dramatic reproduction I mean that the medium sees the knowledge imaginatively as in a dream ; his or her statement comes in an unexpected form, and therefore *seems* fresh.”<sup>2</sup>

### *The Subliminal Self*

Again, students of psychology speak of the existence of what they call “the subliminal self.” Mr. F. W. H. Myers, one of the founders of the Psychical Research Society, says “The conscious self with

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

which we are familiar in our waking life is but a portion of a more comprehensive consciousness, a profounder faculty, which for the most part remains potential, so far as regards life on earth." <sup>1</sup> That is to say, this mysterious faculty is there in us, but normally is unused and inactive, though it may in certain conditions be awakened into activity.

Sir W. Barrett says "The subliminal self not only contains the record of unheeded past impressions, a latent memory, but also has activities and faculties far transcending the range of our conscious self. . . . Evidence of these higher subliminal faculties is not wanting ; we see them sometimes emerging in hypnotic trance, in works of genius and inspiration, and in the arithmetical and musical performances of infant prodigies." <sup>2</sup> Here again we have a source from which the messages received through mediums may be derived,—and especially in the case of messages or answers which apparently are quite beyond the normal knowledge of the medium, as, for instance, classical quotations, or references to scien-

<sup>1</sup> See Sir W. Barrett, *Psychical Research*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

tific facts, or facts quite outside the normal experience of the medium.

*Communications which are said to exclude  
the possibility of Telepathy or Subliminal  
Activity*

But it is maintained that there are instances of communications which exclude all possibility of either telepathy or subliminal activity, and can therefore be due only to unseen intelligences. We are ready to admit this. But then the question arises, What is the character of those intelligences? We have seen the character of the controls mentioned in *Raymond*. Spiritualists admit that the spirit world is of a mixed character, and that messages may be received from evil spirits as well as from good ones; and Sir William Barrett gives the warning that, "Granting the existence of a spiritual world, it is necessary to be on our guard against the invasion of our will by a lower order of intelligence and morality."<sup>1</sup> It has been pointed out to me by a friend that S. Paul, in his first Epistle to S. Timothy, uses some words which have a striking signifi-

<sup>1</sup> *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 250.

cance with regard to Spiritualism. The passage is 1 Timothy iv. 1, 2, and may be translated thus :—"But the Holy Spirit expressly says that in after times certain shall depart from the Faith, giving heed to wandering or idle spirits and teachings emanating from evil spirits who speak lies acting a part, and who have their conscience cauterized, i.e. who have suffered moral degeneration." May not these words exactly describe the character of those spirits to which Sir W. Barrett refers as spirits of a lower order of intelligence and morality? His warning of the danger of the invasion of the wills of those who meddle with Spiritualism by such spirits points to one of the great dangers of Spiritualism—a danger which is the more formidable because one of the great requirements for successful spiritualistic results is that the will should be absolutely passive, and so in a state which offers no resistance to influences from without. This danger is specially one which affects mediums, who in order to fulfil their function have to be in an abnormal condition involving the loss of normal self-control. "It is this weakening of self-control and personal responsibility," says

Sir W. Barrett, "on the part of the medium, that constitutes, in my opinion, the chief peril of Spiritualism."<sup>1</sup> The same peril exists for those who practise automatic writing, and in a different degree for those who attend spiritualistic séances. I do not wish to imply that all the phenomena of Spiritualism are the work of devils. Much, I believe, is due to telepathy and the awakened activity of the subliminal self; especially as we can at present, in our ignorance of the subject, place no limits to the scope of telepathic power. Apart from this, it seems to me that we have no proof that the message in any given case really comes from the person from whom it is supposed to come, and not from some intelligence of a lower order of beings.

A striking instance of the failure to establish a proof of a message from a departed friend is given by Sir Oliver Lodge himself in a book entitled *The Survival of Man*, published in 1909. He there says that Mr. Myers before he died wrote a message, sealed it in an envelope and handed it to himself, the contents of the envelope being known only to Mr. Myers. Mr. Myers's hope was that after his death

<sup>1</sup> *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 259.

he might be able to reveal the contents of the envelope through a medium. The envelope was deposited by Sir Oliver Lodge in his bank at Birmingham. After Mr. Myers's death messages which purported to be from him began to come through ; and eventually they seemed to give a clear and definite statement of the contents of the envelope. On December 13th, 1904, the envelope was opened in the presence of the Council of the Society of Psychical Research ; but it was found that there was no resemblance between its contents and what the messages alleged that the envelope contained.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen, then, that there are well-known psychic powers, viz. telepathy and the faculty of the subliminal self which may account for a large proportion of the communications purporting to be received from those who have died and are in the other world, but which may really be derived in this way from the minds of those who are still living on earth. We have also seen that in one particular and striking test case—that of the message left in the envelope by Mr. Myers—the test entirely failed. Further, it is admitted that there

<sup>1</sup> See *The Survival of Man*, pp. 121 f.



are unseen beings of a lower order of intelligence and morality whose agency in spiritualistic methods it is impossible altogether to exclude. This being so, we may well pause before accepting the claims which spiritualists so confidently make, that they have established communication with the unseen world, and can convey messages to and from the departed.

### *Instances of False Messages*

Moreover, there are not a few authenticated instances of supposed messages from the other world which have been proved to be, in some cases, merely the coming to the surface of things long forgotten, and, in others, to be the direct action of non-moral or malignant spirits. The following are examples of each, and are given by Mr. J. Arthur Hill, who is himself not at all antagonistic to spiritualistic claims.

As regards the first, Mr. Hill gives the instance of an automatic writer who "had communications from a 'spirit' who called herself Blanche Poynings, and gave a great deal of historical detail which the automatist did not consciously know. But it

was afterwards found that Blanche Poyning was a character in a novel which had been read to the automatist many years before; and the novel contained all the historical detail given. All this had been forgotten. But the subliminal strata still retained it, and could produce it." <sup>1</sup>

The other example, in which a friend of Mr. Hill was the automatist, had an ugly, and what might have been a tragic, character. The writer—a lady—one day received a message telling her that she would die that same year. She was naturally much disturbed, and questioned the spirit very closely, and was assured that the message was true. The year passed, and the lady remained living, and in good health. Fortunately she had the strength of mind not to let the thought of death weigh upon her, though she quite believed what she had been told. A spiritualistic friend to whom she told the message she had received was horror-struck to find that it was believed, and subsequently informed the lady that she had received a message from her friends on the other side, who assured her that she was being misled. When asked if any reason could

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Hill, *Spiritualism*, pp. 81, 82.

be assigned for such a message, the answer was, "We cannot assign the motive in this particular case. Sometimes it is evil, sometimes it is a mistaken idea on the part of the communicating spirit, and very often it is from pure love of fooling people." <sup>1</sup>

## 2. AUTOMATIC WRITING

Automatic writing, to which I referred above, is a second method by which communications are received from the other world. The method is simple. The writer holds a pencil in his hand, and has a sheet of paper before him. He remains quite passive, and waits until, without any volition on his part, the pencil begins to write. Nearly all that has been said with regard to communications received through mediums applies to automatic writing, so that I need not dwell further on this matter. The two instances which have been given above, which bear a close relationship to many others, show how little confidence can be placed in this method, as supplying a means of communicating with those we

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-42.

have known and loved who are now in the other world ; while, on the other hand, it may lead—as it has done in many cases—to very unpleasant and dangerous results. <sup>1</sup>

Much importance is attached by spiritualists to what they call “inspired” writing as evidence of communication with spirits in the other world. Whole books of such writings have been published by spiritualists, but it has been pointed out that “while it is impossible to assert of any one passage from published automatic writings that it certainly represents the earthly environment of the medium, and not the mind of any discarnate spirit, it is worthy of note that when we get whole books of automatic writing supposed to be inspired by some individual from the next life, we find, on the whole, we have nothing which does not correspond with the intellectual, moral, and religious environment of the medium.” <sup>2</sup> The writer adds that responsible members of the Society of Psychical Research are generally of the opinion that the fact that speech or writ-

<sup>1</sup> See J. Godfrey Raupert, *The Dangers of Spiritualism*.

<sup>2</sup> *Immortality*, pp. 257, 258.

ing is automatic is not in itself any evidence that it has any source beyond the subconscious mind of the medium.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. TABLE-TILTING

A third method of receiving communications is by table-tilting. Those who wish to receive a message thus sit round a table, placing their hands lightly upon it. The plan is for the table to tilt as each letter of the alphabet is spoken, and to stop or "hold" when the right letter is reached. Some one writes down the letters and makes out the sentences.

Here is an account of one such sitting. It was held in the drawing-room at Marie-mount, Sir Oliver Lodge's house. Some of the younger ladies were singing, and some one suggested that Raymond might like to hear the music. The table was pulled out, and as it began to rock it was asked "Was it Raymond?" It answered "Yes." The table then began to edge itself towards the piano. It was pushed back, but persisted in returning. It then began to thump Miss Barbara Lodge, who was playing, on the back, keeping time

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

with the music. It then moved along the floor to a corner where it could lodge one foot on the skirting-board about six inches from the ground, on which it placed one leg, and then raised the other three in the air. This it did many times, seeming to be delighted with the trick. Finally it laid itself down on the floor and tried to raise itself up. Mr. Lionel Lodge's hand, being under the table, was very uncomfortable, so they asked if they might put the table up, and it answered "Yes."<sup>1</sup> On another occasion the table seemed to show great affection for Lady Lodge, and is described as trying to get on to her lap.<sup>2</sup> At other times the table got rather rampageous, and had to be quieted down. Raymond, we are told, volunteered the explanation, through mediums in London, that he could not always control it, and that there was a certain amount of skylarking on his side which he could not prevent.<sup>3</sup>

### WHAT IS THE EXPLANATION ?

What are we to say of all this? The phenomena, though often queer and often

<sup>1</sup> *Raymond*, pp. 222, 223.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217; see also pp. 182, 194, 273.

absurd, are yet real. Many of the communications purporting to come from the departed through mediums or automatic writing may be accounted for by telepathy, and in many cases are due to it, or else to the action of the subliminal self. Some, especially in the case of professional and paid mediums, are conscious or unconscious frauds. But allowing for all this, what of those communications which, so far as we know at present, seem to be accounted for as being the work of unseen intelligences? What are we to say about them?

First, looking at the matter from a purely scientific point of view, we must remember that the science of psychology is only in its infancy; and the investigations now being made by men of science may in time afford an explanation which is purely scientific, so that what now appears to be supernatural may then be seen to be the result of psychic laws of which at present we have little or no knowledge, and may have nothing whatever to do with the unseen world.

Secondly, if it is proved that some of the phenomena have their origin in the spirit world, and are really due to unseen

intelligences, then for the Christian the question arises, Are these communications approved by God or are they not? If they are not, then for us Christians the matter is closed. It is forbidden ground. That this is so it seems to me impossible to doubt. We know that all attempts to get into touch with the dead in Old Testament times were forbidden to the Jews. The late Dr. Swete, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, points out that the same prohibition is found in the New Testament. "The attempt which is now being made in some quarters to open up communication with the dead is wholly foreign to the mind of the New Testament. If our Lord had desired to remove this prohibition and encourage the methods of Spiritualism, nothing could have been easier. But He was so far from this that even when He recalled the dead to life He seems to have sealed their lips against any revelation of the other world."<sup>1</sup>

But even if it is asserted that there are no grounds for believing that such communications are contrary to the will of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Swete, *The Life of the World to Come*, pp. 25, 26.



God, can we believe that God would choose such means for enabling us to hold intercourse with the faithful in Paradise? Picture the methods and the setting. A medium, whose control is a "Feda" or a "Moonstone," whose behaviour and utterances are often trivial and vulgar; a table which exhibits movements violent and sometimes ridiculous—are these the instruments which we can believe God would use? Again, can we imagine S. Paul or any of the saints seeking to obtain contact with the other world by such methods? Are not the accounts of séances and table-tiltings worlds apart from the *Purgatorio* of Dante or the *Dream of Gerontius*.

To a Christian the whole atmosphere of Spiritualism is repugnant. He feels himself in the presence of influences which are not those of the holy angels or of the saints of God. To the Christian—if the communications are real—they are not due to spiritual conditions, but are rather the bringing back of the departed to the lower level of the old material life, and so are really hindrances to that true union which is found in raising those on earth to spiritual union through deeper and truer life in God.

## WHAT HAS SPIRITUALISM GIVEN US ?

Again, what help or what new knowledge has Spiritualism brought us? Our personal survival after death, which it claims to have proved, has been, as we have seen above, always known and believed by Christians; and we have far surer ground for our belief than any evidence which spiritualists have produced. If they claim to have established communications with the departed, the evidence for this is by no means conclusive. And here again we Christians have a richer and more wonderful assurance in another article of our Faith—the Communion or Fellowship of the saints.

If it is really possible to get into communication with those in the other world by the methods which spiritualists use, we should expect that, with the wider knowledge and clearer vision which we believe the faithful departed to possess, they could, and would, convey to us information which might be of real help. But I believe it is true to say that the whole record of spiritualistic communications has produced nothing of the kind. How many problems there are, for ex-

ample, both historical and scientific, about which we might suppose some solution or suggestion could have been given; and yet the spirits of those who might have solved them have never spoken. Or, if we turn to spiritual truths, surely here we might have expected some very real and rich help. But there is absolutely nothing. It is true that spiritualists claim to have received much spiritual teaching through automatic writing; such, for example, as the automatic writings of the late Mr. Stainton Moses. But these writings contain nothing new, nothing more than what may be called rather uninteresting "sermon stuff"; while their theology, when it is new, ceases to be Christian. As Baron Von Hügel said, in a paper which he read to the Religious Thought Society on October 12, 1916: "One never gets any spiritual ideas out of Spiritualism."

### THE DANGERS OF SPIRITUALISM

Let me, in conclusion, say a word about the dangers of Spiritualism—dangers which are very real, not only to those who have completely yielded themselves to its influence, but to those who, from curiosity or

love of excitement, attend séances and use automatic writing or table-tilting, and still more to those who adopt Spiritualism as a religion. It is easy, of course, on the one hand, to exaggerate the danger ; but it is equally easy for many who have had experience of Spiritualism and so far have found no ill results, to deny that there is any danger at all. The evidence of the evil effects—physical, moral, and spiritual—is very strong. Sir William Barrett, as I have said above, himself warns us of the danger of the invasion of our will by intelligences of a lower intellectual and moral order—a danger which, surely, is serious enough. But, leaving for the moment on one side the question of the moral and spiritual risk, and considering Spiritualism merely as a matter of scientific inquiry, there is a very real danger to those who meddle with it without the knowledge and protection which are given by a real scientific training. Just as many experiments in chemistry are quite safe for those who are scientifically trained chemists, but very dangerous to those who attempt them without such training, so it is with regard to these psychical phenomena. As Sir William Barrett again

warns us, one who enters upon the exploration of this subject, "unless properly equipped and guided by the *lumen siccum* of the scientific spirit, is likely to become engulfed in a Serbonian bog, even if no worse fate befall him." <sup>1</sup> And again, "All scientific investigations need to be conducted with prudence and common sense, and when these are exercised in psychical research there is no reason to apprehend any dangers, such as may undoubtedly befall those who, with ignorant and unbalanced minds, and from idle curiosity, venture to rush into a region which may prove to them a treacherous psychical quicksand." <sup>2</sup>

Sir Oliver Lodge is equally explicit. "It may be asked," he says, "do I recommend all bereaved persons to devote the time and attention which I have done to getting communications and recording them? Most certainly not. I am a student of the subject, and a student often undertakes detailed labours of a special kind. I recommend people in general to learn and realize that their loved ones are still active and useful and

<sup>1</sup> *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, pp. 251, 252.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

interested and happy—more alive than ever in one sense—and to make up their minds to live a useful life till they join them.”<sup>1</sup> This is good and sound advice. But the danger is not only to those who go to a medium as inquirers, but to the mediums themselves. To quote once more from Sir William Barrett :—“There is certainly some evidence indicating that continual sittings for psychical phenomena cause an illegitimate and excessive drain on the vitality of a medium, creating a nervous exhaustion which is apt to lead, in extreme cases, to mental derangement, or to an habitual resort to stimulants, with a no less deplorable end.”<sup>2</sup>

And again, “The danger to the medium lies, in my opinion, not only in the loss of spiritual stamina, but in the possible deprivation of that birthright we each are given to cherish—our individuality, our true selfhood ; just as in another way this may be impaired by sensuality, opium, or alcohol.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Raymond*, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 261.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 250, 251.

## DOES SPIRITUALISM LEAD TO INSANITY ?

This is a question which is much debated. Spiritualists deny that this is the case ; and medical opinion is divided, though there are many doctors who give the gravest warning as to the dangers of dabbling with Spiritualism. Dr. Mercier, in an article in the *Hibbert Journal* of July, 1917, refers in the following words to the annual report of Dr. G. M. Robertson, Medical Superintendent of the Royal Hospital at Morningside, Edinburgh, the premier institution for the insane in Scotland, who is himself by no means antagonistic to Spiritualism :—“ I feel it my duty to utter a note of warning to those who are seeking consolation in their sorrow by practical experiments in the domain of Spiritualism.’ The warning is that manifestations of mediums, supposing them to be honest, are, if not morbid, yet closely related to manifestations of mental disease that have no element of the occult about them ; that the intelligence in practices of a spiritualistic nature is apt to awaken a dormant proclivity to hallucination in those who inherit a tendency to nervous disorders ; that the belief in Spiritualism

merges into unmistakable delusion, so that in some cases it is impossible to say where the one ends and the other begins ; that inquiries in Spiritualism in some cases lead to insanity, and in other cases retard recovery from insanity, and may render permanent what might otherwise have been a temporary affliction."

Mr. J. Godfrey Raupert, who was at one time himself a spiritualist, and so has experience of Spiritualism from within, in his book on *The Dangers of Spiritualism*, is emphatic in the warning which he gives of the many serious evil results which come from meddling with it. And in this view of the matter he does not stand alone. "There are," says the Rev. A. E. J. Rawlinson, in his book *Religious Reality*, "no doubt, some forms of psychical research which are genuinely scientific and legitimate. It is probable enough that there exists a considerable area of what may be called borderland phenomena, to which scientific methods of inquiry may be found applicable, and which it is theoretically the business of science to investigate. But it is a region in which the way lies readily open to all kinds of superstition and self-deceit. The pursuit



of truth for its own sake is essentially a religious thing ; but the motives of many amateur dabblers in psychical research are far from being truly religious or spiritual. Much popular Spiritualism, whether it assumes the form of table-turnings, of spirit-rappings, or of mediumistic séances, is thoroughly morbid and undesirable, and the Christian Church has rightly discouraged it." <sup>1</sup>

A doctor, whose practice lies entirely with mental cases, in giving his own private view of the effect of Spiritualism, says " Spiritualism is an exceedingly interesting subject, and those who give their attention to it get more and more absorbed, and as they wade into the subject get a firm belief in it. When this stage is arrived at, in many cases, it leads to such conduct on the part of those who are interested that they have to be considered as insane by mental specialists."

Another physician, though inclined to say that Spiritualism enters only slightly into mental cases, yet says that he fully believes that the *moral* effect of Spiritualism as currently met with is bad, and that it is

<sup>1</sup> A. E. J. Rawlinson, *Religious Reality, a Book for Men.* (Longmans & Co.)

a subject that should not be touched by any other than a scientific mind for purposes of legitimate inquiry.

Those who are attracted towards this cult, either through curiosity or in the desire to find consolation in their sorrow, would do well to weigh carefully the warnings thus given, remembering that they come not only from medical men, but from such believers in the phenomena of Spiritualism as Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir William Barrett. For members of the Church I am quite clear that Spiritualism is forbidden. It is, of course, easy for people to sneer at such prohibition as narrow-minded, and to say that the Church has no right to dictate to individuals about such matters. But, those who claim the privilege and membership of a society, are in honour bound to obey its rules and to accept its decisions so long as they claim its membership. Moreover, the Catholic Church is not of yesterday. It has an age-long experience, and, as a result of that experience, it has consistently forbidden all attempts to get into communication with the departed in such ways. To Churchmen this prohibition is not obscurantism,

but the voice of a living Body, whose guiding wisdom is inspired by the Holy Ghost, that Indwelling Spirit Who, according to our Lord's promise, should guide the Church into all truth.

### SPIRITUALISM AS A RELIGION

If we turn to the religious side of the matter the danger is still greater. As I have said above, the whole atmosphere of Spiritualism is antagonistic to a Christian. In the communications received from those in the other world there is a strange absence of any sense of the need of penitence; there is little expressed desire for God or reference to Him. The communications are mostly trivial, sometimes vulgar, and almost entirely such as have to do with the things of this world. It is difficult to conceive of them as having their source in God, or as coming from those who are in Paradise; while the methods by which they are received—séances, automatic writing, table-tiltings—are such as make it impossible to consider that they are of divine approval. A further light is thrown upon the religious aspect of this subject when Spiritualism

becomes, as it has done in many places, a definite religion. In a public lecture given in Johannesburg on December 27th, 1917, the question was asked, "What did spiritualists think their religion gave them which the Church could not?" The answer, given at once by a spiritualist who was present, was this, "Sight instead of faith"; and the summary of their creed was stated to be that Spiritualism was a religion which made each man responsible for his own life, and left him to work out his own salvation, with no need for salvation by Jesus "or any other saint." In other words, this statement of the spiritualist creed finds no place for belief in our Lord as God, or for any need of a Saviour.

We shall do well to remember the warning given by S. John: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of

antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”<sup>1</sup> The test of the spirits lies in their witness to the Incarnation. Is Jesus Christ merely man, or is He the very and eternal God? Under this test Spiritualism definitely fails. Dr. Abraham Wallace, in an address delivered to the Members and Associates of the London Spiritualist Alliance on December 3rd, 1904, taking as his subject “Jesus of Nazareth, a modern scientific investigation from the spiritualist standpoint,” says: “Nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels, so far as I know, did Jesus affirm that he was God, or was equal to God.” A statement which many passages in the Synoptic Gospels show to be quite untrue?<sup>2</sup> And further on he says: “No doubt in the post-Apostolic time the man Jesus merged into the mythical Jesus Christ, and most of the dates and symbols of solar myths were incorporated with the history of the individual” — words which one shrinks from even quoting. And this is not an isolated statement; it is the religious (?) position on which the so-called spiritualist Church is based. When spiritualists

<sup>1</sup> 1 S. John iv. 1-3.      <sup>2</sup> S. Matt. xvi. 16, 17; xxvi. 63-65; S. Mark xiv. 61, 62.

speak of our Lord, they speak of Him as nothing more than the greatest example of psychic power. S. John's words have indeed a living significance in these days.

### THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The real answer to that natural and right yearning for fellowship with those we love who have passed into the unseen is to be found in the Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints. The present recrudescence of Spiritualism is the nemesis which has come upon us for neglecting to teach and to believe in this blessed truth. The Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints affords all, and much more than all, that Spiritualism claims to give. It is a glorious and blessed reality in which we can rejoice and participate without a shadow of doubt or the least fear of danger ; for it is a communion — a fellowship — secured, not through mediums or controls or tables, but in Christ our Lord. It is a fellowship in which love and memory and prayer create a bond the more real and close because it is based, not on external means, but on spiritual union—a foretaste and

preparation for complete and perfect union in the life to come.

“The whole course of our true progress in life,” wrote the late Dr. Illingworth, “consists in advancing from material to spiritual things; in learning that man does not live by bread alone; . . . and in the course of this progress we come increasingly to see that spiritual reality is only attained by the sacrifice of the material side of things, i.e. bodily indulgence, visible manifestation, material expression of every kind. Now death is the climax of this process. Its whole point, so to say, is to withdraw us from the last lingering elements of material to wholly spiritual union; to teach us that our true union with those we love best can only be really reached by a common life in God.

“Consequently the attempt to counterwork this process and to re-establish that material communication which God has broken, *precisely in order to spiritualize it*, is wholly irreligious. It is called Spiritualism, but it is, in fact, materialism—an attempt to return to what S. Paul calls ‘carnal’; and keeps us back, if anything, from that attempt to secure true union

with our beloved dead by really spiritual means, i.e. by a completer life in God.”<sup>1</sup>

---

NOTE.—Those who wish to learn the meaning of the Communion of Saints cannot do better than read *The Gospel of the Hereafter*, by Dr. Paterson Smyth ; 2s. 6d. This book is recommended by Sir Oliver Lodge. There is a smaller book, *The Communion of Saints*, by Dr. Percy Dearmer, published by Mowbray & Co., price 4d.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of J. R. Illingworth*, p. 249.