

# SPIRITUALISM

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## AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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## SPIRITUALISM AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

§ 1. SPIRITUALISM, or Spiritism, is the term now commonly applied to a set of beliefs and practices which can be traced back to the dawn of written history and still show no inconsiderable vitality. The fundamental beliefs are two in number: that "spirits" exist, and that men can, by the aid of certain agents or processes, communicate with them. The practices consist of efforts to make such communications. In antiquity it was generally hoped by such means to gain either knowledge of the future or powers (usually to be used for evil ends) which should transcend the normal. In quite modern times the desire is rather to be assured that those whom we have known have survived bodily death, to discover that they are happy, and to be certain that they continue to be interested in our welfare. "Psychical Research" is an attempt to examine the phenomena of spiritualism by the methods of experiment, observation, and deduction which have been enormously successful in modern physical and biological science. It tries by careful and

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exact enquiry to ascertain whether the vague but persistent spiritualistic beliefs of humanity are illusions. It classifies the occurrences which seem to confirm these beliefs, and analyses the credibility of the witnesses who report them. It tries to frame a theory of the nature of "spirits," and to test the theory by fitting it to such facts as seem to be established by well-attested evidence. It examines the proofs given to substantiate their claim by those who assert that they can communicate with spirits. Whatever be our view of the conclusions to which those who have adopted such methods may have been led, there is no doubt that their methods are sound. Only by patient and accurate investigation can men discover whether there is an element of truth in the beliefs on which spiritualism rests, and what exactly that element is.

§ 2. Before we can profitably discuss the experimental evidence afforded by psychical research we must consider related theories as to the nature of the Universe to which other chains of reasoning lead us. The phenomena of spiritualism are still obscure: they are open to diverse explanations between which we have to make a choice. In that choice we shall do well to select such explanations as do not force us to abandon theories as to the nature of man and of spiritual reality which reason and revelation alike have led us to accept. Now

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Christianity has a definite philosophy of the nature of the Universe founded upon the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. His teaching, supremely wise and profoundly important though we affirm it to have been, was in certain respects incomplete. It was sufficient for man's moral needs: it has been of supreme value in awakening and directing man's spiritual insight. But it did not answer all the intellectual enquiries which man as he advances in understanding is led to ask. In fact, it could not do so. Many of the problems which perplex us would have been incomprehensible to those who listened to Christ. The answers to them it would have been useless for Him to give. Christ had to speak their language, to use their forms of thought. He showed amazing genius in the way in which, though thus hampered, He made clear to His listeners His view of the moral government of the Universe, and of man's consequent duty and hopes. But He clearly contemplated that men in future ages would build upon His teaching, using it as the foundation of an ever-growing structure of metaphysical knowledge. The doctrine of the Holy Ghost, Who, as He perfects the work of Christ, leads men into all truth, is an affirmation that God will guide the thoughts of men as they seek to know more of the Universe in which they are placed and that ultimately such guidance will perfect their understanding.

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But the doctrine is misconceived if it is assumed that any particular theory, which at a definite moment is accepted by substantially all Christ's followers, is therefore true. As the truth is slowly unfolded under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the faith of the Christian is a synthesis of his growing knowledge and of Christ's revelation. Particular dogmas which result from the synthesis may be wrong: new evidence and more accurate thought may make it clear that the form in which men had cast their knowledge was imperfect or that conclusions to which they had been led were erroneous. So a new synthesis contradicting some aspects of the old will be made as progressive insight is won. I should not think it necessary to remind you of the nature of the progress towards truth which takes place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were it not that in connexion with demonology we can trace in successive ages alternations of belief and disbelief on the part of practically the whole Christian community. Our own attitude to intercourse with "spirits" must be determined, not by the authority of great teachers of the thirteenth or any other century, but by our examination in the light of the best secular knowledge of our time of the revelation of spiritual truth given by Christ.

§ 3. Christ, according to the account given in the Synoptic Gospels, placed primary stress on the moral duty of man, and He laid down

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ethical principles of supreme beauty and value. Much of His teaching seemed—still seems—impracticable, if not foolish, in the world as we know it. Our Lord justified it by explaining how the Universe is governed and by asserting that individual human life does not end with the grave. His explanation of the nature of spiritual reality was but partial: the way in which we complete it will determine our attitude to demonology. His doctrine of human immortality, though often rejected, is confirmed by arguments which seem to me conclusive. But of the conditions under which men exist in the world to come we have little certain knowledge: and though we as Christians unhesitatingly believe in the survival of human personality after death, it does not follow that we can have such communication with departed friends as modern spiritualists allege. We will then briefly review the teaching of Christ, first with regard to the spiritual government of the Universe, and secondly with regard to human immortality. At the end of our survey we shall be in a position to discuss the nature of spiritualistic phenomena.

§ 4. Jesus affirmed, and we believe, that the Universe was created by a single Mind, Whom we call God. That Mind had in creation, He said, a definite purpose, and the purpose was good. God is best thought of as our Father, for He is perfect truth and perfect love. There

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are of course other theories or modifications of Christ's authoritative revelation which metaphysicians have suggested to explain our origin and that of the world in which we are placed: we reject them because they lead to dilemmas even more unsatisfactory than that involved in Christ's teaching. The dilemma consequent on Christ's view of the origin of the Universe is the famous and insoluble Problem of Evil: "If the world was created by a good God, how came evil to exist and what is its nature?" To the first part of the question no satisfactory answer has ever been given. Naturally, therefore, answers to the second part are diverse and unsatisfactory. We must ask the nature of the good spiritual Being Whom we call God and of His mode of action before we can profitably enquire whether evil spiritual beings, demons or devils, exist.

§ 5. Now we can only think of God in terms of ourselves. Our imagination is limited by what we know, or can deduce from what we know. For the purposes of our thought, we are bound to make God in our own image. We therefore begin by an analysis of the most valuable qualities and powers that we can observe in mankind. We know that we are minds: we have thought, will, and feeling: these attributes involve self-consciousness, memory, and purpose. We assume that God, as He must be at least equal to the best of His

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creatures, has these attributes in perfection ; and thus conceive of Him as a perfect personality. But though we thus think of Him in terms of the highest perfection to which man can possibly attain, we have to postulate one fundamental difference. If He is the creator of all things, matter, whatever it may be, must be the result of His creation. He must therefore have existed prior to matter, and must Himself be non-material. We think, then, of God as a non-material Personality Whose purpose is supremely good. Is there similarly a non-material personality whose purpose is purely evil ? Does the Devil exist ?

§ 6. Undoubtedly those whom Christ taught believed implicitly in the existence of a personal Devil ; undoubtedly the Lord Himself used language to them which confirmed their belief. It may be argued that He could not have spoken to them of evil without using such language, and that we may therefore regard it as metaphorical. I cannot accept this view. The idea that evil is merely something negative seems to me contradicted by our experience. Evil is positive and active. It is impossible to imagine it to be merely due to some flaw in the machinery of the Universe. I believe it to be a spiritual disease, and observation forces me to conclude that diseased spirits exist. God, in creating finite beings with free will such as ourselves, permitted us to become evil ; so far as

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we can see, He thereby allowed personalities to exist which could become wholly evil. But we cannot safely argue from this that there is a more or less equally balanced dualism in the Universe, in which God and the good personalities whom He has created are opposed by the Devil and an army of demons. A perfectly evil human society is unthinkable : it would be self-destructive. We therefore deny that any society of absolutely evil spirits could be permanent. Evil, in short, cannot be a unifying spiritual principle : to put it colloquially, there must be some good in the Devil or he must ultimately destroy himself. It is certain that the Devil cannot be the creative source of evil in the same way that God is the creative source of good. But "black magic" and the like rest upon a denial of this certainty. Those who have practised such arts have believed that, just as through Sacrament men can appropriate to themselves the creative power for good that comes from God, so through its inversion they can appropriate a supernatural strength which will aid them in evil designs. I hold that such a belief is philosophically unsound. Human experience has pronounced "black magic" a delusion. Its practice is criminal folly : criminal because its objective is evil, folly because the means employed are futile.

§ 7. At the basis of the argument just used to justify belief in the existence of evil spirits,

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there has been the assumption that men are finite spirits. They are, that is to say, not only animals with a brief terrestrial existence, but in them is an element which comes from, and belongs to, the spiritual world. This world we postulate to be the world of eternal reality, of God; and we assume that in it whatever is of God, the things that are good, beautiful, and true, will exist for ever with Him. We have, then, to justify our belief that, because such God-like qualities exist in human personality, that personality will survive the destruction of the body.

As we try to do so, let us first examine the physical origin of man. We naturally begin by asking "What is life?" and we have to confess that we do not know. So far as modern science enables us to trace the method of God's creation, we learn that the solar system began as a nebula, formed of gaseous matter. This nebula gradually condensed and became a number of planets, whirling round a central sun. The earth, which was one of these planets, cooled, and at a certain stage in the process elementary forms of life appeared. This happened roughly about a hundred million years ago.\* These forms of life showed a capacity to develop. As they did so, they

\* Such time estimates are, of course, very doubtful. It is possible that they should be multiplied or divided by as large a number as 5.

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became ever more complex, until finally, about one million years ago,\* man was produced as the result of a process of evolution. Life, as we know it, is some organising, regulative principle which gives unity to a group of material molecules. But I am unaware of any satisfactory definition which differentiates elementary forms of living matter from such behaviour of non-living matter as takes place, for example, when crystals are formed. All that we can say is that some regulative principle appeared on earth when life began. It is associated with continuous changes in the matter which it regulates. It seems to be, not some property inherent in matter but an external something capable of using matter. It selects particular types of material substance useful to itself and is dependent upon the energy resulting from chemical change in the substance thus selected. Each living organism is normally able to produce others like to itself, but along with this capacity goes the fact that the offspring may vary from the parent. The variations may be small or relatively large: some of them may be stable—that is to say, they will persist in succeeding generations. By the integration of such variations, man has been produced from the most elementary forms of life.

§ 8. What, then, is man? Is he of no more value than the primitive organisms from which

\* See note, p. 13.

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he has sprung? Is he, in no essential way, different from them? To the two latter questions our answer is of course unhesitating. The personalities of different types of men differ enormously, but the personality even of the lowest existing savage is different in kind from anything that we can describe as personality in the higher vertebrates. Just as a new factor entered when the regulative life-principle appeared amid the dead matter of the cooling earth, so another new factor showed itself when man appeared with a rudimentary knowledge of good and evil. We see in man three elements: the material body, the life-principle, and the element of human personality. The last has only slowly reached its present complexity and is still far from the power and perfection that we can imagine it will some day possess. In lower forms of life we can trace its beginnings. God has worked slowly. Thought, memory, will, purpose, all can be seen in what we term the instincts of insects and vertebrates; but we cannot refuse to admit that man has a value peculiar to himself, in that, so far as we can see, he alone among living animals consciously strives for goodness, beauty, and truth. When an animal dies in old age we feel that a natural and complete end has come: it has fulfilled its purpose if it has handed on its life to offspring so that the species is thereby maintained. An animal, in fact, is but a means to an end: man,

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on the contrary, we know by our own deepest experience to be an end in himself. The whole course of evolution appears to have had as its ultimate purpose the creation of man, himself an animal, but an animal in which a something akin to God has come to exist.

§ 9. You may enquire why different species of animals should have been developed with amazing prodigality during millions of years, though many of them, so far as we can see, have been of no service in leading up to the evolution of man. We cannot answer the question. The apparent waste that we observe in nature is as inexplicable as, and often indeed seems a part of, the problem of evil. Why God worked as He has, in the slow process which has led to the making of man, we cannot understand. We must accept the fact and its result. We do not accept the result unless we recognise that man is not merely an animal but a finite spirit. He has spiritual powers and qualities and a potentiality for apparently unlimited spiritual development. Because of this fact he partakes of the nature of God ; and, as I hope shortly to show, the spirit within him is potentially immortal. We need not be afraid of the thought that in the process of evolution a non-spiritual animal, with a consciousness that vanished with bodily death, has developed a personality that is both spiritual and immortal. The beginning of the change eludes our under-

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standing. Like the beginning of time, or matter, or the solar system, or terrestrial life, it is obscure. But we must not minimise the difference that actually exists between men and the highest vertebrates because of our perplexity as to its origin. Man is what he is because a spiritual element has entered into, and taken possession of, animal consciousness. This spiritual element is not, according to Christian teaching, divine : but it is capable of entering into relations with God. It can perceive Him : in thought, it can reason as to His nature and actions : in will and feeling, it can serve and love Him, or disobey and fear Him. Such activity shows itself in what we call the working of conscience. We know that as men develop from savagery to civilisation the claims of conscience become ever more majestic and authoritative : it increasingly dominates men's lives.

§ 10. Let us now enquire what reason we have for our belief that death does not extinguish the spiritual element in humanity. Why do we contend that man's personality will survive the death of his body ? The Christian who believes that Jesus of Nazareth was the unique Son of God concludes therefrom that His moral and spiritual teaching was perfect truth and is satisfied by the fact that He taught that we are immortal. Trustworthy records tell us that Jesus promised that, after He was put to death, He would show His disciples that

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He was still alive. We cannot explain the early history of the Christian Church unless we admit that He fulfilled His promise. We have, therefore, good reason to hold that He was right when He taught men to regard this life as the preparation for another that shall come after death. We go further and accept His oft-repeated assertion that men after death will enjoy or suffer the consequences of the good or evil which they have done on earth.

§ 11. But revelation can be supplemented by reason. Christ Himself gave reasons for His belief, and put in modern form these reasons are, to my mind, conclusive. You remember the passage in the earliest Gospel: "But as touching the dead, that they are raised; have ye not read in the book of Moses, in the place concerning the bush, how God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living: ye do greatly err" (Mark xii. 26, R.V.). Herein, in a form adapted to Jewish thought, is "the one great argument which has made most sincere believers in God believers in Immortality also."\* God, so far as we can see, made man for fellowship with Himself. The best men are passionately eager to know and serve God: we cannot

\* H. Rashdall: "Doctrine and Development," p. 177. Methuen, 1898.



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allow that those who have succeeded in their quest have perished. This fundamental argument is enforced by others which, though really variants of it, it is well briefly to state :

(a) If God is good He must be just, yet in the world as we know it the wicked often flourish through their wickedness, the good sometimes suffer because of their goodness. We can only think that God is just if life on earth is but a fragment of the total life that each man lives and if in the future right is vindicated.

(b) Our moral consciousness leads us to make a constant fight against evil: the fight is never wholly won before death intervenes. Yet the struggle is incomplete till victory is attained: to complete it by victory we need the life to come.

(c) Man thirsts for knowledge: through its increase comes human progress. But if all the knowledge of truth, which a man has laboriously gained and has been unable to give to others, perishes at his death, we remain perplexed that God should sanction such spiritual waste.

§ 12. The question of human immortality is so important and the character of the ideas which support it shows so clearly the inadequacy of most so-called communications from the dead such as we find in spiritualist literature that I may be pardoned for repeating the

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foregoing argument in other words : God would stultify Himself if life for us men were to end with death. There would be no sense in the divine scheme of things if a man, in obedience to his best instincts, were to fight and suffer for what is right and were then simply to be blotted out. There would be no justice if the gross inequalities of different men were to remain eternally unredressed. On such assumptions the universe would be irrational. God would be capricious and inconsequent. He would have made men to be the victims of their own virtues ; and humanity, destined one day to vanish from the earth as the heat of the sun gradually decays, would have been mere sport of freakish caprice. On such a theory every good man who suffers through his goodness is a reproach to God ; all that is selfless in men condemns Him. The saints of the earth cannot sing "God is love" if His justice is a mockery and their pursuit of righteousness a temporal vanity.

And, too, if there be a God who can raise men to communion with Himself, He cannot allow such men to perish as though they had never been. The sense of Divine Fellowship is in itself a promise of personal immortality. God cannot permit those who painfully have sought and found Him to vanish utterly from His universe. All that is good, true, or beautiful

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must be immortal with God ; and, so far as we gain or possess such qualities, we too must be likewise immortal.\*

§ 13. Such arguments are, for me, conclusive for belief in what we can best describe as the resurrection of a spiritual body. The mere survival of some spiritual element in man would not suffice to make the Universe rational. Man's *complete personality* must, as St. Paul taught, outlast the destruction of his body. Such a faith is alone adequate to explain the world in which we live, and the God Whom we believe to have made it. When in popular language we say that the soul is immortal, we use the word "soul" to denote the whole complex of mental, moral, and spiritual elements which death does not destroy. (This of course is not the sense in which the word is used in the New Testament in such phrases as "body, soul and spirit.") The soul, as we use the term, retains all the essential characteristics of the man whom it survives : it has his thought, will, and feeling : it must remember, or be able to recall, all the deeds of his earthly life, for it is responsible for the good and evil which he has done. It has capacity for joy and suffering : it can

\* A fuller and singularly clear discussion of the moral argument for immortality will be found in Chapter II. of "Christianity and Immortality," by Vernon F. Storr. Longmans, Green and Co., 1918.

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continue the moral struggle begun on earth : it can progress in knowledge of truth : it can know God.

§ 14. What will be the conditions of the life of the soul in its existence after death ? Naturally, all who believe in human immortality are eager to discover the nature of life in the world to come. Inevitably, such eagerness has led men to frame speculative theories. These must be tested in one of three ways. We, who are Christians, naturally attach profound importance to Christ's teaching on the subject ; and, in so far as the record of that teaching has not been confused by the views and hopes of His followers, we shall regard the information which comes from Him as entirely trustworthy and supremely important. We may also try to deduce from the arguments which lead us to accept the fact of the post-mortem survival of human personality theories as to the nature of the life to come, correlating them to Christ's teaching. Alternatively, there is the method of experiment. We may attempt to analyse the nature of human personality—to see how the soul, in its terrestrial existence, is affected by external spiritual forces and in connection therewith to investigate cases in which it is alleged that living men and women have had communications from beyond the grave. We try to combine into a single

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unity the evidence afforded by revelation, by reason, and by experiment. It will be convenient to take together the first two of these three types of enquiry, and to relate the few relevant dicta of our Lord to the conclusions to which speculative argument seems to point.

§ 15. Christ said little that has survived to indicate the nature of life after death. He was concerned mainly with its moral and religious significance. He spoke freely of ultimate punishment and reward: to Him we owe the picture of the Last Judgment. Because such matters have no direct bearing on the question of spiritualism, I pass them by. But our Lord did say definitely that when men "shall rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mark xii. 25). There is no doubt that this saying is authentic: it is a part of the teaching to the Sadducees wherein occurs the great argument for human immortality that we have already studied and it has an importance which must not be overlooked. On earth men have the animal's power of reproducing the species, of creating, that is to say, personalities like to themselves. This power, according to our Lord's teaching, they will no longer possess after death. Against such teaching no plausible objection can be brought forward. It is congruous with all our instincts as to the future state; and at once suggests the enquiry

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as to whether the soul will in the future as in the present be associated with some form of matter which provides for it a body. Will it continue to depend for its existence upon chemical changes consequent on the assimilation of food without which life as we know it on earth is impossible? Christ did not answer these questions; but St. Paul, His greatest follower, stated definitely that the soul will, in the future state, possess a "spiritual body." I have previously suggested that in using this phrase the Apostle meant to insist that not merely will some spiritual essence in man survive, but that our complete personality must continue to exist. The "spiritual body" would thus be the soul which still bears within itself earthly memories and hopes: it is at the beginning of the future life stained by sin, beautified by love, and responsible for the deeds and thoughts of earthly existence. Such is certainly the essential idea in St. Paul's use of the term "spiritual body." But their interpretation of his teaching has made the majority of Christian theologians contend that the spiritual body will be formed of matter. It is impossible to deny that, when he wrote his earlier Epistles, the Apostle may have associated this idea with a belief in the immediacy of the Second Advent. But, as he said that "flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. xv. 50) in connexion with the "change" whereby "this



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mortal shall have put on immortality," it is open to us to argue that it is dangerous to press too far his use of religious metaphor.\*

§ 16. The clause in the Apostles' Creed which affirms human immortality, when accurately translated, expresses belief in "the resurrection of the flesh" (*resurrectio carnis*); and there seems to be little doubt that those who framed the Creed believed that the material particles which had composed our bodies would be united again in a general resurrection to form a habitat for the soul. As is well known, the Apostles' Creed is of Latin origin, while what we call the Nicene Creed arose in the East under the influence of Hellenic thought. The corresponding clause of the latter Creed affirms the "resurrection of the dead" (*ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν*); and in the words we seem to see a more cautious pronouncement which was content to affirm the fact of human immortality without prescribing its mode. We know to-day that the same particles of matter can in turn form part of innumerable bodies and no one would now contend that the body which is ours at the moment of death will be ours in the future life. But most Christian theologians have held, and probably still hold, that in the

\* An elaborate attempt to trace the development of St. Paul's thought will be found in the article "Eschatology" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. Many of the conclusions at which the author arrives would, however, not be accepted by other scholars.

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future state our souls will need a material body as a vehicle for self-expression. A majority imagine that such matter will be rarefied\* : some describe the post-mortem body as made of sublimated matter.†

§ 17. Though no arguments can be conclusive, it seems highly probable that such theories are unsound. It is true that we have no knowledge of life apart from matter ; but we do not assert that God needs matter for His own self-expression, and our own souls after death may in this respect be like to Him. Moreover, life, as we know it, in its association with matter, cannot continue without food. The argument for the existence after death of a material body would seem to point to the need of material food. Further, the material body associated with all life as we know it grows old : none, I imagine, will contend that growth and decay will characterise our bodies in the life to come. The cessation of the processes of reproduction for which we have Christ's authority and the cessation of the process of physical decay, which we observe in all terrestrial life, both seem to

\* In his essay in "Immortality" (Macmillan, 1917), p. 104, Canon Streeter supposes that the spiritual body will be material, but "normally invisible and impalpable to earthly senses."

† So Dr. Gore, Bishop of Oxford, in his manual, "The Religion of the Church" (Mowbray, 1916), p. 83, where the spiritual body is described as "still material, but sublimated in such sense that its matter is no longer the restraining and hampering medium that we now know."



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negative the suggestion that the soul in a future state will possess a material, or quasi-material, body. There is nothing to support the view in Christ's teaching, and as I have suggested, such language of St. Paul as seems to lend colour to it can naturally be explained as religious metaphor. Thus I am inclined to believe that any analogies between future and present existence are delusive if they depend upon the idea that the future life is conditioned by matter.

§ 18. It may be objected that our Lord after His Resurrection had a material Body. But those who claim that His existence between His Resurrection and His Ascension is typical of the existence which will be ours after death seem to me to minimise the miracle of the Resurrection. To convince His disciples that He was alive Christ had to use miraculous methods that revealed Him to their physical senses. Those of us who hold that He was God Incarnate before His Death, and God Discarnate afterwards, have no difficulty in believing that His control of matter was absolute, and that He could, at will, create it to be a physical embodiment when He showed Himself to St. Thomas, or disperse it when He disappeared, the doors being shut. Such use of matter was necessary, not for His continued life but that He might conclusively reveal His Presence. Few, however, will argue that after death we shall have such powers as belong, by

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His very Nature, to the Creator of the Universe  
All parallels between Christ's Resurrection-life  
on earth and our own future state seem to me  
to result from a perilous confusion between the  
normal and the miraculous.

§ 19. If it be true that our future life is not associated with matter, it is probably not a life in space : a non-material existence is, I imagine, non-spatial. We shall be, as regards position, as free as thought itself. We must, of course, develop non-physical powers of perception and receptivity, for we cannot imagine that we shall be without intercourse with other finite spirits in the life to come. This idea presents no difficulty to those who hold that mind is ultimate reality. It is probable that, at present, the surest type of human perception is independent of the physical senses. The instinct, by which we judge people otherwise than by what we see of them or by what they say, points to a process by which the soul recognises kindred or alien qualities in other souls by powers that are spiritual and not material. Telepathy seems to indicate that in some cases, which are not perhaps so rare as we think, thought can be communicated without using physical means. Not merely emotional antipathies or sympathies but definite information can be thus conveyed. If in the future life these powers are immensely developed by the release of the soul from the body, that life will have the potential richness

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which is conveyed by the idea of the Communion of Saints. We shall know even as we are known.

§ 20. The views which I have thus adumbrated are obviously of great importance in connexion with modern spiritualistic beliefs. If in the future state we have material bodies, however rarefied, the spirits of the departed will have a definite spatial existence. By the refinement of physics we can to some extent detect the presence, and even the nature, of matter in the depths of space. There would thus seem to be no reason why we should not hope to be able by physical methods to perceive any materially embodied spirits existing near to us. Further, we should not regard spirit-photographs as necessarily fraudulent, nor apparitions as subjective, the result of the visualising of his thought by him who sees them. If, however, we hold that human souls have a non-material existence after death, we shall expect that communications from them, if they are possible, will be direct influences on our consciousness, independent of any physical mechanism. Moreover, any such communications which individuals assert that they have received we shall regard as illusions, if they suggest that the future life has a physical basis.

§ 21. Before we proceed to discuss the reality of such alleged communications let us consider the future life in connexion with time.

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I have suggested that the life to come will not be in space : will it be in time ? Here Christ's teaching seems to be conclusive and to be confirmed by our deductions from the arguments which lead us to believe in human immortality. However we regard the Last Judgment, we must think of it as a time-process ; and traditional Christian theology would seem to be right in postulating an "intermediate state" or period during which our souls are purified of the evil within them. In admitting so much we need not accept the medieval doctrine of purgatory, with its theory of penal suffering following upon judgment already pronounced. Judgment will rather be viewed as continuous, as determined by the struggle for or against God made by the individual will. The inherently destructive nature of evil will corrode and finally destroy the rebellious spirit ; while he who in the future life seeks to do the will of God will find salvation through struggle aided by Christ.

§ 22. Such views seem a reasonable deduction from what, in the present life, we observe as to the nature of the laws of the spiritual world, and there is no reason to think that these laws are altered when we die. But it is remarkable that the idea of gradual purification after death does not occur explicitly in recorded statements of our Lord. In the Synoptists, judgment is placed at the begin-

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ning of the life to come : it is decisive, and its consequences seem to be immediate. It is true the teaching of our Lord as given in the first three Gospels is picturesque rather than formal, and that therefore we may err if we try to deduce from it more than that good and evil done on earth have profoundly serious effects in the life to come. But in the Fourth Gospel we find that the time-process in the next world is utterly ignored. Whatever view we may hold as to the actual authorship of this Gospel we must claim that the substance of its teaching is due to the Beloved Disciple. In it we have most certainly a supremely illuminating record of St. John's exact knowledge and careful interpretation of the innermost thought of Christ. The Gospel is essentially the Gospel of Eternal Life, as its author emphasises in the sentences with which the book ended before the present last chapter was added as a sort of appendix. Now Eternal Life is not the indefinite prolongation of life in time : it was not so regarded by St. John, and we shall be wrong thus to conceive it. It is life with God and in God. God is not in time : time is in Him. And the soul that has won eternal life will possess God's "simultaneity," to use von Hügel's expressive word.\* The fugitive experiences

\* F. von Hügel, "Eternal Life" (T. and T. Clark, 1912), p. 64 and elsewhere. Baron von Hügel's profound study has rapidly taken rank as a classic. Because of the way in which

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of spiritual peace which we get on earth are suggestions of Eternal Life thus conceived. As we try to describe it we fail. Because it is devoid of the tension which we associate with living, it seems negative. Owing to this some have found the Fourth Gospel "thin."\* The author, as though conscious that the objection had been, and would be, raised, quotes as words of our Lord: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John x. 10). The life in God, though outside time, will not be negative. It will have the richness of perfect intercourse with Him. It will have broken the barriers that separate finite spirits from one another. Love will have produced a perfect harmony. All will be in Christ, and Christ will be in all. Thought, will, and feeling will cease to be combative. The contrasts by which we distinguish different personalities will vanish as the personalities attain perfection. Yet the result will not be emptying of personality, but the infinite enrichment of all that is valuable in it. So the spirit will return to Him who gave it, finding the rest and joy which are the final objects of all spiritual struggle.

§ 23. Ideas such as these are difficult to

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it combines learned and penetrative insight with deeply religious feeling, it can hardly be overpraised.

\* Cf. von Hügel, *loc. cit.*, p. 80, "This great work's apparent thinness and abstractness."



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apprehend and it is impossible to convey them except by imagery almost meaningless to those who do not share that which, for want of a better name, we call the mystical consciousness. For this reason, such ideas find little place in popular thought regarding the future life. But they are the very essence of Christian teaching with regard to the final state of the soul. They dominate the Fourth Gospel and are increasingly important in the later Pauline Epistles, where, no doubt as the result of a better appreciation of the true inwardness of Christ's teaching, the Apostle saw that they must replace the vivid but less spiritual pictures of the Second Advent that characterised his earlier thought. They are of outstanding importance in connexion with the communications which mediums and others assert that they have received from the dead. Practically all such communications give no hint that Eternal Life is the crowning glory of the future state. Almost invariably they reflect the commonplace thoughts of commonplace minds. They are quantitative, not qualitative; they confuse eternal values and temporal facts. Shall we be wrong if we necessarily conclude that they are earthborn, dreams or fancies of the living men and women through whom they come?

§ 24. So far we have considered such elements of Christian thought as have a direct connexion with the beliefs and practices of modern

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spiritualism. We have now to consider what we can learn from the scientific examination of the phenomena termed spiritualistic. Is there any good reason to believe that psychical research has demonstrated that the dead communicate with the living?

At the outset it should be remembered that a belief in necromancy is as old as written history. Yet, in spite of the persistence of the belief, evidence that conclusively shows the possibility of spirit communications is practically non-existent. Its absence constitutes a strong presumption that such communications do not occur. As Dr. Inge,\* the Dean of St. Paul's, has said: "If communications between the dead and the living were part of the nature of things, they would have been established long ago beyond cavil." It is certainly possible and indeed probable that the influence of those who have loved us continues after their death to be with us, though the parable of Dives and Lazarus may be deemed to negative even this belief. God is the supreme link of the Universe, and it may be that all communications between the dead and the living are conveyed through Him. If this be so, the dead will influence us through their prayers to Him; and we, if we

\* In his article on "Survival and Immortality," *Hibbert Journal*, July, 1917. Though most readers will probably find this brilliant essay difficult, it merits and will repay the most careful study. I know no more incisive philosophical discussion of the subject.



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believe that they are still struggling towards final perfection, may aid them by our prayers to God. Even if the spiritual influence upon us of lost friends is direct, it is probable that we perceive it vaguely. It is almost certainly a diffused atmosphere, such as that with which the Holy Spirit surrounds us when we try to know, serve, and love God. We may expect to experience it in its power to guide will and feeling rather than to convey specific ideas.

§ 25. Modern spiritualism asserts much more than this : it claims that by suitable channels of intercourse finite spirits in the other world can convey definite thoughts to the living. In the later Middle Ages fantastic and horrible credulity reared on precisely this basis the theory of demonology. About the year A.D. 900 the Ancyra "Canon Episcopi" "commanded bishops to denounce energetically as pure illusions the possibility of demoniacal magic and of nightly expeditions to hold communications with demons."\* But later the official attitude of the Church changed. The great influence of St. Thomas Aquinas encouraged the belief, not only that demons exist, but that they can do material harm to men. He contended, for instance, that they could pro-

\* Edmund McClure, "Spiritualism" (S.P.C.K., 1916), p. 7. This pamphlet, which contains much valuable and well-chosen historical matter, must be highly commended for its sobriety of judgment.

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duce hurricanes and hinder the fruitfulness of marriage. Down to Wesley\* influential Christian teachers in all branches of the Church held similar beliefs. We have seen that there is no reason to reject the idea that finite evil spirits exist. Such will be the spirits of men whose will has been turned persistently towards evil, both before and after bodily death. The influence of such spirits, so far as it extends, will be evil. But it does not follow that we must accept the fundamental assumption of demonology. The conclusion of the modern educated world is surely right in regarding as mere superstition the beliefs that such spirits can communicate their thoughts to us; that they can give us præterhuman knowledge of the past and the future, and supernatural help to accomplish evil aims. The assumption is really the same as, though the claims are more extravagant than, those made by modern spiritualists. The further beliefs that demons could materialise themselves, so that they could be seen and so that their activity could be physically manifested, find parallels in some modern spiritualist contentions.

§ 26. The unity between the ideas underlying demonology and spiritualism has, during the last generation, been generally recognised by

\* The curious reader will find in *Wesley's Journal* for 1768 a passage wherein occurs the statement "giving up witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible."

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Christian teachers. Few, however, draw the conclusion that because a belief in demonology has, since the middle of the eighteenth century, been generally rejected by educated men, the new cult must be deemed to be based upon an equally false conception of the nature of the spiritual Universe. It is not uncommon to hear in Christian pulpits an admission that the medium can receive communications from another world, and to find this admission coupled with the suggestion that these communications are sent by evil spirits. Such teaching attempts to combat spiritualism by a revived belief in demonology. Those who give it hope that their denunciations of what should be described as a degrading illusion will preserve those whom they teach from practices which they condemn. I would earnestly protest against such teaching. Many associations of spiritualism are morbid and dangerous ; but, if it be a superstition, it is a less harmful outcome of human credulity than was demonology. If it is admitted that men can directly communicate with spirits, they will try to do so, however strong the warnings and prohibitions addressed to them. If they are allowed to think that "black magic" can help them to use to their own advantage extraordinary powers, the fear of moral ruin will not prevent some from making the attempt. If a belief in the reality of demon-aid again captures the minds of men, Europe

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will slip back into the morass of cruelty, suspicion, and filth from which it finally emerged less than two centuries ago. Before Christian clergy commit themselves to a belief in the reality of demonology, I would beg them to investigate the consequences of such credulity in the later Middle Ages. Let them study the painful degradation of human thought shown in the charges brought against the Knights Templars at their dissolution; in the so-called evidence at notorious witchcraft trials; and in the horribly filthy stories indicated by such Latin words as *incubi* and *incubones*.<sup>\*</sup> Let them consider whether, the initial assumption once conceded, they can assign any reason why the whole mass of deplorable superstition should not again be reared upon it.

§ 27. The true way to approach spiritualism is not to admit its fundamental claim that communication with "spirits" can be set up and then to assert that the "spirits" with whom intercourse is established are evil. We must plead that trained observers shall investigate the phenomena on which the claim is based. Amid the varying explanations which reflection upon what they observe leads them to suggest, we must choose as the most

<sup>\*</sup> Lecky, in the first chapter of his "History of Rationalism in Europe," gives what is probably the best account in the English language of the way in which demonology and allied beliefs corrupted European thought between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries.

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probable that which best accords with the Christian outlook on the Universe. Investigations must be left to observers selected because of their special ability, and trained for the purpose—that is to say, to expert psychologists. The physicist studies matter in motion ; the biologist the physical consequences of life ; the psychologist investigates mental states. Psychology is thus, by its very nature, a more difficult science than physics or biology, for in it man tries to use the mind to analyse itself. Practically all spiritualistic phenomena belong to the region of mental experience, and our explanation of them is the attempt to determine the kind of reality which lies behind the experience. Such things as “ghost photographs” are an exception : they must be material in their origin ; the theory that they are due to the materialisation of spirits is now generally discredited.

The main phenomena on which spiritualists base their faith will only be understood when we know more of the nature of human consciousness. What is the relation of will to thought ? What evidence as to the structure of human personality is afforded by dreams, sleep-walking, hypnotism, or hysteria ? What is the range of telepathy ? How can we account for apparently well-established cases of dual or multiple personality ? How can we explain unconscious cerebration, the process

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by which a forgotten fact is recalled to memory when the will has failed to recover the knowledge? How can fixed delusions be explained? What causes insanity? One has but to enumerate this list of questions to indicate how profound is our ignorance of the nature of consciousness and how rash it is to assume, from one particular class of imperfectly understood phenomena, that certain persons possess the power of spirit intercourse. It is foolish to doubt the existence of any surprising but well-authenticated mental phenomena; but we shall be wise to suspend judgment as to the truth of the explanations given of them, until experts arrive at some general agreement.

§ 28. Let us consider in the first place the fact of hysteria. It is a definite mental disease for which no material origin can be found, though it has well-marked physical consequences. It is a disease of consciousness, sometimes apparently infectious in character, for epidemics have attacked whole villages. It often can be alleviated or cured by the influence of strong and benign personalities. In Palestine, during the lifetime of Christ, the disease was apparently rampant, and was universally ascribed to possession by evil spirits.\* Our

\* Those who doubt that the "possession by evil spirits," recorded by New Testament writers, was a bad type of hysteria, should study Paul Richer's "*Études Cliniques sur*

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Lord could, and did, cure obstinate cases. As He wrought His cures, He was content, as always, to use language natural to His education and environment. But we have no right to conclude that because He used such a mode of speech He gave His authority to the explanations from which it had arisen. His language was descriptive and not explanatory, just as it was when He spoke of the sun rising and setting. He spoke of the disease by its popular name as He cured the patient. His power to work such cures transcended, but was apparently not unlike, the less splendid power which other good men have shown in similar cases.

§ 29. I submit that in our present state of knowledge we shall be both wise and prudent if we hesitate to accept the old theory that aggravated hysteria is due to possession by evil spirits. We shall understand better what Christ was and what He did if, from the New Testament narratives, we draw the conclusion that consciousness is not a definite entity but, as it were, a stream constantly receiving from other streams and giving to them. We shall regard human personality in normal men as something in the making:

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*l'hystéro-épilepsie*" (Paris, 1881), where they will find exact modern parallels to the symptoms described in the Gospels. Richer worked under Charcot at the Salpêtrière.



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the evil in it is disruptive, the good is the unifying factor. The perfect personality, of which Christ is our sole example, is wholly strong because wholly good. By virtue of its perfection it resists the evil flowing from other consciousnesses, but it gives of its strength to them. We thus understand why Christ said that virtue went out of Him (Luke viii. 47). Our Lord was the type of what we may hope to be when the Christ in us has struggled into existence. Our present consciousness is an unfinished thing: our personality is "here in the making, elsewhere in fact and power."\* Only when personality is made perfect shall we attain eternal life with Christ, and then there will be no barriers to the interchange of consciousness between Him and ourselves. Though the phraseology is different, this is essentially St. Paul's teaching. That teaching, as Baron von Hügel† finely summarises it, affirms that "an all-embracing self-conscious Spirit—the Spirit of One Who loved and immolated Himself wholly and to the end—is the link and medium by and in which all human spirits, in proportion to their awakeness and acceptance, are bound and fitted together." The vagaries of unfinished personality, as we observe them in hysteria and in cases of dual consciousness and the like,

\* Inge, *loc. cit.*, p. 593.

† Von Hügel, *loc. cit.*, p. 71.



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should probably be classed as the outcome of morbid growths of no survival value. We must remember that animals possess consciousness, and that the spiritual personality of man shows itself when such consciousness begins to realise the value of goodness, beauty, and truth. We are unable to separate the new factor from the mental powers which it normally dominates. But apparently dissociation can take place. That it should do so suggests degeneration, and, so far as we can observe the results, the process is evil.

§ 30. I have put before you what seems to be the best way in which we who are Christians can regard the abnormal mental state which we term hysteria. We are fortified in our conclusions by what we know of the modern and still imperfectly understood science of hypnotism, which gives us a clear example of the influence which a strong personality can have over a weaker. The consciousness of the hypnotic subject can apparently be split up : in hypnotic trance, some part of it is asleep, the remainder awake. When the patient is aroused, suggestions made to the part may influence the whole consciousness. There are limits to the extent of this influence. Commands, for instance, which are strongly repugnant to the moral sense will be disobeyed. The methods by which the mesmerist establishes control over his patient are empirical. But it seems indubitable that,

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when once the two are *en rapport*, suggestions can be conveyed from a distance without employing the usual physical means of communication, by which we normally convey ideas. Hypnotism has been proved to have a therapeutic value in cases of hysteria, or when the patient has a craving for stimulants or drugs, when in fact the personality of the patient is weak or inclined to evil and the intention of the hypnotist is good. A stronger personality can with care thus be built up. But, employed by unskilful or unscrupulous practitioners, hypnotism seems to disintegrate personality, and so to do harm to the moral consciousness: it may even lead to the total bankruptcy of insanity.

§ 31. The possibility that ideas might be conveyed without the use of speech or its physical equivalents first became apparent as the result of hypnotic experiments. They revealed that, if a close connexion had been established between the consciousness of two human beings, the flow of thought from one to the other was more definite than had been suspected. Naturally men enquired whether a similar definite flow could not take place under other conditions. It seems to be established that certain people can, under favourable circumstances, receive ideas from other minds in this way. The process is termed telepathy or clairvoyance. A person with telepathic powers can obtain knowledge, stored

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in the mind of another person, by perception which seems to need no physical channels. Many experiments must be made, and the results of observing them co-ordinated, before we can say whether telepathic insight is rare. We must hope that in the future some man of genius will formulate conditions under which telepathic powers can be successfully exercised and discover means whereby such powers can be developed. Our present knowledge is fragmentary, but some facts seem definitely established. Two people, such as mother and son, between whom a strong sympathy exists, and between whom also, because of their relation to one another, there is a natural affinity, can in moments of crisis send and receive telepathic messages. Often these messages are not clear: what is sent out by one is received by the other as a vague emotional disturbance. Sometimes, when the message is received more clearly, it is visualised by the percipient, just as in dreams we visualise our thoughts. Apparitions seen about the time of death would be thus explained. If we grant that a "sensitive" can thus receive messages from a living person, we have no right to conclude that after the death of the sender the process will continue. It may be so; but death makes such an enormous change in the mode of existence of the spirit then liberated from the body that

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the possibility is unlikely. The fact must not be assumed until quite definite proof of it has been obtained. Moreover, such proof would not necessarily exist if it could be shown that a sensitive perceived the apparition of a friend some time after death. Cases of this nature are on record. But they are probably to be explained by the fact that the consciousness of the sensitive only slowly co-ordinates impressions that come to him. For such retardation we seem to have evidence in messages sent at moments of crisis by persons who have continued to live after the crisis has passed. Occasionally, when a strict time-comparison has been made, the percipient seems not to have consciously realised the message until a definite interval after we must imagine it to have been sent. Well-attested evidence is difficult to obtain, for in connexion with such happenings we can seldom rely on statements made by honest witnesses. The very fact that they receive such visions suggests that their minds are not working normally: confused recollection is as frequent as we should anticipate. On the basis of such evidence as we at present possess we cannot conclude that a spirit after death transmits messages to the living.

§ 32. Apart from the inconclusive evidence of post-mortem apparitions, have we no reason to believe that persons with telepathic powers have received messages from the spirit world?

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Let me say at once that the vast mass of literature dealing with abnormal mental states does not seem to me to warrant the conclusion. I hold that all the well-attested evidence, on which the theory of spirit-communication is based, will ultimately be explained by a fuller knowledge of the interchange of consciousness between living persons. I believe that when mediums claim to have spirit-intercourse, they either state what they know to be untrue or are self-deluded. The revelations which they give as to the nature of life after death are often ludicrous: in this matter they contradict one another, and sometimes themselves. Almost invariably one can trace in such statements the particular type of crude philosophy or theology which the medium accepts. If there was any coherence in pretended spirit-communications; if from them one could build up any idea of future progress towards eternal life; if the temporal and often material facts which they record had any clear relations to spiritual values, we might say that, though the evidence was inconclusive, the theory was tenable. As things are, sober judgment will condemn it as a superstition. The difficulty caused by the triviality of the communications has been felt by most thoughtful spiritualists. They are forced to argue that, though spirit-intercourse is a fact, the perception of the medium is at fault. To me it is more natural to conclude that the consciousness of the

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medium picks up mental impressions from living persons around him, fuses these with notions of his own, and produces in the result what we are bidden to accept as messages from another world.

§ 33. What is called "automatic writing" has produced the greater part of the alleged revelations from the next world. Practically all psychologists agree that such writing is of no evidential value in favour of the theory that it is possible to communicate with the dead. What is obtained in this way is usually wordy stuff such as most more or less educated persons could produce without stint by letting their minds "run." It is not rare to be able to obtain such material in bulk by using a "planchette" or some other mechanical means of lessening the control that thought ought to exercise over speech. Men can by practice enormously develop this useless faculty of half-conscious cerebration. As a result of assiduity, the writing obtained assumes a definite character, and, by persistent self-suggestion, he who writes it may accept the illusion of spirit-control. It is, however, but the mature analogue of the day-dreams which children not seldom weave into a coherent and continuous narrative. Neither for such day-dreams, nor for the trance utterances or planchette communications of later years, need we normally assume the action of any external mind. In

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most instances, all alike are born in the brain of the individual and are the reflex of ideas obtained by normal experience and education. Exception must be made of cases when automatic writing reveals the existence of unsuspected telepathic power. It may then show that the consciousness of the writer is receiving ideas from the minds of other living persons. The possibility that this may happen adds the spice of the unexpected to a process which ordinarily results in tedious verbiage. Planchette-writing, table-turning, and the like are often employed to relieve the tedium of winter evenings. Such practices do little harm to men and women whose minds are healthy ; but there is a danger that through them persons whose minds are unstable may develop fixed illusions. Complete sanity is probably more rare than we imagine, and few have such mental stability that they can safely brood over one particular idea or for long concentrate attention on one particular mental state. Automatic writing needs the sort of concentration that empties the mind : if it be associated with the idea that by it intercourse with some loved one is established, the end may be disastrous.

§ 34. In this connexion may I put more general considerations before you ? A tendency to mental instability is undoubtedly inherited. The weakness may be latent until



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a sudden emotional shock loosens the relation of thought to reality which we term sanity. Such shocks have latterly been numerous, owing to the war, and have led to a large increase in the number of individuals who firmly hold irrational beliefs. Among such beliefs, the idea that we can have constant communication with those whom we have loved and lost must be expected to show itself. This fixed idea will be of little danger to the community if it does not become associated with other mental delusions. But a wise physician will regard it as a warning that they may follow; and if in the family history he can discover instances of "queerness" or actual insanity (such facts are usually carefully concealed) he will be gravely anxious. He will strongly advise against any practices such as recourse to mediums, planchette-writing, and the like which may encourage the delusions; and will trust that a healthy, unemotional life will gradually restore mental balance. Clergy should be especially careful in such cases to do nothing which will lead to religious excitement. The delusion of spirit-intercourse is a familiar element in religious mania. Unfortunately also, vicious practices not seldom show themselves. A clergyman whose help is sought in such a case must be morally stern. He must use all his influence to get the patient to take up hard routine work. And by emphasising the value and true nature

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of prayer, he must try to make the peace of God overcome morbid excitements.

§ 35. Of course men and women who show no trace of mental instability believe that it is possible to communicate with the dead ; but it is remarkable that the most distinguished who have come to this conclusion have not *themselves* received messages to which they ascribe such an origin. The messages have come through others, for the most part professional mediums. It would need a treatise to examine in detail the pretensions of professional mediums and to discuss the so-called proofs of the spirit-origin of their messages. I must be content to indicate what seems to me to be the quality of the consciousness of the genuine medium, to remind you of the moral character of some of the most famous among them, and finally to say a few words as to whether there is an irreducible element in the messages only to be explained on the assumption of spirit-intercourse. Probably the average medium, like all fortune-tellers, is an impostor. Some, however, have genuinely abnormal powers. They can pass at will into a trance-like condition in which certain elements of consciousness are in abeyance, while the remaining elements receive, more or less imperfectly, ideas from the minds of those who associate with them. In the condition of self-induced trance they will answer questions : the answers may be irrelevant or

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commonplace, but at times they show a range of knowledge which we should not have expected the medium to possess. Thus the medium may tell an unknown visitor what he knows or possibly even what he had known but had forgotten. This faculty of thought-reading every genuine medium must have. Probably the power, though it is a reality, only operates under favourable conditions which occur somewhat rarely. "All our evidence," says Myers,\* "has tended to show that the telepathic power itself is a variable thing, that it shows itself in flashes, for the most part spontaneously, and seldom persists through a series of deliberate experiments."

§ 36. Consider now the situation in which a professional medium finds himself placed. He is, if my estimate is correct, conscious of certain ill-defined powers. He knows that he cannot always rely on them, but he uses them to earn his living. Even when his powers fail, he must strive to impress those who resort to him. Successful imposture must cloak failure. Thus we account for the incontrovertible fact

\* F. W. H. Myers, "Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death" (Longmans, Green and Co., 1903, vol. ii., p. 149). Myers's book suffers by the fact that he did not live to complete it, and I hold the author's fundamental contention to be unsound. But it is a storehouse of well-arranged information, and of theories that are always ingenious and probably often correct. It may be regarded as a semi-official summary at the time at which it was written of the work of the Society for Psychical Research.

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that celebrated mediums have repeatedly been proved guilty of intentional deceit and fraudulent claims. Perhaps the medium with his abnormal consciousness does not separate truth from falsehood as clearly as do more normal men. When zeal for professional success urges him to make extravagant claims he yields somewhat easily to the temptation. Among such claims, that of spirit-intercourse is invaluable. It may begin as a theory naturally framed by one who has heard that others claim such an origin for happy flashes of telepathic insight : it may end as a fixed delusion. I believe that any of us might, under similar circumstances, accept a theory of spirit-control, build up gradually a more or less fantastic conception of the spirit with whom we imagine ourselves to communicate, and end by believing in, and endowing with well-defined language, the creation of our fancy. Genuine delusion can be produced by long-continued self-suggestion.

§ 37. The usual theory of spirit-intercourse which is advanced by the modern medium is well known. It asserts that A, a departed spirit, communicates with B, a control, who, is *en rapport* with C, the medium, who more or less imperfectly reveals to D, the enquirer, particulars which he longs to learn from A. It is ingeniously convenient for the medium ; for, when he talks nonsense or is incoherent or obscure, it is easy to postulate a broken or

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imperfect connexion between A and B or B and C. The conditions under which *séances* take place make the accounts of almost all results obtained at them of small value. If, as is usually the case, the enquirer D is morbidly anxious to hear from A, he will in his anxiety clutch eagerly at the poorest shreds of evidence. An enquirer who tries to prevent his judgment from being deflected by his emotions may easily convey a false impression of the medium's powers by selecting from a mass of statements those which seem to confirm his hopes. It must be remembered that out of a fairly large number of ingenious guesses one or two may be expected to be approximately correct. But the laws of probability will be ignored if D writes an account of the *séance* in which failures are set aside and chance successes emphasised.

§ 38. I would remind those who think that I have here made too unfavourable an estimate of a *séance* with the average medium that the law regards claims to spirit-intercourse as means whereby money is obtained under false pretences. Further, I would point out that the results of careful investigation of the characters and careers of celebrated mediums have usually been disquieting. Many of the ablest mediums of the past were proved to be dishonest. The more extravagant of their claims have now been generally abandoned. Half a century ago, a "good" medium would commonly assert that

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his powers included materialisation of spirits, levitation, and the like. Attempts to repeat apparently well-attested instances of such phenomena, under conditions sufficiently stringent to prevent the possibility of fraud, failed. A cold critic will naturally suspect that the assertion of spirit-communication is similarly untrue, and that it continues to be made because credulous people are anxious to believe it and because, owing to its nature, disproof can hardly be conclusive.

§ 39. Yet it would appear to be true that, associated with much deceit and with explanations that are false, successful mediums have genuine telepathic powers. They have thus been able to give information that has seemed to justify their claim to receive messages from the dead. I hold that such information is always obtained telepathically—that is, without physical means of communication—from the minds of the living. There are extremely few so-called proofs of spirit-intercourse that cannot be explained by the fact that the medium is reading the mind of the “sitter.” The exceptions may be due to a power to perceive knowledge which the visitor thinks that he has forgotten but which is stored in his memory, or to a power to receive ideas from the consciousness of some third person between whom and the medium the visitor acts as a link ; or they may be merely lucky guesses which a shrewd



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man might make and subsequent investigation confirm. The latter explanation is probably in most cases the true one. It is doubtful whether, by telepathy, a medium can obtain knowledge which a visitor believes himself to have forgotten. It is also doubtful whether a visitor can act as a go-between enabling the medium to get ideas from the consciousness of a third person. In fact all our knowledge of telepathy is at present elementary, and will remain so until expert psychologists learn more of its nature. Meanwhile, let us avoid the hypothesis that the dead communicate with the living. It is unnecessary ; for, as I have suggested, it is probable that the facts on which it is based can be explained otherwise. It is unlikely ; for the so-called communications are unworthy of the origin claimed for them. It is a new form of an old superstition, the modern equivalent of that belief in demonology which did untold harm in the Middle Ages. A recent writer\* has said, in commenting on the revival of belief in necromancy, that either we have seen an outbreak of lunacy over two continents during two generations or we must suppose ourselves in the presence of a new revelation constituting the greatest religious event since the death of Christ. The history of demonology proves that just such an outbreak of delusion is possible.

\* Sir A. Conan Doyle, "The New Revelation." Hodder and Stoughton, 1917.



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For several generations, we must expect to see growing from the bloodstained battlefields of Europe weeds of cruelty and superstition. It is the duty of the Christian Churches to root them out by the power of the Gospel of Christ.

§40. Finally, I would briefly refer to the question of authority in relation to spiritualism. It is true of many of our beliefs that we hold them because others tell us that we ought to do so. We cannot ourselves prove, and usually we have but the vaguest notion of the arguments which lead experts to hold, most theories of the nature of the Universe that we commonly accept. Take, for instance, the fact that the solid earth on which we live is a globe revolving on its axis and rushing violently through space. Few, even among educated men, could prove this truth : the rest accept it on authority. They are content to know that every man of science who can speak authoritatively on the subject asserts that it can be demonstrated by combining experiments which he can repeat with logical arguments that to him are cogent. Similar examples could be multiplied almost indefinitely. Human knowledge is so vast, and the opportunities of the individual for personal experiment and accurate thought are so few, that, for all but the common facts of daily life, we rely on statements made by others. Men are so accustomed thus to submit themselves to guidance that, if they can find honest and able

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teachers who affirm doctrines which are plausible, they will believe those doctrines to have been established. But the teachers in whom such trust can rightly be placed must not only be honest and able : they must be experts in the special subjects on which they express opinions ; and, moreover, they must have convinced their fellow-experts before it is safe to accept their views. Now it is a fact that certain distinguished men of letters and physicists have given their authority to the doctrine that the dead communicate ideas to the minds of the living. But such men are not experts in psychology : they are not qualified by a scientific medical training to examine more or less abnormal mental states. Though they have shown marked ability in literary or physical research, we do not know that they have the *flair* necessary for the different work of accurate psychological investigation.

§ 41. It is significant that practically none of the leading experimental psychologists of the world are prepared to accept the theory of spirit-communication. Nor is it accepted by leading medical men, whose careful study of mental disease, and experiments with abnormal mental states, would permit them to speak with authority. So long as such experts refuse to accept the spiritualistic explanation of the observed phenomena, it is mere superstition for the mass of men to do so. We cannot too strongly urge the inherent difficulty of the

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subject and the consequent liability to error, even when the utmost care is taken by competent investigators. Psychology, as we have said, is the science in which the human mind attempts to analyse the human mind. It is thus, by its very nature, less likely to lead to assured conclusions than are sciences in which the mind examines the behaviour of matter. Even in connexion with physical investigations the so-called "personal equation" has led honest and competent men to frame untenable theories. I would remind you, for instance, of the so-called N rays, famous in scientific literature a few years ago. In 1903 and subsequent years, Professor Blondlot and his assistants at Nancy announced that they had discovered that, under certain carefully specified laboratory conditions, many substances, and in particular the muscles of the human body, emitted rays. They described these rays with an appearance of detailed accuracy that seemed conclusive proof of their existence. They measured, for example, the wave-length of the rays. In fact, in a series of papers they communicated the results of elaborate observations to the *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences de Paris*, which published them.\* The officials of the Academy

\* A collection of the papers of Blondlot and his pupils, translated by J. Garcin, was published by Longmans, Green and Co., in 1905.

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are at least as jealous as the officers of our own Royal Society that records of untrustworthy experiments should not appear in their publications. Naturally the results aroused enormous interest. The experiments were actually repeated and verified in America. Our own scientific men and those in Germany failed to observe the phenomena and ultimately asserted that they were non-existent. To-day their view is, I think, universally accepted; the N rays do not exist. If men can thus give objective reality to what is really subjective, the creation of a particular mental state, when they are merely examining the behaviour of matter, it is at least possible that others in endeavouring to explain obscure mental phenomena will argue in favour of theories which falsely interpret the facts. There is grave danger that we may be misled by the authority of eminent men of science if we accept their conclusions when other equally eminent men, whose studies enable them to speak with greater authority, remain unconvinced. Of the readiness of the populace to believe and confirm myths, I need not in these days give instances.

§42. It is often hard to prove a negative, and some will hold that I have failed in my present attempt. To them I can only say that I have approached the subject of spiritualism with an open mind, and that I have

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read widely in the literature connected with it. I have tried not to be unfair in presenting the views of those whose opinions differ from my own, and I trust that I have refrained from importing into the controversy either abuse or contempt. To the many who ardently wish for scientific evidence that their dead are still alive, I would say that I too share their desire. But I would remind them that the moral and religious evidence for human immortality is extremely strong: as strong indeed as the evidence for the existence of God. The Christian faith, though its bases are not in the world of sense-observation, is not irrational. It is founded upon the teaching of One Whose perfection of character and spiritual insight were supreme. It has been corroborated by the deepest spiritual experience of innumerable wise and good men. It is contradicted by no experiments that we can make, and is affirmed as by patient thought we try to understand our nature and destiny. In our faith is the substance of the things we hope for; as we live by it, we prove the things not seen. Let us be content with our limitations; and, though faith is not sight, let us keep our trust and confidence, knowing that they are based on two great certainties: the love of God and Eternal Life with Christ. The many who in these days mourn the loss of loved ones slain in the glory of their youth will find no con-

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solation if they seek in spiritualism the solace that faith in Christ can surely give. The common business of spiritualism is permeated by deceit and fraud : many who have sought aid from it have been alternately exalted and depressed, excited, baffled, and duped. It has given them, not tranquillity of spirit and usefulness of life, but morbid excitements and experiments alike unhealthy and unfruitful. Probably so long as man exists he will attempt to pass beyond the barriers that restrain him. But the Christian need not chafe at the thought of such barriers. In the revelation of Christ we have the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection. In communion with God we can feel the power of His love and know that it still enfolds those who have passed before us to the other world. In prayer to Him we can enter the spiritual realm where they are, citizens of the city of the living God, the new Jerusalem. So we can gain the Peace of God, and here and now have a foretaste of Eternal Life.