
THE CHURCH AND SPIRITUALISM

by

HERBERT THURSTON, S.J.



THE BRUCE PUBLISHING COMPANY
MILWAUKEE

Imprimi potest:

HENRY KEANE, S.J.

Praep. Prov. Angl.

BF 1275
C3T5

Nihil obstat:

H. B. RIES,

Censor librorum

Imprimatur:

✠ SAMUEL A. STRITCH,
Archiepiscopus Milwaukiensis

January 3, 1933

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

MAY 18 1933

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2. N. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITOR

Spiritualism has for a long time held a challenging position in the public attention. By different men it is variously viewed according to their chance impressions and probably, too, their favorite prepossessions.

To some it is purely a matter of curiosity or perhaps of bewilderment. To others it is first and foremost an object of scientific research. Some see in it a convincing argument for the survival of the human spirit after death, while others believe it to be the merest mummary, a skilfully commercialized though easily transparent trickery. A small inner circle loudly proclaim it to all the world as a new religion, a perennial revelation, for all time destined to enlighten and reform society. And finally there still remains the number of its own devoted clientele, the men and women to whom it implies neither more nor less than an eager hope and an absorbing pursuit to hold communion with their own departed.

For excellent reasons, as the author clearly shows, the Church has placed her prohibition against attendance of her faithful at spiritualistic séances. Yet Catholic authors differ widely in the emphasis respectively laid by them on the various causes hitherto assigned to spiritualistic phenomena. Doctrinally and in principle they are fully agreed.

While the practical conduct of Catholics is thus wisely guided by the Church, the vital questions raised by Spiritualism continue none the less to call for the most minutely careful, prudent, and scientific investigation. Much may remain to be discovered that we have hitherto hardly surmised.

A book, therefore, on this important subject by one who speaks from a long acquaintance with spiritualistic literature

should be as widely welcomed as it is imperatively needed.

Father Thurston's interest in psychic phenomena, as he himself informs us, dates back some sixty years. As a staff member of the London *Month* he has concerned himself especially with psychic and mystical phenomena, and has had the advantage of coming into contact with many who have played a leading part in this field of research. His mental attitude in all these undertakings has invariably been one of impartial objectivity. Nothing, except truth and fact, has ever been permitted to influence his final judgments. Such are the characteristics which everyone familiar with the work of Father Thurston will gladly recognize in him.

As for the present Preface to his book, it seems to me that the best service I can render the reader will be to give him, however briefly, what I may call the historic background for the subject treated in this volume.

To peer beyond the veil of death and hold communion with the departed has perhaps at all times been the longing of certain souls. The questions that Spiritualism raises in our own day are such as naturally tantalize the human mind when left to its own surmises. Deprived of the safe guidance of the Church, man, in the face of death, finds himself standing baffled and bewildered on the bourne of another world.

That the human soul does not perish with the body has been the belief of all the ages. In the earliest graves where Mousterian man, millenniums of years ago, deposited with sacred reverence the remains of his beloved dead, he piously laid away with them the most precious gifts — weapons and food for their use, paint and ornaments to adorn them in the spirit land.

Debased with error as his religion had become, man still firmly held to the fundamental facts of the existence of God

and of a future life. Nothing has ever been able to obliterate these primeval traditions and convictions. The Church, in her turn, has definitely taught the existence of an omnipresent, invisible Creator, "not far from every one of us," as St. Paul told the Athenians, "For in Him we live and move and are."¹ From the Sacred Scripture, as clearly interpreted by the Church, we still further learn of other beings, equally invisible to our corporeal eyes, angels of light and spirits of darkness, ever present in our midst. Missioned by God for our aid or ruthlessly bent on our destruction, they ever interweave with our daily lives.

We are certain no less of the survival after death of the soul of man. But here precisely we approach the point most intimately touched upon by Spiritualism. "Is there any evidence," we must pertinently ask, "to support the spiritualist contention of a free communication, through specially endowed mediums, between these disincarnate souls and men now living upon earth?"

In answering this question let us say that one thing we know with certainty. It is the fact that at its departure from this life the soul of every man and woman, accountable here upon earth, is judged by God according to its just deserts. In that same moment it is assigned at once to its own definite state in a future existence. This can only be, according to Christian doctrine, either one of temporary purgation to fit it for the Beatific Vision, or else one of everlasting punishment, or of instant and eternal reward. In none of these cases can we assume that its return to earth will be lightly permitted. With certainty we can say that it will not take place at the mere summons of a spiritualistic medium, but only at the disposition of the Divine Will.

¹Acts xvii. 27, 28.

If in the Old Testament we read of the soul of Samuel apparently answering the summons of the woman at Endor with "a divining spirit," the mysterious medium appealed to by Saul, we can readily understand the reason. If the saintly spirit of the last of the great Judges in Israel appeared indeed, it was not through any occult power of the chosen medium, as the Fathers teach, but only by the power of God, that in His Providence He might smite with condign chastisement the unfaithful King and foretell his tragic end. "And forthwith Saul fell all along on the ground, for he was frightened with the words of Samuel."²

Saul well knew that in consulting her he was violating the express commandment of God. The divine legislation forbidding all such attempted communication had been definitely laid down to the children of Israel before ever they set foot on the promised land and wrested it from the nations which before had practised precisely these "abominations":

"When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee," we read in Deuteronomy, "beware lest thou have a mind to imitate the abominations of those nations. Neither let there be found among you anyone that shall expiate his son or daughter, making them pass through fire . . . nor any one that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune tellers, or that seeketh the truth from the dead."³

It is obvious, therefore, how God instructed His people in regard to all these practises, then freely in vogue under the ancient paganism.

In our own day the purported communication with the spirits of the departed, through the intervention of highly sensitive mediums, has naturally assumed its own peculiar

²1 Kings xxviii. 20.

³xviii. 9-11.

characteristics. Yet accepting Spiritualism at its own evaluation, it definitely professes to do precisely what was forbidden in the Old Testament: "Neither let there be found among you any one . . . that seeketh the truth from the dead."

Necromancy, as this practise had been called in more plain-spoken days, has been sufficiently familiar throughout the centuries, but something, at least, of abhorrence seems always to have attached to it. The inspired Scriptures speak of it as an "abomination." Under the Old Laws it could not be permitted to have its place among a people "holy to the Lord." Much less, therefore, can it be condoned today among those whom St. Peter calls: "a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people."⁴

Modern Spiritualism, while claiming to exercise the same power of communication with the dead, has contrived, however, to give to it a new setting. It has cast about it an air of social respectability, swathed it in an atmosphere of alluring mystery, played on the responsiveness of its visitors with all the appurtenances of dim lights, soft music, swaying curtains, and whatever else might attune them to the desired psychic mood.

So much for its popular presentation. But we must not deny that modern Spiritualism has also, and that not seldom, attracted the educated, the cultured, and people of wealth or prestige. It has not hesitated even, and that in numerous instances, to submit to all the exacting demands of scientific investigation. In a word, it has cast aside on occasion its often deceptive trappings and dared to stand the test of closest scrutiny — with varying results.

The questions raised, therefore, are not so simple as many might have us believe. Are we dealing with a clever decep-

⁴ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

x *PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITOR*

tion? Has the Angel of Darkness once more transformed himself into an angel of light? Are there factors to be here taken into account of which we may as yet understand but little? Or are there even — and it is mentioned as the merest possibility by the author — invisible and immaterial presences of whom, perhaps, we have no knowledge whatsoever? Such are questions touched upon, in the course of this volume, with equal learning, skill, and prudence. The reader, whoever he may be, will follow it, we are certain, with keenest interest and no slight measure of intellectual enlightenment concerning not merely Spiritualism, but general psychic phenomena which we may not ignore.

JOSEPH HUSSLEIN, S.J., PH.D.,
General Editor, Science and Culture Series

St. Louis University,
October 23, 1932.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

There are three main contentions embodied in this book. The first is that genuine and inexplicable phenomena, even of the physical order, do occur in the presence of certain exceptionally constituted persons called "mediums"; secondly, that for the mass of mankind, and notably for Catholics, spiritualistic practices, quite apart from the Church's prohibition, are dangerous and altogether undesirable; and thirdly, that people have learned nothing from their attempted intercourse with the spirits of the departed—an almost inevitable result when the fact is borne in mind that the identity of the supposed communicator can never be established with certainty.

My contact with these subjects goes a very long way back. About the year 1865, when I was a boy of eight or nine, my father, as a medical man, became interested in hypnotism, or as it was then more commonly called, "mesmerism." He chanced to make the acquaintance of Mr. J. H. Powell, at that date editor of *The Spiritual Times*, a journal, as its cover announced, "devoted to the facts, philosophy, and practical uses of modern Spiritualism," and for some time that gentleman was a constant visitor in our house. It happened, too, that a lad in my father's employ, attending one of Powell's public demonstrations of mesmerism proved to be an exceptionally good subject for such hypnotic experiments. He fell completely under Powell's control, and the latter, if ever he caught sight of the youth across the street or at many yards distance, was able to reduce him to a state of absolute immobility. He could not stir, or raise his hand, or even close his mouth, if he happened to be yawning, until the mesmerist chose to release him. One of my earliest memories

is that of an experiment performed in our house by Powell, when, calling to the lad just referred to, he bade him lie down upon his back on three chairs, his head on one, his heels on another, and his body supported by the third chair in the middle. With a few passes, Powell threw the lad into a deep hypnotic trance, and when "Jim" lay in a state of cataleptic rigidity, he removed the middle chair and stood upon the boy's thighs. Powell was a tall, big-boned man, and Jim a rather weedy youth of seventeen or eighteen, but he supported the weight as if he were an iron bar. I may confess that the impression that there are mysterious forces in nature of which we understand very little has remained with me ever since, although on the other hand I seem to be personally quite devoid of sensibility to their subtle influence. I have never had anything which I could seriously call a psychic experience in my life, and I think that my natural bent is distinctly in the direction of scepticism.

To turn to another point, I should like to say that though I am aware that Catholic usage in the United States favours the term "Spiritism" and that the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, with Dr. Liljencrants and several other writers, informs us that this is the correct designation, I have deliberately, throughout this book, adhered to the primitive terminology "Spiritualism" and "Spiritualist." This was the appellation which had already established itself among the disciples of the new cult at least as early as 1852, and it seems to me that those who inaugurate a movement have the best title to determine the name by which it is to be called. We meet the term "Spiritualism" in Ballou's book published at Boston in 1852, and the treatise of Edmonds and Dexter (1853), which is itself called "Spiritualism," quotes an automatic script, dated June 20, 1852, which purported to emanate from Henry Clay. In this we read: "Brother Edmonds, you will

do more good with 'Spiritualism' than ever I did with politics. Go on. Henry Clay."

But apart from this, the more serious objection remains that "Spiritism" was afterwards introduced on the continent of Europe to denote something entirely different; to wit, the body of beliefs formulated by Allan Kardec (i.e., H. D. Rivail) of which the central feature was the doctrine of reincarnation. This particular teaching was — and indeed is still — repudiated by the majority of American and English spiritualists. It would be easy to quote a dozen plain testimonies bearing on this matter from the early literature of the subject. D. D. Home, the most famous of mediums, who knew America as well as England and Europe, strongly objected to the term "Spiritism" precisely on this ground. "I need not explain," he says, in writing to a London newspaper, *The Spiritualist* (October 1, 1875), "that there is a difference between Spiritists and Spiritualists. Of course the former are reincarnationists." But perhaps the most convincing evidence which could be quoted is that of Madame Blavatsky. In a letter to Professor Corson of March 20, 1875, she complains that "the French Spiritistes are reincarnationists and zealous missionaries for the same." Further she describes, little foreseeing her own later developments, how she, a true spiritualist, had quarrelled with Prince Wittgenstein because he had become a spiritist, i.e., "a reincarnationist," a form of teaching upon which she proceeds to pour ridicule. It is beyond question that there were in France two separate journals, the one called the *Revue Spirite* and the other the *Revue Spiritualiste*. The former taught reincarnation; the latter did not. What is more, the distinction persisted and is clearly recognized by the *Congrès Spirite et Spiritualiste international* held at Paris in 1900 (see the *Compte Rendu*, p. 611). An article on the use of these terms

appeared in the London *Spiritual Magazine* (February, 1869), the writer of which begins by saying: "It is customary with the opposition to disparage Spiritualism by calling it Spiritism," and after pointing out that the latter term was identified with the Kardecian reincarnation doctrine, he complains that "to confound Spiritualism with Spiritism is either ignorance or wilful misrepresentation."

I am inclined to think that the general acceptance of the form "Spiritism" among American Catholics is due to the influence of Orestes A. Brownson. In two different articles in the *Catholic World* he contended many years ago that the name "Spiritualism" applies to any doctrine opposed to materialism, and that to avoid confusion it would be well to set apart the word "Spiritism" to describe the belief that departed spirits hold communication with men. In defence of the practice here followed, I would urge that usage (*quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi*) is the supreme and final standard of correct diction in such matters. The religious revolt of the sixteenth century has to be called the "Reformation" though many of us hold that it was in fact very much the contrary; and we make no difficulty in conceding the term "Orthodox" to the Greek and Russian schismatics, while fully aware that to this name in its etymological meaning they have absolutely no claim. Notwithstanding Brownson's protest, Spiritualism is still the term which prevails among those who employ mediums and hold séances, and if it is stated of anyone that he is a spiritualist, nobody now supposes that this only means that, like every other believing Christian, he rejects materialism.

But I am glad to avail myself of this mention of Brownson's name as an excuse for quoting a passage from his book *The Spirit - Rapper*. The warning which follows seems to me eminently sensible and I can ask no better support for the

attitude taken up in more than one chapter of the present volume.

"In the case of the spiritists of our own times [writes Brownson], much harm is done by telling them the spirit manifestations are all humbuggery, imagination, fraud or trickery. These people know that it is not so. They know they are not knaves, that they practise no trickery and have no wish to deceive or be deceived. They are not conscious of any dishonest intentions, and they have no reason to think that they are less intelligent or less sharp sighted than those who abuse them as impostors, or ridicule them as dupes. The worst way in the world to convert a man from his errors is to begin by abusing him and denying what he knows to be true. Except in the teachings of God, or what is the same thing, the teachings of men appointed by Him to teach, we never find unmixed truth, for to err is human; and on the other hand, we never find pure unmixed falsehood. . . . These Spiritists are deceived or deluded, I grant, for they are the sport of a lying and deceiving spirit, but they are not deceived or deluded as to the phenomena to which they can testify, nor, as a general thing, do they wish to deceive others. Among them there may be knaves and fools, there may be quacks and impostors, but I have no reason to suppose that the mass of them are not as intelligent and as honest as the common run of men, as the world goes. Their error is in the explication of the phenomena, not in asserting the reality of the phenomena; and to begin by telling them that no such phenomena have ever occurred, that the spirit manifestations are all humbug, is, to say the least, a very unwise proceeding. . . . I have known many apparently sincere and pious persons driven to apostasy by this scepticism with regard to the phenomena they have themselves seen."

So far as concerns the composition of the present book I may note that much of its contents will be found in scattered articles contributed during the past twenty years to *The Month*, *The Dublin Review*, the *Irish Quarterly Studies*, the *London Tablet*, etc., and that they are reproduced here with the kind permission of the respective editors. But the whole of the matter has been thoroughly revised, a great deal of it

recast and developed, and chapters or sections added which have not before appeared in print. By way of appendix I have included an article by another pen which was published some forty years ago in *The Month*, not long after I joined the staff of that periodical. The author's name was not given — it is only signed with initials — but I am quite confident that the then editor, Father Richard Clarke, S.J., would not have inserted it unless he had had very sound reason to be assured of his contributor's good faith and reliability. His own views of the harmful effects of Spiritualism were strong. He had himself, a few months earlier, devoted some forty pages in all to denouncing the evils of the cult, and he would not have been likely to give currency to what might seem to some readers a sort of apology for such practices unless he had been satisfied that this was no fictitious story. It is to be remembered in any case that the article was printed before any explicit prohibition of automatic writing or participation in séances had been issued from Rome.

Besides the books accessible in the library of the British Museum, in the London Library, and in that of the Society for Psychical Research, I have been able to avail myself of sundry isolated papers which I owe to the kindness of Dr. W. Franklin Prince of the Boston S.P.R., Mr. Harry Price, Director of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, the late Sir William Barrett, and others. I should like, in particular, to record my indebtedness to the late Professor Henry Ford, of Princeton University, who some years ago was good enough to send me a considerable number of early books on Spiritualism, many of which have proved of great service.

It is with much regret that I confess my inability to identify myself completely with the point of view of some of my religious brethren who have recently written on Spir-

itualism. I refer more particularly to the book *Los Fraudes Espiritistas y los Fenomenos Metapsiquicos* of Father C. M. de Heredia (1931) and to that of Father Fernando Palmés, *Metapsiquica y Espiritismo* (1932). While I am thoroughly at one with them in the belief that the attempt to communicate with the dead is subversive of Christian principle and full of dangers, and while on the other hand I also share their conviction that the phenomena of Spiritualism must not be too easily attributed to diabolical agencies, I do not find myself forced to conclude that the alleged manifestations are due in nearly all cases to trickery, whether conscious or unconscious. My own view approximates much more closely to that of Father Alois Gatterer, S.J., Professor at the University of Innsbruck, whose admirably documented essay *Der wissenschaftliche Okkultismus und sein Verhältnis zur Philosophie* gives proof of a profound and experimental study of the problems involved. It is no doubt unsatisfactory to have no definite explanation to propose, but so far as my own study of Spiritualism both in its earlier and later phases qualifies me to express an opinion, I am persuaded that we must wait for a solution until much more evidence has accumulated than is available at present. Our conceptions of the physical constitution of matter have undergone a revolution, and who can say whether we have yet reached finality. But while in physical problems we can repeat our experiments at will with uniform results, in psychic matters we seem to be dependent on a chance combination of conditions the very nature of which is veiled from us. Indeed, for all we know, these may be determined by the free choice of intelligent beings who take pleasure in mocking our efforts to establish any permanent connection with them. No wonder that progress is slow and uncertain. An attitude of patient resignation to our limitations, perhaps for

centuries to come, seems to be imposed whether we like it or not.

I trust, however, that my conviction of the genuineness of certain well-attested psychic phenomena will not convey the impression that I am blind to the enormous amount of fraud associated with Spiritualism, both now and in the past. It may not be out of place to refer to a striking piece of testimony on this point published fifty years ago in a source quite above suspicion. The Rev. George Sexton, converted almost against his will from rationalism to Christian belief owing to the spiritualistic phenomena he had witnessed, had edited for some time *The Spiritual Magazine* which had been appearing monthly in London from 1861 to 1877. In this latter year he had to announce that the journal could not continue publication, and gave as an explanation that his position had been rendered impossible both by the anti-Christian bias of the younger generation of spiritualists, and by the wide prevalence of gross imposture among accredited mediums. He himself by no means renounced his belief in the cause, but he complained that some of the oldest and most energetic workers had been alienated by the way in which things were developing.

"Mr. William Howitt [he states], *facile princeps* among spiritualistic writers, wrote me, some time since, that could he have foreseen to what Spiritualism was coming, he would never have allowed his name to be associated with it. And this opinion of his is shared by many others whose names I need not here introduce. Spiritualism has not simply become anti-Christian, but, if possible, it has fallen to a still lower depth. It harbours within its ranks mediums who cheat and impose upon the credulous and unwary, as well as leading public men who defend them for so doing on the ground that they are under spirit control when they play tricks — a tacit sort of admission that the kind of spirits thus communicating lie and deceive as much as the mediums they use. I have pointed this out again and

again in the pages of this Magazine, and done what I could to remedy the evil, but I fear without much success."

After referring to certain statements made in a previous issue, Dr. Sexton goes on:

"Since that time matters have grown considerably worse. One medium after another has been detected cheating, until the outside public have come to believe the whole thing an imposition, and even conscientious spiritualists became puzzled to know which phenomena to accept as genuine and which to reject as feats of legerdemain. And as I have never hesitated to denounce trickery and to threaten to expose it whenever and wherever I may have detected it, I have, as a matter of course, been very considerably vilified and persecuted. . . . Spiritualism is a great and mighty truth [such was, no doubt, Dr. Sexton's sincere belief] and it came, I am convinced, in the Providence of God to dispel the scepticism and materialism of this unbelieving age. In the past it has done good service in this respect. But if now it serves but to replace one form of scepticism by another equally bad, or even worse, and if it harbours in its ranks cheats who deceive and lie in connection with one of the most sacred of all subjects, its end may easily be foreseen. Already it is dragged into the mire to such an extent that many of its very warmest supporters in times gone by are expressing themselves — as scores of letters that I have received will testify — as thoroughly disgusted with the whole thing. The greatest care and the labour of another Hercules will be needed now to purify this modern Augean Stable."¹

Such, in the opinion of a leading advocate of the cause, was the condition of Spiritualism in England twenty-nine years after this "new revelation" had been given to the world, and there is good reason to believe that in America things were even worse. Whether the position has notably improved during the half century which has elapsed since the above comments were written seems to me more than doubtful.

There is one aspect of the subject which is but slightly touched upon in the pages which follow. I refer to the

¹*The Spiritual Magazine*, Vol. XVII (1877), pp. 97-99.

pretentious claims of spiritualistic teaching, and the disappointment consequent upon its failure to substantiate these claims. Perhaps I may be allowed to refer to a little shilling book of mine, *Modern Spiritualism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1928) in which this point of view is more directly dealt with.

HERBERT THURSTON, S.J.

London, 31 Farm Street W.

17 June, 1932

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITOR	v
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	ix
CHAPTER	
I. THE CHURCH'S DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES	1
II. THE FOUNDERS OF MODERN SPIRITUALISM	19
III. CATHOLICISM AND THE EARLY SPIRITUALISTS	45
IV. THE CONVERSION OF HOME, THE MEDIUM	61
V. "DANGER; KEEP OFF THE ICE"	83
VI. WHAT COMES OF IT	107
VII. THE BIBLE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION	133
VIII. TELEKINETIC PHENOMENA	143
IX. THE ACCORDION PLAYING OF D. D. HOME	167
X. MATERIALIZATIONS AND "KATIE KING"	188
XI. THE TRUTH OF TELEPATHY	224
XII. CLAIRVOYANCE	244
XIII. "THE GATE OF REMEMBRANCE"	270
XIV. THE SCRIPT OF OSCAR WILDE	289
XV. SOME MODERN DEVELOPMENTS	309
XVI. THE CASE OF DOYLE VERSUS HOUDINI	331
XVII. THE "FRUITAGE" OF MODERN SPIRITUALISM	348
Appendix: A CONVERT THROUGH SPIRITUALISM	368

CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH'S DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES

WHETHER Spiritualism can be said to be everywhere making converts is not perhaps so certain as its votaries pretend. But it is unquestionably more talked about, and more written about, than it was before the War, and as a natural result there has grown up of late years a considerable body of Catholic literature, produced with the laudable purpose of counteracting the spiritualistic propaganda now so actively carried on. While much that has been published by way of protest against the new cult must command the assent of all sincere Christians, there are aspects of the question which have provoked a marked difference of opinion not only among the general public but within the Church itself. If I may be pardoned for expressing a personal view, formed after many years of interest in the subject, it seems to me highly important that we should be on our guard against those extremists who would commit us to theological positions from which, later on, it may be difficult to retire with dignity. The biblical commentators of the time of Galileo, having no inkling of the truths which astronomical science, then in its infancy, was about to demonstrate, insisted that the earth was at rest and that the sun was continually in motion. How, they urged, was it otherwise possible to justify the statement of Holy Scripture that the sun and moon stood still at the bidding of Josue? This exegesis had consequences which, as we all know, have given encouragement to countless assailants of papal authority and a certain amount of trouble to our modern professors of apologetic. I cannot help fancying that with regard to such subjects as morbid

psychology, hypnotism, thought transference, and man's psychic faculties we are even now hardly better equipped than were the theologians of Galileo's day in the matter of astronomy. It is possible that the next century or two may witness the recognition of many psychic truths which are at present hidden from us or barely suspected. Consequently, in the meanwhile, it seems advisable to dogmatize as little as possible until we have quite explicit guidance. Hypnotism, for example, less than a century ago, was denounced by not a few moral theologians as pure devilry, but while it still presents many problems, it is recognized by this time as a natural faculty which under proper control may even have its legitimate uses.

That the Church has acted with absolute wisdom in prohibiting spiritualistic practices to all her faithful subjects is a conviction which I have long held, and which wider study and experience have only served every day to deepen. In this respect I find myself in thorough accord with the writers criticised hereafter. But when they go further and set out to explain the why and the wherefore of the Church's action, basing their contention to a large extent upon the principles—or what are alleged to be the principles—of mediæval psychology and eschatology, I must confess to entertaining a certain misgiving. Are we not a little in danger of jumping to rash conclusions? Has the study of experimental and morbid psychology no further revelations in store? Can we speak quite confidently regarding the limitations or the range of the activities of angels, demons, and discarnate human souls, notably the unbaptised, who, after all, form numerically the vast majority of the human race? Is it even certain that there are no other intelligent beings at any time in God's universe besides these three categories of angels, demons, and human souls? I have no thought of

affirming as a fact the possibility envisaged in this last question; I only ask, can we be quite sure?

It seems that in the past, opinion has been left a good deal of latitude. Simply as an illustration of the very wide range of speculation which has found sanction in publications of unquestioned orthodoxy and which has gone unreproved for more than half a century, I cannot resist the temptation to quote a passage or two from the "revelations" recorded in the *Life of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich* by her Redemptorist biographer, Father Schmöger. After relating a certain vision of angels and devils which she had had, Anne Catherine went on:

"There are, also, souls neither in heaven, purgatory, nor hell, but wandering the earth in trouble and anguish, aiming at something they are bound to perform. They haunt deserted places, ruins, tombs, and the scenes of their past misdeeds. They are spectres. . . . I have often understood, in my childhood and later, that three whole choirs of angelic spirits, higher than the archangels, fell, but were not cast into hell; some, experiencing a sort of repentance, escaped for a time. They are the planetary spirits that come upon earth to tempt man. At the last day they will be judged and condemned. I have always seen that the devils can never leave hell. I have seen, too, that many of the damned go not directly to hell, but suffer in lonely places on earth."¹

She is also reported to have said:

"Great order reigns among the planetary spirits, who are fallen spirits but not devils. They are very, very different from devils. They go to and fro between the earth and the nine spheres. In one of these spheres they are sad and melancholy; in another, impetuous and violent; in a third, light and giddy; in a fourth, stingy, parsimonious, miserly, etc. They exert an influence over the whole earth, over every

¹Schmöger, *Life of Anne Catherine Emmerich* (Eng. Trans.), II, p. 206. It is noteworthy that Father Papebroch, the famous Bollandist, seems to favor a similar view that some of the fallen angels were not straightway cast into hell but still haunt this earth as "powers of the air." See *Acta Sanctorum*, June, Vol. IV, original edition, p. 385.

man from his birth, and they form certain orders and associates. . . . Some of these spirits are an occasion of good, in as much as man himself directs their influence to good."²

There is much more to the same effect. What is especially noteworthy is that Father Schmöger was Provincial of the Redemptorists in Bavaria at the very time when he was preparing this biography, that it was dedicated to Cardinal von Reisach, an active member of the Congregations of the Holy Office and of the Index, that it appeared with the cordial imprimatur of the Bishop of Limburg,³ that Pope Pius IX is stated to have taken a personal interest in the preparation of an Italian translation, and that translations appeared also in France (1872) and in America (1885) with fresh episcopal encouragement.

Supposing that there were any justification in fact for the above strange disclosures, taken down, as her amanuensis Clement Brentano alleged, from the lips of Sister Emmerich, in September, 1820, they would leave room for abundant speculation as to the possible causes of spiritualistic phenomena. There is, in my judgment, no reason whatever for regarding these so-called revelations as of supernatural origin; but if learned theologians can pass them for the press without any note of censure, the fact seems to imply that we possess very little positive knowledge regarding the spiritual influences which, under certain ill-understood conditions,

²*Ibid.*, p. 207.

³The second volume, in which the above rather startling utterances occur, appeared with a separate imprimatur in the following terms: "As the second volume of the work entitled *Life of Anne Catherine Emmerich*, by Father Schmöger, like the first, contains nothing contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, either in morals or dogma, but much which, if read in the spirit of piety, may contribute greatly to the edification of the faithful, we willingly grant it, after careful perusal, the approbation solicited by the author. Peter Joseph, Bishop of Limburg."

may possibly be able to interfere in the everyday concerns of mankind.

Let me note in passing that Father W. Hümpfner, O.E.S.A. (see his *Clemens Brentanos Glaubwürdigkeit in seinen Emmerick-Aufzeichnungen*) would contend, upon what seems to me inadequate evidence, that the above utterances were the invention of Brentano and did not come from Sister Emmerich herself. But my point for the moment is not that these were true revelations or that she was responsible for them, but that for fifty years they were accepted as hers without protest by all sorts of eminent theologians, who believed her to have a supernatural knowledge of many mysteries hidden from mankind at large. It was only when these and similar statements, coming before the Congregation of Rites in the process of her beatification, threatened to block further progress that Father Hümpfner, the new postulator of her cause, turning completely round upon Sister Emmerich's former biographers, such as Father Schmöger and Father Wegener, urged that Brentano's account of her visions was utterly untrustworthy. Father Wegener, O.E.S.A., the first postulator of her cause, had previously published a treatise in a precisely contrary sense.

I would urge, then, that we can hardly be too cautious in pronouncing upon the nature of spiritualistic phenomena, and that the problem cannot be solved by merely invoking, as many seem disposed to do, the authority of such great names as those of St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Chrysostom, and St. Thomas Aquinas. In this respect the little volume of Père Mainage, O.P., *La Religion Spirite*, sets an excellent example of moderation of tone. In three brief propositions, which the distinguished author describes as the "directive principles of Catholic teaching," he sums up all that

6 THE CHURCH AND SPIRITUALISM

it is quite safe to affirm regarding the Church's guidance in this matter. His three propositions are these:

"1. The Church has not pronounced upon the essential nature of spiritualistic phenomena.

"2. The Church forbids the general body of the faithful to take any part in spiritualistic practices.

"3. In the manifestations which occur the Church suspects that diabolic agencies may *per accidens* intervene."⁴

It were much to be desired that Catholic writers on the subject would emphasize these points, which are matters of certainty, and would, on the other hand, make it clear that the further considerations so often urged in anti-spiritualistic literature carry no more weight than attaches to the private opinion of those who have studied the movement with more or less of attention. It does not follow because St. Augustine, or even the Angelic Doctor, says this or that, that the Church's authority is in any way involved. Strained arguments and overpositive statements are in the long run nearly always prejudicial to the cause of truth, for exaggeration in one direction is apt to be followed by a reaction and exaggeration in the opposite sense. The insistence upon what has been called "the wholesale devil theory" in spiritualistic phenomena, as expounded, for example, by that prolific writer and lecturer on Spiritualism, the late Mr. J. Godfrey Raupert, has only led to the more ready acceptance of the nothing-but-trickery theory with which some prominent American authorities, Baron Liljencrants, S.T.D., Father de Heredia, S.J., and Dr. J. J. Walsh, are especially identified. Of the two extremes, it is the latter, in spite of its appeal to common sense, which seems to me the more misleading and consequently the more likely to prove dangerous to the cause we all seek to serve. The convinced spiritualist will, no doubt,

⁴*La Religion Spirite*, p. 176.

be indignant if you describe his controls and communicators as devils, but he recognizes that there is at any rate a common basis for argument. On the other hand, if you assure him that no real phenomena take place and that he is simply the victim of imposture, the impression produced will be that the critic is not only wrong in theory but has no personal knowledge or experience of the facts. Even such writers as Père Mainage, Father Blackmore, and Père Roure seem to me to dwell too much on the fraudulent side of Spiritualism—the temptation to enliven their pages with piquant anecdotes of discomfited mediums is naturally strong—and there is a tendency to direct attention to sensational manifestations alone, ignoring the very real difficulty presented by the simplest of phenomena. After all, if once the hypothesis of trickery be excluded, a series of raps, giving intelligent answers to spoken questions, constitutes, to my mind, just as insoluble a problem as a full-length materialisation or the floating of the medium's body in the air. Tables do not rap of themselves, and I, for one, find that Père Mainage's theory of kinetic action at a distance (of which more anon) raises even more serious difficulties than those it claims to remove.

Despite the wide prevalence of fraud, which is, of course, immensely fostered by the conditions under which séances are commonly held, the fact that physical phenomena do take place can hardly be denied by any serious student of the evidence, unless he takes up an attitude of scepticism, which would undermine the validity of all human testimony in favour of the miraculous. In certain subsequent chapters of the present volume, I hope to show the strength of the case which may be made out, first for the levitation of heavy dining-room tables in private houses, without contact and under good lighting conditions,⁵ and secondly, for the ac-

cordion playing of the medium D. D. Home, when the instrument was held upside down, not only in his hands, but in the hands of others who were present, without anyone touching the keys. In both cases the mass of evidence is very great, the standing of the numerous witnesses was unexceptionable, and the manifestations were continued over a period of many years without the slightest indication which would point to trickery or collusion.

At the same time it must be admitted that conviction in these matters belongs to the category of things which are not transferable. It comes most powerfully from personal contact with the facts, or at any rate with those who have been witnesses of the facts. For this reason it is not now my object to try to bring over to my opinion those who may think otherwise, but I am seeking to explain why I find it impossible to accept the view which at present seems to be gaining ground in many quarters that "Spiritualism is Fake." Much of it may be fake, but by no means all. It would not be easy to say how strongly I endorse the following utterance of the well-known Dominican, Père Mainage. My own experience here in London has been, so far as I can judge, precisely parallel to his in Paris.

"Is it possible [he asks], without falling into an absurd extreme of hypercriticism, to refuse credence to the confidences, made by word of mouth, of people whose mental balance, good faith, and high level of intelligence are beyond all question? To myself, as priest and religious, it has happened — if I may for once be pardoned the introduction of my own modest testimony — to come into contact

⁵The occurrence of such phenomena in the private houses of people beyond suspicion of collusion seems to me a point of very great importance. Able conjurers like Maskelyne or Houdini or Father de Heredia can imitate many of the most startling manifestations of Spiritualism, but these things are done on a stage, under conditions which facilitate the use of apparatus and the introduction of confederates. A heavy dining-room table on a turkey carpet cannot be moved along the floor by the sleight of hand of a single performer.

with such witnesses. And I admit, very simply and without waiting for the final word of science, I admit that I believe in the objectivity of spiritistic phenomena. There *are* tables which turn and which talk. Mediumistic script is not the figment of a crazy imagination. Apparitions are not all of them the result of unreal hallucinations, and the partial materialisations obtained by Dr. Geley are not a pure chimera."⁶

It is not the most marvellous phenomena or the names of famous scientists which produce the deepest impression, but for the individual a greater evidential weight attaches to the much less startling experiences of his own intimate acquaintances. The manifestations which caused such an immense sensation when the wave of Spiritualism first swept over the United States in 1850-1852, were for the most part of a very simple character. If the raps then heard were merely due to some silly trick of toe-cracking, or "subluxation of the bones," as my friend, Dr. J. J. Walsh, prefers to call it, the whole thing would soon have been convincingly exposed, and the movement would have come to an end. Dr. Walsh is apparently acquainted with one very capable expert in toe-cracking,⁷ but it does not seem to be a very common accomplishment; and if we are to account for the craze of the early fifties, hundreds, if not thousands, of such performers must have been busily employed in all the great American cities. Moreover, no amount of toe-cracking can explain the movement of tables, with the many other attendant phenomena, and — perhaps most serious difficulty of all — any very gifted practitioner in the toe-cracking business would soon have found that he could make just as good an income by exposing it as by continuing the imposture.

Have the advocates of the nothing-but-trickery theory

⁶Mainage, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁷This was "Professor Merrigan, the anatomist of Fordham University Medical School," see *Spiritualism a Fake*, p. 39.

taken the pains to read the contemporary reports of the early participators in the movement? I hardly think so, for they rarely quote them at first hand. Starting myself with a strong sceptical bias, this early literature of Spiritualism has produced upon me the same impression which it undoubtedly produced upon the most thoughtful and unprejudiced publicists of that day, men like Horace Greeley, Orestes A. Brownson, W. Lloyd Garrison, the anti-slavery leader, and J. F. Whitney, the editor of the New York *Pathfinder*. All these were serious-minded observers, who lived in the centre of the disturbance. None of them finally adopted Spiritualism as a religion, but they all bore testimony to the genuineness of the manifestations. Let it be sufficient here to quote a few lines written by W. Lloyd Garrison in 1852:

"We have read [he says] nearly everything that has appeared on all sides of the question, and endeavoured to hold the scales impartially. . . . We have heard the rappings, seen the tables moved and overturned as by an invisible power . . . we are unable here to state in what light we regard the phenomena beyond expressing our conviction that no satisfactory solution has yet been given by those who attribute them to imposture or delusion."⁸

Father Blackmore, Père Roure, and others, while holding that the overwhelming majority of the phenomena claimed by spiritualists are due to fraud, self-deception, or simple telepathy, admit nevertheless that there is a residuum which cannot be so explained. These they pronounce to be of necessity diabolic in origin, because God would not permit lost souls or souls in purgatory to coöperate in the nefarious procedure of spiritualists and mediums. They appeal, moreover, to the teaching of St. Thomas, who lays down that such souls by their natural knowledge are not even cognisant of what passes on earth. The Angelic Doctor says, for example:

⁸Quoted from *The Liberator*, of May 7, 1852, by W. P. Garrison, in *W. Lloyd Garrison, the Story of his Life*, Vol. III, p. 75. There are many similar utterances in *The Liberator* which I have myself verified.

"The separated soul has knowledge of singulars by being in a way determined to them either by some vestige of previous knowledge or affection, or by the Divine order. Now the souls departed are in a state of separation from the living, both by Divine order and by their mode of existence, whilst they are joined to the world of incorporeal spiritual substances; and hence they are ignorant of what goes on amongst us. Whereof St. Gregory gives the reason thus: "The dead do not know how the living act, the life of the spirit is far from the life of the flesh, and so, as corporeal things differ from incorporeal in genus, so they are distinct in knowledge" (*Moralia*, XII). Augustine seems to say the same (*De Cura Mort.*, XIII), when he asserts that 'the souls of the dead have no concern in the affairs of the living.'"⁹

But surely, in spite of the veneration we all pay to the authority of St. Thomas, this is rather a slender basis on which to found a final and absolute conclusion. I prefer to abstain from argument upon such transcendental matters, which are beyond my competence, but it is certain that this opinion of the Angelic Doctor has not of recent years won universal acceptance even in the most orthodox circles. It will be sufficient to quote a passage from a book, *La Psychologie du Purgatoire*, published in 1901, with due imprimaturs, by the Abbé Chollet, D. D., professor of Theology at Lille. Speaking of the intellectual activities of those detained in the place of expiation, he says:

"The eye of the soul has a still wider range. It penetrates to the surface of this world of ours. In anguish as in glory, in Purgatory as in Heaven, the soul possesses the same nature; its knowledge of the earth is the same; and if the occurrences of this life are perceptible to the elect in Heaven, they are equally perceptible to the elect in Purgatory. Those, then, whose loss we deplore have not really left us; as immaterial beings they are unaffected by locality or distance, they are near us; clear-sighted as they are, there are no opaque barriers, there is no dimness of vision. They know us, they follow our movements, and in the delicate consideration of a love which grows continually

⁹St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, Part I, q. 89, art. 8, and cf. Part I, q. 51, art. 2. Quoted from the official translation published by the English Dominicans.

purser, in the concentration of a gaze which becomes ever more intent, they enfold us in their affectionate solicitude."¹⁰

This comfortable doctrine may not be very certain, but it is to all appearance as well founded as that which it opposes. Even if we allow it only a certain measure of probability, the backbone of an argument which Father Blackmore, to take one example, develops through fifty pages¹¹ is seriously shaken. Moreover, the whole line of appeal to what would be congruous or incongruous in the divine regimen of the universe is very unconvincing. "To suppose," writes Father Blackmore, "that blessed souls in the friendship of God, whether in heaven or in the state of purgation, should become the tools or abettors of mediums who seek the gain of lucre in the gratification of the sinful curiosity of mortals, is an impious thought and most repugnant to Christian minds." This, it seems to me, is to beg the question. One might almost equally well argue that it is repugnant to the goodness of God to maintain in existence the scoundrel who only uses the wit, the health, and the resources which his Creator has bestowed upon him, in plotting the moral ruin of the young and defenceless, or to allow the devil to transform himself into an angel of light by prompting the ascetic to practise excessive austerities. Still less can this reasoning be safely applied to the souls in limbo, of whose conditions of existence we know absolutely nothing. And, lastly, when we are told that the lost cannot possibly interfere because "reprobate souls have no egress from their prison," one feels inclined to ask where that prison is situated and what the doors are made of. It is very probable that Father Blackmore is right in maintaining that neither the souls in hell nor

¹⁰Chollet, *La Psychologie du Purgatoire*, p. 47; other authors might easily be quoted in the same sense.

¹¹*Spiritism, Facts and Frauds*, pp. 375-427.

those in purgatory have any share in producing spiritualistic phenomena, but can any really sound and conclusive argument be adduced in this matter? Is it not better to confess our ignorance than to build up a whole edifice of speculation, too commonly with a certain affectation of dogmatic authority, about matters which the Almighty has not thought fit to reveal?

Taking a general view of the recent attitude of Catholics towards Spiritualism, it may be affirmed without fear of contradiction that there is a distinct tendency at present to seek explanations which evade the necessity of postulating diabolic intervention. The fraudulent aspects of the cult are everywhere very much stressed, while nearly all the writers referred to seem prepared to admit that hysteria, telepathy, and psychological hyperæsthesias developed in the hypnotic trance may have much to say in what are commonly reputed the phenomena of Spiritualism. Probably this tendency is due in large measure to the fact that the majority of those who adopt it as a religion show no greater signs of being subject to Satanic influences than the followers of Christian Science, Theosophy, New Thought, and the other weird cults with which we are now familiar, and also to the fact that it is not easy to draw a hard and fast line distinguishing spiritistic manifestations from other phenomena which are recognized as perfectly innocent. The evidence for the occurrence of what are commonly called apparitions at the point of death is overwhelming.¹² Some of these have a religious character, as when St. Peter of Alcantara, at the moment of his decease, showed himself to St. Theresa in another part of Spain, or as when warning seems to have been

¹²Apart from the huge collection of cases recorded in Gurney, *Phantasms of the Living*, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick registers 200 other examples in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. XXXIII (1922), and mentions 54 more to which references are given.

given in view of spiritual help, or in expectation of prayers and Masses subsequently to be offered for the repose of the departed soul.¹³ But the vast majority of the cases recorded have no religious character of any kind. No one will now maintain that religious apparitions are caused by angels, who, as St. Thomas holds¹⁴ assume bodies "of compressed air, shaped and colored, as we may see it in the clouds," but that the non-religious apparitions are all the work of devils. Some explanation has to be found which will fit both types.

Père Mainage meets the difficulty by assuming the operation of what he calls "complex telepathy." An impulse is generated through concentration of mind upon an idea by some agent at a distance, and in virtue of this impulse not only is the idea communicated to the percipient (simple telepathy), but it is sometimes accompanied by a vivid impression, auditive, visual, or tactile, which the percipient receives at the same moment (complex telepathy). Moreover, Père Mainage is prepared to admit a still further development which corresponds with what is called by F. W. Myers and others telekinesis. The eminent Dominican believes it to be conceivable that there may be an actual transference of matter from one place to another, and that this effect, though rare, may possibly not transcend man's natural powers. He tells the well-known story of a mate at sea who sees a man writing on a slate in the captain's cabin. It is not the captain or any of the crew. The captain is fetched, the man has disappeared, but the slate remains with the message he has written there: "Steer to the northwest." The direction is

¹³Cf. the Brompton Oratory case, when one of the Fathers, believing himself to have been awakened in the middle of the night by another Father, whose voice he clearly heard, and in whose room was the telephone, went to the patient, who was in urgent need of the last sacraments, but found afterwards that there had been no telephone call and that no one had come to his room.

¹⁴*Summa*, Pt. I, q. 51, art. 2, ad 3.

obeyed, and the discovery is made of a vessel, in danger of foundering after collision with an iceberg, on board of which the mate recognises the man whom he saw writing on the slate.¹⁵ The man in the sinking ship has projected, so to speak, not only a visual image, but a certain kinetic energy. Père Mainage considers that we have a parallel to this in a telephone or a radio installation. The impulse transmitted may be so transmuted by an adequate receiver as to leave a physical record of itself in a permanent form. In this way he is prepared to find a natural explanation of the manifestations in many haunted houses, of most Poltergeist phenomena (where there is always a child or young person who is the centre and real agent of the disturbance), of the telekinetic phenomena of such mediums as Eusapia Palladino, and even of the materialisations of Marthe Béraud, alias Eva C. I can only suggest that the acceptance of such a theory would seem to require a revision of the whole conception of the miraculous. Only a very slight extension of the same line of argument would be required to provide a non-supernatural interpretation of those cures of organic disorders which are allowed to rank in the Bureau des Constatations at Lourdes or are accepted as a guarantee of the divine approval in the canonization of saints. Still it is only fair to add that Père Mainage does not dogmatize. He leaves his readers quite free to adopt his speculations or to reject them, and, as already noticed, the point upon which he wisely lays most stress is the narrow range of the "directive principles" to which the Church stands committed in her official utterances.

If the question should be further asked why modern critics, even among the clergy, seem so anxious to minimize the influence of Satan in the phenomena of Spiritualism, I think we should have to answer that not only do perfectly

¹⁵Mainage, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-154.

innocent manifestations, such as apparitions and appeals for prayers, shade imperceptibly into those which are justly regarded with suspicion, but also that there are quite a number of cases on record where the guidance received through automatic writing, and even through recognised mediums, has proved beneficent and salutary. A very remarkable example is the story of Mme. Mink Jullien as she herself has recounted it in the little book not long since translated into English.¹⁶ The lady and her husband, who held an appointment in the Far East, were both of them agnostics. The husband died, and the wife, in her utter misery, taking up automatic writing, began, as she believed, to receive a series of communications from the dead man. These after a while took the form of urging her to seek peace in the bosom of the Catholic Church. She complied, and, as Père Mainage, who contributes a preface, attests, she has proved herself for some years a most fervent and exemplary convert. The case is not so uncommon as might be supposed. I have myself known two excellent Catholics, one of them a nun, who have had a similar experience, and some other examples will be found, treated in more detail, later on in this volume.

No doubt Satan is very subtle and poses sometimes as an angel of light, but these facts and other weighty considerations of the same kind, seem to point to the conclusion that the influences encountered in the practice of Spiritualism are not all of them evil. I am myself inclined to believe that there are really outside intelligences which communicate (though such communications are invariably colored and distorted by the subconscious beliefs of the medium or automatist), and that these intelligences are often mocking or freakish, often untruthful, sometimes brutal, licentious, and

¹⁶*The Ways of God; the Story of a Conversion*, by Madame H. Mink Jullien (London: 1925).

malevolent, but not infrequently sincere and kindly. It is easy to believe that Satan and his myrmidons are apt to take a direct part in such intercourse, but there seems nothing to exclude the possibility that the discarnate spirits of the unbaptised, or it may be, other intelligent beings whose existence has not been otherwise made known to us, also intervene. All this, however, is mere conjecture. What we know for certain is that the attempt to communicate with the unseen through spiritualistic practices is extremely dangerous and that the Church in all ages has very wisely forbidden it.

And here, before we pass to another chapter, it may not be out of place to quote the precise terms of the two decisions of the Holy Office which more directly deal with the matter now under discussion. The first decree has reference to the practice of automatic writing and is dated March 30, 1898.

Question. "Titius, while excluding from his purpose any compact with the spirit of evil, is accustomed to evoke the souls of the dead. His method is this: Being alone in his room, without any kind of external ceremony, he prays to the leader of the heavenly hosts to grant him the opportunity of conversing with the spirit of some definite person. He waits for a little time and then he feels his hand moved, and by this he learns the presence of the spirit. Then he explains what he wants to know and his hand writes the answers to the questions proposed. All these answers are in accord with the Faith and with the Church's teaching regarding a future life. For the most part such replies relate to the state of the soul of some dead person, the need that it has of prayers, and complaints of the negligence of its relatives. In the circumstances explained it is asked whether this practice of Titius is permissible."

To this the answer was returned: *Uti exponitur non licere* (in the circumstances explained it is not permissible), and the decision was ratified by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII.¹⁷

Some twenty years later, in a full assembly of the Congre-

¹⁷See the *Analecta Ecclesiastica*, Vol. VI, p. 187.

gation of the Holy Office, the following *dubium* was propounded:

Question. "Is it lawful by means of a medium, or without a medium, whether hypnotism be employed or not, to take part in any sort of spiritistic communications or manifestations, even such as present an appearance of sincerity and piety, either by questioning the souls or spirits, or by listening to the answers received, or merely by looking on, even with a silent or explicit protest that one has no wish to have anything to do with evil spirits.

"The most Eminent and Reverend Fathers decided that in every one of these suppositions the answer must be in the negative."

This decree was ratified on April 26, 1917, by His Holiness Pope Benedict XV.¹⁸

It is not very likely that the members of the Congregation of the Holy Office had made any profound researches into the history of Spiritualism. They probably based their decision upon theological considerations alone. But if they had troubled themselves to investigate the origins and early developments of the movement, they would have found much to confirm their attitude of distrust. As a source of guidance the first communicating spirits had brought no blessing upon their votaries but only dire calamity. Let us turn, therefore, to this strangely sinister portent of so much that was to follow. This is an aspect of the case which must not be left out of account in any statement of the Catholic position.

¹⁸ *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, Vol. IX, p. 268.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDERS OF MODERN SPIRITUALISM¹

THERE can be no doubt that, like other newfangled creeds which have survived for half a century or more and have attracted a considerable following, Spiritualism counts among its associates many well-meaning people whose lives are free from reproach. I have personally come into contact with many such, just as I have known some estimable Christian Scientists and perfectly sincere Theosophists. Ever since a large part of the world drifted from its religious moorings under stress of the Reformation, an ever-increasing number of earnest men and women, striving to find an anchorage for their aspirations after God and a future life, have attached themselves to almost any system which offered some half truth lending itself readily to experimental trial. Christian Science makes its main appeal to the healing of disease; Theosophy to the doctrine of Karma which professes to explain the mystery of human suffering; Spiritualism bases its claim upon certain psychic phenomena which, as I venture to hold, are real in some cases, though often fraudulent, and which down to our own times have never been adequately investigated. People who are groping for any religious hold-fast take no interest, as a rule, in the past history of these movements. They only want a prescription which will assuage some sort of dull ache in their souls; while often enough in the mere effort to comply with certain outward observances or to imbibe a teaching which is rather beyond their

¹Lest I should seem to have borrowed other people's materials without acknowledgment, it may be noted that the substance of this chapter was printed in *The Month* for February, 1920.

powers of apprehension they find a measure of relief which contents them. There are very few Christian Scientists who are acquainted with the real facts of the life of Mrs. Eddy as they are set out irrefutably in the biographies by Georgine Milmine or E. F. Dakin. There are hardly any Theosophists who can be persuaded to look into the history of the Theosophical Society, an organization built up by Madame Blavatsky out of the debris of her own career as a spiritualist and out of Col. Olcott's abortive "Miracle Club." In like manner, most of the adherents of the movement with which we are here concerned find a sufficient guarantee of respectability in the support of such representatives as Sir Oliver Lodge and the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and do not care to trouble themselves about its origin. These two protagonists may be men of the highest repute — just as were Judge Edmonds, Professor R. Hare, and Mr. Robert Dale Owen in the middle of the nineteenth century — but the advent of the "New Revelation" cannot be dated from the afternoon in September, 1915, when Lady Lodge went to see Mrs. Osborne Leonard in the hopes of getting into touch with her dead son Raymond. Spiritualism already had a long and rather grim history behind it. Mrs. Leonard is, no doubt, a medium whose honesty is above suspicion,² but there have been hundreds of practitioners before her, from Margaretta and Katie Fox down to Eusapia Palladino, whose records are by no means so satisfactory. We cannot pass judgment upon the system merely from the communications alleged to have been made through approved mediums during the past twenty years. It is to the tendency of the cult as a whole that

²See the very interesting paper by Miss Radclyffe-Hall and Lady Troubridge in Part 78, of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, p. 343. The detective agency used found nothing suggestive of trickery on the part of Mrs. Leonard.

appeal must primarily be made, and least of all can we afford to neglect the sad lesson taught by the career of its actual founders. For this reason I propose, in the present chapter, to give an account of some features in their history — a history which has attracted too little attention. Those enthusiasts who see something providential and divine in the movement, may surely be called upon to offer an explanation of the fact that the powers which guided it were so singularly unfortunate in their selection of the instruments through which this heavenly message was first made known to the world.

On March 31, 1920, a widely advertised meeting was held in the Queen's Hall, London, to commemorate the anniversary of the birth of Modern Spiritualism. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, an old schoolfellow of mine, as a sequel to a short controversial correspondence I had had with him just then, was kind enough to send me a ticket. He was himself the principal speaker, and I heard him tell a crowded audience that they were there that evening "to celebrate the seventy-second anniversary of what spiritualists considered to be the greatest event which had occurred in the world for two thousand years." He did not hesitate to proclaim that the movement began with the manifestations at Hydesville in Wayne County, New York, in which the two Fox sisters played a principal part. Margaretta Fox was then (March, 1848) 14 or 15 years old, and her sister Katie 12.³ Inexplicable noises and rappings, it is said, had been heard for some time in the farmhouse occupied by the family, and one night Margaretta Fox, snapping her fingers a certain number of times, challenged the powers which produced these sounds to reply by

³There is some discrepancy in different books regarding the ages of the children. I follow the statement of their mother, Mrs. Fox, as cited by H. Spicer, *Sights and Sounds* (London: 1853), pp. 57-58. With this, Mr. Podmore's account agrees, and also that of Sir A. C. Doyle.

making the same number of raps. This was done. Then their mother, Mrs. Fox, who was present, asked the spirit to give by raps, first of all the number of her children (only the two youngest girls were actually living in the house), and afterwards their respective ages. To all these questions correct answers were returned. After some further experiments of the same sort on different occasions in which the neighbours participated, it occurred to someone to try to ascertain the name of the rapping spirit; this he did by calling out the letters of the alphabet in turn and requesting that a rap should be given at the proper letter. In this way the name "Charles B. Rosna" was spelled out and a basis for further communications was established.⁴ It is quite unnecessary to describe in detail the developments of this new system of spiritual telegraphy. Great excitement was caused in the neighbourhood, and when the family a few months later moved to Rochester, the rappings followed them there. Gossip and the newspapers spread the report of these occurrences far and wide. Other curious persons soon began to try to put themselves in communication with the spirits, notably Leah, a much older sister of the Fox children, who was married to a man named Fish. It was she, we are told, who first discovered that there was money in the business, but though numbers of people strove to develop mediumistic powers, the two younger Fox sisters remained for a long time by far

⁴The spirit who communicated and was responsible for the knockings purported to be that of a peddler who had been murdered by some previous occupant of the house and had been buried in the cellar. See Sir A. C. Doyle's article in *Psychic Science*, Vol. I (1922), pp. 212-237, entitled "The Mystery of the Three Fox Sisters." I confess that I am not satisfied with the evidence for the discovery of the remains of the murdered man. Some traces were said to have been found at the time in 1848, and an almost complete skeleton in 1904. The point is irrelevant to the present discussion. What is certain is that when the Fox children, almost immediately afterwards, removed to Rochester, their repose continued to be disturbed by manifestations of a most alarming and turbulent character. See the long account given in their elder sister's book, *The Missing Link*.

the most successful of the practitioners in this line, and very soon all sorts of other phenomena manifested themselves in their presence in addition to the rappings. Writing in 1854, by which time Spiritualism as a cult had become familiar in every part of the United States, and was rapidly spreading over Europe, Mr. Capron remarks:

"During the six years that have elapsed since the commencement of the manifestations at Hydesville, there have been few more singular, and no more convincing proofs of the agency of spirits than were given to the family of Mr. Fox. Almost every variety of the phenomena that have startled the world since that time was known to them long before the public were made aware of the existence of such strange occurrences. They have had all the variety of sounds, speaking in an audible voice, moving of furniture, touching and writing by the spirits. Blocks of wood were thrown into the windows when they were open, with important directions written upon them. Information was given to the family which was of essential benefit, by writing on the floor of a room where it was known that no living visible person had been."⁵

The rapidity with which the craze spread almost passes belief. Judge Edmonds, a man of unimpeachable integrity, who had occupied the highest judicial position in the United States, became an early convert. He himself had spiritual visions, in which he saw spirit forms as clearly as the objects he beheld with his bodily eyes; endless communications were made to him in automatic script which purported to emanate from Francis Bacon, Swedenborg, Benjamin Franklin, and other celebrities of the past; his daughter developed mediumistic powers, and in her trances is said to have spoken in half a dozen different languages which she had never learned. Now, Judge Edmonds, after travelling in every part of the States to lecture to his fellow spiritualists, seriously computed that already in 1854 the followers of the move-

⁵Capron, *Modern Spiritualism, Its Facts and Fanaticisms* (1855), p. 55.

ment in America numbered as many as 3,000,000. Two years earlier, Mr. H. Spicer, an Englishman, after a visit to the States, had brought back word that there were 30,000 mediums there, asserting in particular that there were 300 "magnetic circles," i.e., reunions of spiritualists, in the one city of Philadelphia. While we cannot fail to regard these estimates as greatly exaggerated,⁶ they bear witness beyond doubt to a development which was felt to be quite phenomenal. So far as I have been able to discover, the fact that this prodigious excitement was subsequent to, and set in motion by, the experiences of the Fox sisters at Hydesville, is questioned by no one, though they themselves were gravely suspected of fraud by the more sceptical.

Upon the findings of the committee of doctors in Buffalo, who inquired into the rapping phenomena of the Fox family as early as February, 1851, I do not propose to dwell. They came to the very definite conclusion that the girls produced the noises themselves by cracking their knee joints, but they did not exclude the possibility of other articulations, for example, those of the toes or the ankles, being used in the same way. The report may be read in Podmore,⁷ and as a carefully reasoned argument it is certainly damaging to the credit of the parties suspected. A few weeks later a certain Mrs. Culver, a connection of the Fox family, volunteered a statement, published in the *New York Herald*, in which she declared that Katie Fox had accepted her proffered assistance and shown her how to produce the raps by cracking her toes. Mrs. Culver averred that she had acquired some

⁶These figures were challenged by other spiritualists but Judge Edmonds defended them warmly. In 1866 he held that there were 5,000,000 believers in the United States, i.e., one sixth of the total population. See *The Spiritual Magazine*, 1867, p. 328 and cf., p. 159.

⁷*Modern Spiritualism*, I, p. 184. See also Mrs. Henry Sidgwick in the *Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, Vol. IV, p. 47.

dexterity in the business, but was too old to rival the performances of those who had learned it in early youth. A considerable discussion followed in the newspapers, the spiritualists replying with vigour, but it is at any rate clear that an attitude of credulity was by no means universally prevalent. More than a year before the investigation of the Buffalo doctors (i.e., in February, 1850), an English traveller who visited the Fox girls at Rochester, wrote to Mr. Epes Sargent:

"My opinion of the rappings is that they are human, very human, sinfully human, made to get money by. If really there is a ghost in the matter, then quite certainly he is very fickle, something of a liar, very clumsy, very trifling, and altogether wanting in good taste. It would indeed be very painful to me, exceedingly, if I thought that any man on this earth, on dying, had ever turned into such a paltry, contemptible ghost. . . . My experience will be useful to me in regard to superstition as a disease of the human mind. I have learned something from the errand I have been on. But to me the knockings themselves are not nearly so wonderful as the echoes they make in the city of New York."⁸

The curious thing is that the writer of this letter (a Mr. W. M., only initials are given), became at a later date a convinced believer in Spiritualism. Be this as it may, it is certain that the movement was not decisively checked or retarded by the criticism of which the Fox sisters were the object. Though, as we shall see later, Margaretta (afterwards Mrs. Kane), gave no séances from about 1856 to 1867, her sister Katie (Mrs. Jencken) was always engrossed in her mediumship, and it may be said roughly that for thirty years or more the two were looked upon as among the most highly gifted of the mediumistic fraternity. But in October, 1888, when the sisters were already something more than middle-aged, an astounding event happened. For several

⁸Epes Sargent, *Planchette, or the Despair of Science* (Boston: 1869), p. 34.

weeks rumours had been rife that an exposure of the frauds of Spiritualism was imminent. Mrs. Margaretta Fox Kane, arriving in New York from Europe, manifested to an interviewer her intention of showing up the whole business. She had had, it would seem, a bitter quarrel with her elder sister, Mrs. Leah Underhill (formerly Fish), who not very long before had published a book, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* (New York, 1885). This purported to tell the history of those early manifestations at Hydesville and Rochester in which the three sisters had been concerned, but I do not know whether this was the cause of the quarrel. In any case, the interview with Mrs. Kane, reported in the *New York Herald* for September 24, 1888, included the following details:

"Since you now despise Spiritualism, how was it you were engaged in it so long?" I asked.

"Another sister of mine," and she coupled the name with an injurious adjective, "made me take up with it. She's my damnable enemy.⁹ I hate her. My God! I'd poison her! No I wouldn't, but I'll lash her with my tongue. She was 23 years old the day I was born. I was an aunt seven years before I was born. Ha! Ha!"

As the language itself shows, Mrs. Kane was in a very excited state, and declared tragically that she would have thrown herself overboard on the journey, if she had not been prevented by the captain and the doctor. Then she resumed:

"Yes, I am going to expose Spiritualism from its very foundations. I have had the idea in my head for many a year, but I have never come to a determination before. . . . I loath the thing I have been. As I used to say to those who wanted me to give a séance: 'You are driving me to hell.' Then the next day I would drown my remorse

⁹It is only fair to note that Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten in *The Unseen Universe* (September, 1892, p. 302), while writing sympathetically about the sisters Margaretta and Katie, describes Mrs. Leah Underhill as "one of the most generous and noble of women." Mrs. Britten had known them all intimately.

in wine. I was too honest to remain a medium. That's why I gave up my exhibitions.

"When Spiritualism first began, Kate and I were little children, and this old woman, my other sister, made us her tools. Mother was a silly woman. She was a fanatic. I call her that because she was honest. She believed in these things. Spiritualism started from just nothing. . . . Our sister used us in her exhibitions and we made money for her.

"Dr. Kane found me when I was leading this life." The woman's voice trembled just here and she nearly broke down. "I was only 13 when he took me out of it and placed me at school. I was educated in Philadelphia. When I was 16 years old, he returned from the Arctic and we were married."

The interview ended by a demonstration of how the rappings could be produced — so at least the reporter believed — by cracking the toes. On October 9, the youngest sister, Katie (Mrs. Jencken), also a widow, arrived from Europe. She likewise accorded an interview to the representative of the *New York Herald* and expressed her intention of taking part in the exposure projected by Mrs. Kane:

"I regard Spiritualism [she said] as one of the greatest curses that the world has ever known. . . . The worst of them all (the Spiritualists) is my eldest sister Leah, the wife of Daniel Underhill. I think she was the one who caused my arrest last spring and the bringing of the preposterous charge that I was cruel to my children and neglectful of them. I don't know why it is, she has always been jealous of Maggie and me; I suppose because we could do things in Spiritualism that she couldn't."

On October 21, a great meeting took place at New York in the large hall known as the Academy of Music. A certain Dr. Richmond, skillful in sleight of hand, imitated successfully the slate-writing and thought-reading phenomena of the séance room. Then Mrs. Margaretta Fox Kane stood up and, in her sister's presence, read a short speech, the most striking utterances of which run as follows:

"That I have been chiefly instrumental in perpetrating the fraud

of Spiritualism upon a too-confiding public, most of you doubtless know.

"The greatest sorrow in my life has been that this is true, and though it has come late in my day, I am now prepared to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God! . . .

"I am here tonight as one of the founders of Spiritualism to denounce it as an absolute falsehood from beginning to end, as the flimsiest of superstitions, the most wicked blasphemy known to the world."¹⁰

I have verified these facts by looking up the account given of the meeting in the *New York Herald* and the *New York Daily Tribune* for the next day, October 22. The *New York Herald* begins its article as follows:

"By throwing life and enthusiasm into her big toe Mrs. Margaret Fox Kane produced loud spirit-rapping in the Academy of Music last night and dealt a death-blow to Spiritualism, that huge and world-wide fraud which she and her sister Katie founded in 1848. Both sisters were present and both denounced Spiritualism as a monstrous imposition and a cheat.

"The great building was crowded and the wildest excitement prevailed at times. Hundreds of spiritualists had come to see the originators of their faith destroy it at one stroke. They were greatly agitated at times and hissed fiercely. Take it all in all, it was a most remarkable and dramatic spectacle."

A practical demonstration of the rappings followed Mrs. Kane's speech. The same reporter thus describes the scene:

"There was a dead silence. Everybody in the great audience knew that they were looking upon the woman who is principally responsible for Spiritualism, its foundress, high-priestess, and demonstrator. She stood upon a little pine table with nothing on her feet but stockings. As she remained motionless, loud distinct rappings were heard, now in the flies, now behind the scenes, now in the gallery."

The reporter of the *New York Daily Tribune* does not appear to have been quite so favourably impressed by Mrs. Kane's share in the performance. He describes her as "highly excited" and says that she "delivered her written address in

¹⁰R. B. Davenport, *The Deathblow to Spiritualism* (New York: 1888), p. 76.

a fragmentary and mirth-provoking style." Of the rapping demonstration he tells us: "she had slipped off a shoe to facilitate this scientific investigation and, putting her stockinged foot on the board, the audience heard a series of raps, 'rat-tat-tat-tat-tat,' increasing in sound from faint to loud and apparently traveling up the wall and along the roof of the Academy."

The *Herald* report is less critical, and it continues:

"Upon these rappings Spiritualism sprang into life, and here was the same toe rapping it out of existence. Mrs. Kane became excited. She clapped her hands, danced about and cried:

"'It's all a fraud! Spiritualism is a fraud from beginning to end! It's all a trick. There's no truth in it!'

"A whirlwind of applause followed."

Rather more than a year later, at the house of Henry J. Newton, a prominent spiritualist in New York, Mrs. Margaretta Fox Kane, in the presence of a reporter and witnesses, made a formal recantation of her previous confession:

"Would to God," she said, in a voice which trembled with intense excitement, "that I could undo the injustice I did the cause of Spiritualism when, under the strong psychological influence of persons inimical to it, I gave expression to utterances that had no foundation in fact."

At a further stage in the interview we have the following dialogue:

"Was there any truth in the charges you made against Spiritualism?"

"Those charges were false in every particular. I have no hesitation in saying that."

"Won't you name any of those who were instrumental in causing you to make such sweeping charges against the methods of 'your people'?"

"I do not wish to just now. But I will mention that persons high in the Catholic Church did their best to have me enter a convent."¹¹

¹¹Probably some such institution for inebriates as St. Veronica's Retreat, then existing at Chiswick.

"Was the offer made to you by anyone in this country?"

"No; in London. I had a letter from Cardinal Manning advising me to abandon this 'wicked work of the devil.'"¹²

It is worthy of notice that Mrs. Jencken, in a letter to *Light*, had already in some sort repudiated her share in the "exposure" at the Academy of Music. She died of drink in June, 1892, and Mrs. Kane, the last survivor of the Fox sisters, followed her, in March, 1893. Her end was pitiable and tragic. Witness the following:

"The tenement house of No. 456 West 57th Street, New York, is deserted now, except one room, from cellar to roof. The room is occupied by a woman nearly 60 years of age, an object of charity, a mental and physical wreck, whose appetite is only for intoxicating liquors. The face, though marked by age and dissipation, shows unmistakably that the woman was once beautiful.

"This wreck of womankind has been a guest in palaces and courts. The powers of mind, now almost imbecile, were the wonder and study of scientific men in America, Europe, and Australia. Her name was eulogized, sung, and ridiculed in a dozen languages. The lips that utter little else now than profanity once promulgated the doctrine of a new religion which still numbers its tens of thousands of enthusiastic believers."¹³

Postponing, for the moment, further comment on this infinitely sad history, the question naturally suggests itself: Which are we to believe of the two apparently contradictory statements recorded above? Is trust to be placed in the confession of fraud, or in the retraction of that confession a twelvemonth afterwards? Though it may seem a paradox-

¹²This account, with facsimile of signatures of Mrs. Kane and witnesses, appears in *The Medium and Daybreak*, December 27, 1889, copied from *The Celestial City*, a New York spiritualist journal. Cf. *Light*, December 20, 1889, p. 614.

¹³*Washington Daily Star*, March 7, 1893, quoted in *The Medium and Daybreak*, April 7, 1893, p. 212.

ical conclusion, my own inclination is to answer: "In both."

There is, no doubt, reason to believe that Mrs. Kane told the truth when she averred that the whole of Spiritualism, as she knew it, was contaminated by imposture. But she also told the truth when she admitted that she had lied in ascribing to trickery all the phenomena that occurred. Spiritualism was not all fraud. Genuine manifestations often took place under favourable conditions, but they could not always be evoked at will, and when the spirits were recalcitrant, recourse was had to fraud to supply what was needed.

That there may have been some element of trickery in the séances of the Fox sisters seems to be altogether probable. The fact that Mrs. Kane, when over 50 years of age, should still possess the power of producing a storm of raps, apparently by cracking her toe joints, would point to long practise, and however much we may discount the confession of a confirmed inebriate, influenced by vindictive motives, the report of the Buffalo doctors, the story told by Mrs. Culver, and the findings of the later Seybert Commission, point in the same direction. But there is more than this. The one redeeming feature in the career of Margaretta Fox a pathetic incident in itself, is the story of her relations with Dr. Elisha Kane, the Arctic explorer. By the testimony of all who knew him, Kane was a fine character, clean-living, enthusiastic, courageous to a fault, honourable, and tender-hearted. He first saw Margaretta when he was one day led by curiosity to attend one of the séances given by the Fox sisters, and her beauty and childlike simplicity seem to have made a strong appeal to him. He sought her acquaintance, and for a while succeeded in withdrawing her from her contaminating surroundings and paid for her education in Philadelphia. His own family, who belonged to a rather exclusive New York set, were much opposed to this attachment, but

eventually a secret marriage took place. Very shortly afterwards, in 1857, Kane fell ill, was sent to Havana for a cure, and died there without seeing his wife again. In due course a rather elaborate biography of Dr. Kane was published, which, while celebrating his achievements as a man and an explorer, completely ignored the whole of his relations with Margaretta Fox. In self-defence she, deeply hurt, sanctioned the issue of a volume entitled *The Love-Life of Dr. Kane*, which was compiled almost entirely from the letters he had addressed to her. At this time she had become a Catholic, and had given up Spiritualism. Hence, no attempt was made to disguise the earnestness with which he had constantly pleaded with her to have nothing more to do with the séances. Passages such as the following occur repeatedly:

"Oh, Maggie, are you never tired of this weary, weary sameness of continual deceit? Are you doomed thus to spend your days, doomed never to rise to better things?"

Or again:

"Don't rap for Mrs. Pierce (Mrs. Pierce was the wife of the then President of the United States). Remember your promise to me. . . . Begin again, dearest Maggie, and keep your word. No rapping for Mrs. Pierce, or ever more for anyone. I, dear Meg, am your best, your truest, your only friend."

Or once more:

"Do avoid spirits. I cannot bear to think of you as engaged in a course of wickedness and deception. Maggie you have no friend but me whose interest in you is disconnected from this cursed rapping. Pardon my saying so; but is it not deceit even to listen when others are deceived?"¹⁴

The references to the subject, always in the same tone, contained in Dr. Kane's letters, are far too numerous to quote. He even touched upon it in the verses he occasionally wrote to his beloved over the half-playful signature of "Preacher." Here is one brief extract:

¹⁴*The Love-Life of Dr. Kane* (New York: 1866), pp. 105, 114, 201.

Then the maiden sat and wept,
 Her hand upon her brow;
 So long this secret have I kept,
 I can't foreswear it now.
 It festers in my bosom,
 It cankers in my heart,
 Thrice cursed is the slave fast chained
 To a deceitful art.¹⁵

Taking the whole body of letters and documents printed in *The Love-Life of Dr. Kane*, it seems to me impossible that he would have written as frankly as he did except on the supposition that his fiancée had confessed to him the deceptions involved in the life she was leading. At what date the habits of intemperance, which in the end so fatally overshadowed the closing years of both sisters, first began to manifest themselves I am unable to say. It is only fair to point out that their father was apparently a victim to the same deplorable weakness, but the surroundings of the séance room must surely have had the worst effect on character, and it was no doubt because Dr. Kane saw Margaretta's need of some clear rule of life and strong religious influence that he, though a Protestant himself, encouraged her to join the Catholic Church. The fact is chronicled by the work just quoted, in a passage which betrays, quaintly enough, the writer's unfamiliarity with the ceremony of baptism:

"In August, 1858, she became a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Dr. Kane had often advised her to join this Church, and many times had accompanied her to Vespers at St. Anne's in Eighth Street, New York. The ceremony of her baptism at St. Peter's Church in Barclay Street, New York, was new in this country, and was attended by a large assemblage. The lady was attired in white and was accompanied by her sponsors, her father and mother, and her youngest sister. The priest made the sign of the cross upon the candidate's

¹⁵*Love-Life of Dr. Kane*, p. 40.

forehead, ears, eyes, nose and mouth, breast and shoulders, repeating appropriate words in Latin. She was anointed with the holy oils and introduced into the Church by receiving the stole, a long white veil reaching to the ground, and a burning light, emblematic of the faith. The occasion was the Feast of the Assumption, and the church and altar were decorated, the statue of the Virgin being covered with flowers."¹⁶

In one of the New York papers which mentioned this ceremony the following description is given of the new convert:

"She is a very interesting and lovely young lady and is very young. She has large dark Madonna eyes, a sweet expressive mouth, a petite and delicately moulded form, and a regal carriage of the head with an aristocratic air quite uncommon."

Mrs. Kane's break with Spiritualism seems, with occasional lapses, to have lasted for nearly ten years, but then, alas! she completely succumbed either to the solicitations addressed to her, or to the pinch of what was at least relative poverty. In the London *Spiritual Magazine* for July, 1867, we find it recorded that Margaretta Fox, who "embraced the Roman Catholic faith, and from religious motives, as it was thought, renounced Spiritualism," had again been associated with these manifestations. As the same journal states, "after her medium powers have been held in abeyance for so many years, she has at last been pressed by the spirits into their service at the very town of Rochester where she was first developed, and is now once again before the world as Mrs. Margaretta Fox Kane, with undiminished powers, as a spirit-medium." From this date, although in the service of Mr. Henry Seybert, the spiritualist, she was provided with an ample salary, she seems to have sunk steadily downward until the climax was reached which has already been described. Some of her fellow spiritualists drew harsh lessons from her

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 284.

sad history. For example, Mr. James Burns, the editor of *The Medium*, wrote as follows after her death was announced:

"Mrs. Kane, it has been made to appear, had intercourse with the Romanists, who prevailed on her to state that her mediumship was false and that Spiritualism had been her ruin. . . .

"Here we have a wonderful twofold spiritual spectacle; we have a woman giving spiritual manifestations to others, while within herself she is spiritually lost and misdirected. All moral sense, and control of mind and desire were gone. . . .

"But when the medium makes a trade of it and puffs the thing up as a commodity for sale, then farewell to all that might elevate or instruct in the subject. . . . Under such circumstances, and with drunkenness, sensuality and moral abasement of all kinds added, is it any wonder that this kind of thing has covered the cause with scandals and left a heap of festering corpses along the course of these 45 years?"¹⁷

Mr. James Burns, as editor and publisher, was a pillar of English Spiritualism, and the strength of this language would suggest that the past record of the movement, better known to him than to most others, did not seem a matter for unmixed satisfaction.

I have said that, while fully admitting the part played by trickery in the exhibitions of the Fox sisters, I also believe in the authenticity of a good deal of the rapping phenomena. In arriving at this conclusion no argument impresses me more than the marvellously rapid spread of the movement. Of the many hundreds, not to say thousands, of mediums who within three or four years were developed in the United States, it is inconceivable that all were rapping with their toes or adopting some similar fraudulent device. If that were all the mystery, there would at least have been a fair proportion of them, who having found out that they could perform the silly trick, would have grown bored, and would, as I

¹⁷James Burns, in *The Medium and Daybreak*, London, April 28, 1893, p. 258.

have remarked before, have found it easier to earn money by exposing the procedure than by seeking out dupes who believed in it. A craze like this requires some foundation in fact, some real mystery, to set people speculating and to keep them interested. Anyone who can believe that the whole movement, involving, to say the very least, tens of thousands of people, some of them men of high intellectual eminence, was based on nothing better than a mere children's prank, seems to me to show a lack of practical judgment and common sense. Supposing, as Faraday claimed to have proved, that table-turning may be accounted for by unconscious muscular action, it is easy to understand that many who practised such experiments must have believed in good faith that the tables were turned by the spirits. The mediums, or those who thought they were mediums, may themselves have been deluded. But with rappings which were due to trickery, such self-deception was impossible. People who rapped with their toes or their knee joints must have known that they did it. No circle which assembled could have obtained any raps at all except in the presence of some fraudulent persons who had acquired by long practice the rather difficult art of producing them. Under these conditions I cannot account for the fascination of the craze, its rapid extension and relative permanence.

Moreover, apart from more general considerations, one has the evidence of the facts. Persons known to me, sitting as novices to experiment out of mere curiosity, without a medium, have obtained raps at their very first trial. In Dr. W. Crawford's séances with Miss Kathleen Goligher, an unpaid medium, which were said to be conducted under strict test conditions, knocks of every description were heard, and served as means of communication. Sir William Barrett, F.R.S., who assisted at some of these sittings, describes how,

when a loud knock was given and a request was made for something still louder, "there came a tremendous bang which shook the room and resembled the blow of a sledge hammer on an anvil."¹⁸ This could hardly have been due to the cracking of Miss Goligher's joints, then a girl of seventeen. The late Lord Rayleigh, F.R.S., in his presidential address, at which I was myself present in 1919, told the Society for Psychical Research how Mrs. Jencken (Katie Fox), when staying in his own house in 1874, though remaining motionless and in a good light, produced from the door "loud thumps such as one would hardly like to make with one's knee."¹⁹ The amount of first-rate scientific evidence for phenomena of this kind seems to me quite overwhelming, and if these things can happen now, there is no intrinsic reason why the Fox girls should not, at least occasionally, have been similarly favoured in the early days at Hydesville and Rochester.

But however the case may be regarding the reality of the rappings from which modern Spiritualism sprang into being, the moral degradation of Margaretta and Katie Fox stands revealed for all time. If the confession of 1888 is worthy of credit, the whole edifice of Spiritualism has been reared upon systematic imposture. If, on the other hand, we are rather to trust their subsequent retraction, they have thereby convicted themselves of the basest ingratitude to their spiritualist benefactors and of a blasphemously solemn appeal to God to witness to a lie.

¹⁸*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. XX, p. 335, 1919. Mr. Whately Smith, who was present on other occasions, similarly speaks of "sledge-hammer blows which shook the whole floor." *Ibid.*, p. 314. Here and elsewhere I quote Sir William Barrett because I knew him well, and, like all others who were acquainted with him, am convinced of his absolute sincerity, as well as of his alertness and accuracy as an observer.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 280.

At the same time I should be sorry to speak unsympathetically of the sad career of these two so-called Founders of Spiritualism. Few priests can fail to have met cases in which a most generous and attractive character has been pitifully transformed by the subtle virus of alcoholism, and it is often very hard to decide how far the poor victims are responsible for what they do. It was not only Dr. Elisha Kane who paid tribute to the charm of the Fox sisters. Mr. Horace Greeley, the well-known editor of the *New York Tribune* and a statesman of rare breadth of view, remained their cordial friend for several years and tried his best to rescue them from their surroundings. What is more surprising, Orestes A. Brownson, in his curious *causerie*, half novel, half dissertation, entitled *The Spirit Rapper* (1854), speaks of the two girls in the most appreciative terms.

"I owe it [he declares] to them and to the public to say, that they were simple-minded honest girls, utterly incapable of inventing anything like those knockings, or of playing any trick upon the public. The knockings were and are as much a mystery for them as for others, and they honestly believe that through them actual communication is held with the spirits of the departed. They are in good faith, as they some time since evinced by their wish to become members of the Catholic Church, which certainly they would not have wished, in this country at least, if they looked upon themselves as impostors, and had only worldly and selfish ends in view. They are no doubt deceived, not as to the facts, as to the phenomena of spirit rappings, but as to the explanation they give or attempt to give of them. They have not always been treated, I fear, with due tenderness, and sufficient pains have not been taken to enlighten them as to the real nature of these phenomena."²⁰

This statement, first printed in the autumn of 1854, that both sisters had leanings towards Catholicism is in many ways remarkable. It certainly must have been founded on

²⁰*The Works of Orestes A. Brownson*, collected and arranged by H. F. Brownson. Vol. IX, p. 81.

some definite piece of information, for at that date the two Fox girls were quite public characters in American life, and a highly respected and representative Catholic, such as Brownson was, could not afford to print a mere surmise without imminent risk of finding himself ignominiously confuted by one of their many admirers. As stated above, Margaretta Fox Kane did not actually join the Catholic Church until August, 1858, four years after the appearance of the work just quoted; while Katie Fox, so far as I am aware, never became Catholic at all. Margaretta seems to have persevered in some sort of profession of Catholicism for about ten years, but even at that time she cannot have been entirely faithful in her renunciation of spiritualistic practices, for R. Dale Owen, in his book *The Debatable Land*, mentions that on October 25, 1860, she took part with her sister Kate in a séance at which he was present — a sitting which was marked by a blow of quite terrific violence striking, as it seemed, the centre of the table. "By the sound," he declares, "it was such a stroke, apparently delivered by a strong man with a heavy bludgeon, as would have killed anyone." Phenomena of this kind seem to have been characteristic of the mediumship of Margaretta Fox. In a footnote, Mr. Owen observes that this was "the only time, I believe, at which she joined our circle. Having become a Catholic, she had scruples about sitting."²¹

There was undoubtedly something exceptional in the knocks produced under the mediumship of Mrs. Fox Kane, and her sister seems to have possessed the same power of originating violent percussive noises apparently at will. Was this due to the action of subservient spirits, who obeyed their behests, or was it, as has been suggested, a faculty inherent in themselves of projecting etheric or teleplasmic rods, in-

²¹R. Dale Owen, *The Debatable Land* (London, 1871), pp. 275-276.

visible to normal sight but in some degree under the medium's control? Apparently the knockings were, as Brownson says, "as much a mystery for them as they were for others." They did not know how they produced them, and this may possibly account for the submissiveness with which Margareta bore with her fiancé's reproaches of deception. She let people think that the spirits were knocking, whereas she was at least vaguely conscious that the force came from something inside herself. I agree with Sir A. C. Doyle that the matter is shrouded in mystery. At the same time it is very difficult to resist the evidence that raps, thuds, or crashes did occur, and occurred not merely in the darkness, but in full light, at times when every movement of the medium could be observed. Sir William Crookes, F.R.S., who was not then a spiritualist, but who believed in what he and Sergeant Cox called "psychic force," wrote very emphatically upon the subject. After stating that sounds or raps are noticed with almost every medium, each having a special peculiarity, he goes on:

"But for power and certainty I have met with no one who at all approached Miss Kate Fox. For several months I enjoyed almost unlimited opportunity of testing the various phenomena occurring in the presence of this lady, and I especially examined the phenomena of these sounds. With mediums generally, it is necessary to sit for a formal séance before anything is heard; but in the case of Miss Fox it seems only necessary for her to place her hand on any substance for loud thuds to be heard in it, like a triple pulsation, sometimes loud enough to be heard several rooms off. In this manner I have heard them in a living tree—on a sheet of glass—on a stretched iron wire—on a stretched membrane—a tambourine—on the roof of a cab—and on the floor of a theater. Moreover actual contact is not necessary. I have heard these sounds proceeding from the floor, walls, etc., when the medium's hands and feet were held—when she was standing on a chair—when she was suspended in a swing from the ceiling—when she was inclosed in a wire cage—and when she had fallen fainting on a sofa. . . . With a full knowledge of the numerous theories which have been started, chiefly in America, to

explain these sounds, I have tested them in every way I could devise, until there has been no escape from the conviction that they were true objective occurrences, not produced by trickery or mechanical means.²²

It must be remembered that Sir William Crookes, the discoverer of thallium, and the inventor of the radiometer, was a very eminent scientific man, who in 1874 was at the height of his powers. Unlike Sir A. C. Doyle in our own day, or Judge Edmonds in a past generation, he was then wedded to no quasi-religious theory. He himself states explicitly —

That certain physical phenomena, such as the movement of material substances, and the production of sounds resembling electric charges, occur under circumstances in which they cannot be explained by any physical law at present known, is a fact of which I am as certain as I am of the most elementary fact in chemistry. My whole scientific education has been one long lesson in exactness of observation, and I wish it to be distinctly understood that this firm conviction is the result of most careful investigation. But I cannot, at present, hazard even the most vague hypothesis as to the cause of the phenomena. Hitherto I have seen nothing to convince me of the truth of the "spiritual" theory.²³

Those, however, who believe that the knockings of the Fox sisters were caused by spirits, e.g., by the ghost of the murdered peddler, have a very serious difficulty to face. In her own private apartment, as described by a *New York Herald* reporter, and again before a crowded audience at the Academy of Music, Mrs. Kane produced raps at will, in order to prove that the spirits had nothing to do with the matter and that she caused the sounds herself. The spiritualists, therefore, are forced to admit that the spirits in this

²²Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1874), p. 87. Obviously some, at least, of the phenomena must have been observed in daylight.

²³Crookes, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4. I may note that even Father de Heredia, S.J., does not dispute the fact that the production of raps, though at present unexplained, may be due to purely natural causes. See his book *Los Fraudes Espiritistas y los Fenomenos Metapsiquicos* (1931), pp. 255-265.

case bore testimony to their own non-existence, and also that Mrs. Kane, even when half intoxicated, had an assured conviction that they would not fail her. Thus we find ourselves confronted by a very curious problem. Perhaps another century or two of psychic research may provide a solution, but, for the present, Sir William Crookes' attitude of reserve seems still to impose itself.

In his article entitled "The Mystery of the Three Fox Sisters" (1922) and in his *History of Spiritualism* (1926), Sir A. C. Doyle did his best to palliate the stigma which the career of Margaretta and Kate had fastened upon the cause. But he could not dispute the fact that the scene at the Academy of Music took place as described above. He also admitted that Kate, as well as Mrs. Kane, in a printed interview, declared that what happened at Hydesville "was all humbuggery, every bit of it." Moreover, he avowed that when Mrs. Kane was bent on demonstrating that Spiritualism was nothing but trickery she produced a storm of raps at will, not only in the public hall where they were audible to a large assembly and seemed to come from the walls and roof of the building, but also privately when she was interviewed by a reporter of the *New York Herald*. Sir Arthur was probably right when he remarked:

"She really knew no more of the nature of these forces than those around her did. The editor [i.e., of *The Love-Life of Dr. Kane*] says: 'She always averred that she never fully believed the rappings to be the work of spirits, but imagined mere occult laws of nature were concerned.' This was her attitude later in life, for on her professional card she printed that people must judge the nature of the powers for themselves."²⁴

And again:

"When a man like Dr. Kane assured Margaretta that it was very wrong, he was only saying what was dinned into his ears from every quarter, including half the pulpits of New York. Probably she had

²⁴*History of Spiritualism*, I, p. 92.

an uneasy feeling that it *was* wrong, without in the least knowing why, and this may account for the fact that she does not seem to remonstrate with him for his suspicions."²⁵

Doyle's theory, as already hinted, was that Maggie's raps were caused by the protrusion from some part of her person of a long rod of ectoplasm, a substance invisible to the eye under normal conditions, but which is capable of conducting energy in such a fashion as to make sounds and strike blows at a distance. He appealed to Dr. Crawford's experiments with the Goligher circle, in which good evidence was obtained of the existence of some such mysterious substance. Further, he considered that "it is entirely possible that Margaretta had some control over the expulsion of ectoplasm which caused the sound." In the Goligher séances, however, we were given to understand that it was the "operators," spirits who required to be treated with every courtesy, who were the executants of all the phenomena. The medium was an absolutely passive instrument. But Margaretta Fox Kane was evidently sure of her own powers. When she wanted to rap, the raps came, even though she used the gift to demonstrate that the phenomena were all fraudulent. Those, then, who adhere to the belief that it is the spirits who produce the raps are forced, as stated previously, to admit that the spirits in this case bore testimony to their own non-existence, and also that Margaretta had an assured conviction that they would not fail her. On the other hand, if we suppose that she was able at will to extrude ectoplasmic rods as far as the roof of the hall and thus produce the raps unaided, the whole spiritualistic element disappears. She may have had this power from childhood, and it may be some precisely similar power which is responsible for the *Poltergeist* phenomena, which are almost invariably asso-

²⁵*Ibid.*, I, p. 90.

ciated with a child or young person under twenty. From the narrative of Leah (Mrs. Underhill) in her book, *The Missing Link*, Doyle was led to conclude that "the entities with which the Fox circle were at first in contact were not of the highest order."

This is, of course, but a very imperfect sketch of the career of the Fox sisters. One might have said much about the well-attested manifestations witnessed at their séances in early days, and one might have dwelt upon the ample provision made for them by patrons like Horace H. Day, Henry Seybert, and Charles F. Livermore.²⁶ If only they had been able to exercise self-control, they would never have been in any danger of poverty. But while we make the fullest possible allowance for the pitiable effects of heredity in the matter of intemperance, the impression left upon us is intensely sad and even sinister. It surely needs a curious obliquity of vision to see anything divine in a revelation ushered into the world under such auspices.

²⁶See for example *The Spiritual Magazine*, 1871, pp. 525-526, and Emma Hardinge Britten's *Autobiography*, p. 39.

CHAPTER III

CATHOLICISM AND THE EARLY SPIRITUALISTS

IN A BOOK which is almost certainly the first considerable work on Spiritualism produced by a British author — I refer to Henry Spicer's *Sights and Sounds*,¹ may be found many interesting sidelights upon the beginnings of that perplexing movement which has since occasioned so much controversy. Visiting the United States in a spirit of complete scepticism, Mr. Spicer eventually became a believer in the philosophy, or at any rate in the phenomena, of the new cult, and, in spite of many trivialities and digressions, his pages preserve a more impartial picture of the conditions under which the craze developed than can easily be met with elsewhere. I do not here propose, however, to discuss the work in question, but a casual utterance which is recorded therein and which purports to emanate from the spirits in the beyond, seems worthy of the attention of those who approach the subject from the Catholic standpoint. Speaking of the non-sectarian character of Spiritualism in these very early days, Mr. Spicer declares that "persons of all Churches and creeds have lent themselves to the movement," and he goes on to state that "one of the most remarkable *media* in answer to a question 'Which religion is the true one?' answered — 'None are perfect, but the Roman Catholic Church is nearest to the truth.'"²

Who the particular medium was through whom this an-

¹The full title is *Sights and Sounds; the Mystery of the Day, Comprising an entire History of the American "Spirit" Manifestations*, by Henry Spicer, Esq. (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853), 486 pp.

²*Sights and Sounds*, p. 444. *Media*, still italicized in these early books as a new locution, was often used at first by spiritistic writers for the plural of medium.

swer was obtained is unfortunately not stated, but there can be no doubt about the fact that—owing possibly to such well-known Catholic tenets as the belief in miracles, in purgatory, and in the revelations made to holy people—there was a distinct Romeward trend in many of the more religiously minded enquirers whose curiosity was awakened by the phenomena of the early spiritualists. Margaretta Fox, the cofoundress of modern Spiritualism, and D. D. Home, the most famous of all mediums, were both received into the Church, but both, it is sad to note, subsequently fell away. Of Margaretta an account has just been given; Home's short-lived conversion will form the subject of a subsequent chapter.

That there have been other prominent spiritualists who with more or less of sincerity and constancy have coquetted with Catholicism will be known to those who have studied the literature of the movement. A conspicuous example was Florence Marryat (Mrs. Lean), the author of *There is no Death* and other spiritualistic works. *The Dictionary of National Biography* states that "although a Roman Catholic, she received permission from her director, Father Dalgairns of the Brompton Oratory, to pursue researches of the kind in the cause of science." This was, of course, long before the promulgation of certain recent decrees, but one feels very doubtful whether Father Dalgairns can ever have sanctioned such "researches" as those which are described in some of Florence Marryat's spiritualistic books.

Even Mr. Stainton Moses, whom Sir A. C. Doyle regarded as one of the great seers of Spiritualism, seems at one time to have fallen under the spell of Catholic influences. "Imperator," the control who declared himself to be no less a personage than the prophet Malachy, when explaining to the famous medium how his religious development had

been the special care of the highest order of spirits, informed him that:

"It was during this phase of your religious belief that we directed your study to the records of that body of Christian believers who falsely arrogate to themselves the title of the Church of God and call themselves Catholic and Universal. You read their books, you knew their creed, you learned from them much that was real and true; and if you learned naught else, at least you unlearned that chilling heartless bigotry which would identify Catholic belief with universal damnation, and would make Rome synonymous with hell. Another ray dawned on your soul when you learned to believe that a Catholic might be saved, and that God might even look with favour on the ignorant prayer to the Virgin which came warm from the heart of the fanatical peasant who had no knowledge but his faith. But indeed you learned more. You learned of angel ministry, of saintly intercession, of the power of prayer."³

These tributes to Catholic teaching, however qualified, are perhaps the more remarkable because there can be no question that the Church from the very beginning adopted the most uncompromising attitude towards the spiritualistic movement. As Mr. Spicer remarks, the testimony that Catholicism "comes nearest to the truth" has been received by the Roman Communion "in a most ungracious spirit, inasmuch as her teachers have, with much anxiety, warned their hearers against yielding any sort of credence to the new manifestations."⁴ Possibly the very earliest pronouncement of a more public and serious character which in the name of the Church and ecclesiastical authority put Catholics on their guard against the pretensions of the spirit-rapping craze was an article in the *Boston Pilot*. I have not seen the original newspaper in which it appeared, but the article is copied entire in Adin Ballou's book, *Spirit Manifestations*, the first edition of which was published in Boston in 1852.

³Trethewy, *The Controls of Stainton Moses* (1923), p. 13.

⁴*Sights and Sounds*, p. 445.

Ballou himself was a Universalist minister who had founded a curious and austere socialistic community at Hopeton. He was an earnest believer in the new cult born of the phenomena of the Fox sisters. The *Pilot* article is only quoted by him to illustrate the prejudice and narrow-mindedness of Catholics, who, like the Methodists, the Episcopalians, and most other denominations, had refused to find anything religiously inspiring in the manifestations from the other world. In spite of Mr. Ballou's indignant protests there is much forcible common sense and an undercurrent of humour in the "editorial" in question.

The writer (one is tempted to guess that it may have been Orestes A. Brownson) begins by a summary of what he describes as "the pretensions of the rappo-maniacs," how the souls of the departed, progressing through a series of spheres or worlds, each of which is more perfect than the last, have been for ages "trying to communicate with people in this world, to tell them how happy they are, how watchful they are over us, and to give us, generally, the news from the other side." But men for the most part have been indifferent, except for some few saints and miracle workers, our Lord among them, "who, they say, was an extraordinary mesmerist and of a wonderfully susceptible organization." Now at last, we are told, the barriers between the two worlds are giving way. Men have become more spiritualized and the spirits have begun to communicate freely with mortals. The time is at hand when conversation between spirits and mortals will be as common as conversation among living men. Already raps are being discarded as too clumsy a means of communication. All that is now necessary is to provide pencil and paper and wait until some spirit guides your hand. "Whole books," says this critic (already in 1852!), "have been written in this way; recently one was written by the

now happy ghost of Tom Paine, who is at present travelling in the sixth heaven and expects soon to reach the seventh."⁵ It is even promised that before many years these communications and physical manifestations will become so common as to excite no remark. The following passage, as coming from a Boston Catholic, who lived in the heart of what he describes, deserves to be given in full:

"Our readers, at least most of them, will hardly believe that this delusion has so spread over New England, and towns in other states of New England origin, that scarcely a village can be found which is not infested with it. In most small towns several families are possessed, the medium between the erratic ghosts and the crazy fools being, in some cases, a weak and half-witted woman, but in most instances a little girl, whom her parents and friends have prostituted to this wicked trade. Most of the mediums, who are sometimes, but not always, put into a mesmeric sleep before starting in search of the ghosts, become stark staring mad, and so do many of the believers. Not a week passes that does not see some one of them commit suicide or go to the madhouse. All of the mediums give unequivocal signs of some abnormal unnatural disturbance of their bodily and mental functions. Some of them discover indications of what looks like genuine possession by a devil. The evil is unquestionably spreading, and it will, in a few years, exhibit shocking results."

Although we must, no doubt, allow for some exaggeration in a newspaper article of this kind, the writer's statements regarding the prevalence of the craze are entirely borne out by such native spiritualists as Ballou, Capron, and Judge Edmonds, as well as by English visitors like Mr. Spicer. Even as regards the spread of lunacy and suicide, the accusation could not be wholly denied. Ballou, in answer to the objection that these manifestations cause insanity, replies only: "They *do*, when *grossly* abused; not otherwise."

⁵This work was produced through the mediumship of the Rev. Charles Hammond. There is a copy of it in the British Museum library.

So does love between the sexes; so does gold-seeking and property-getting; so does religion."⁶ But to discuss the evidence on this point would take us too far afield. We are concerned here primarily with the Catholic attitude as manifested in this issue of the *Boston Pilot* of June, 1852. So far as Catholics themselves were concerned, the writer declares that few had been led astray by this new "rappomania." There had been attempts made to inveigle Irish servants in Protestant households into taking part in such practices. "Scarce any," we are told, "have fallen into this unfortunate mistake; and those who have, led either through excessive complaisance or curiosity, soon pitched the whole affair to the black spirit that started it."⁷ For the most part, "the Irish girls behave nobly, they laugh at the ignorance and superstition of their silly employers." We need not follow the writer in his historical review of the subject nor in his excellent comments on the case of the girl "having a pythonical spirit," recorded in the sixteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. In connection with this last incident he notes that "something similar has happened in circles where the *medium* was busily at work talking with the real or supposed ghosts, the accidental entrance of a baptised person—a Catholic—made the spirit dumb. This has occurred several times within our knowledge."

Returning from his review of the past to contemporary manifestations, the writer unhesitatingly assigns a large share in the business to trickery. "It is certain," he declares, "that

⁶*Spirit Manifestations* (Boston: 1852), p. 89.

⁷An attack made upon Margaretta Fox in November, 1850, when staying at West Troy in the house of a Mr. Bouton, was said at the time to have been the work of Irish roughs. But Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten admits that "it was found that Catholics and Irish do not make up the bulk of the rude and jibing mobs that surrounded Mr. Bouton's house, fired the shots, and threw stones at the windows, uttering meanwhile threats and imprecations against the 'unholy witch-woman within.'" *History of Modern American Spiritualism*, 4th ed. (New York: 1870), p. 88.

in some cases the raps or noises, supposed to have been made by uneasy ghosts, were made by machinery, or by the toes, knee joints or hands of the mediums." The fools who sit around a table with their hands spread upon it are easily duped.

"Yet [he goes on], making due allowances, it is a question whether something more serious than mere jugglery be not at the bottom of this rappomania. We have thought, read, seen, and heard somewhat about it, and our opinion is that the affair is not pure undiluted imposture. Amidst the mass of trash, certain traces of an *Intelligence* that is not human are tolerably clear. . . . That a communication can be established between spirits and mortals is certain, of course. The Holy Scriptures testify that such communications were common. . . . The possibility, therefore, that these manifestations are, to a certain extent, real and made by invisible beings is hardly questionable."

Arguing from the fact, which no Catholic will dispute, that spirits, good and bad, are *effectually present* to the human soul, the writer concludes that diabolic influences may be presumed to be actively at work in encouraging these manifestations. The powers of evil have an interest in promoting them, for nothing is so fatal to soul and body as this rappomania.

"It is quite easy, therefore, to see that Catholics cannot countenance it at all. As might be expected they do not. Grant that it is wholly a humbug, they are not accustomed to tolerate humbugs. . . . But there is a possibility that, with all the humbug, there may be a devilish agency at work in the matter; and, in this view of the case, no Catholic can have in it part or lot. Hence we counsel our readers to avoid it, to spurn it, without forgetting to laugh at it. As far as possible, shun the houses and the company of the humbugged unfortunates, the knaves or the demoniacs who practise it. If circumstances compel you to live with them, a hearty prayer and a plentiful supply of holy water will meet the necessities of the case."⁸

⁸See Ballou, *Spirit Manifestations*, 1st edition (Boston, 1852), pp. 141-153, where he reproduces the article in full. I am indebted to the great kindness of the late Mr. Henry Ford, for some time a professor at Princeton University, for sending me this among many other precious volumes bearing on the early history of Spiritualism.

As already suggested, it is possible that this article was written, or at least inspired, by Orestes A. Brownson, the famous American convert from Unitarianism. His home was then at Chelsea, a suburb of Boston. He seems to have been on good terms with the *Pilot*, and the views expressed are in close accord with those which may be found more fully elaborated in that strange book of his (which, in spite of its fictional setting, is neither romance, nor history, nor dissertation) *The Spirit-Rapper*, published in 1854, two years later.

But of all the examples of the Romeward tendency of early Spiritualism the most curious that I have met is the conversion, in 1857, of Dr. T. L. Nichols and his wife, Mary S. Gove Nichols, which took place at Cincinnati. Both of them, owing to their connection with socialistic and other movements, seem to have been well known in America, and, when they settled subsequently in England, they again achieved a certain reputation by publications on hygiene, economics, spirit manifestations, etc., for the most part of a rather extravagant type. It was Dr. Nichols who first instructed the British public on *How to Live on Sixpence a Day*, and who published an account of the Davenport Brothers, which was appealed to by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as establishing conclusively the reality of the Davenport phenomena. What concerns us now, however, is a tiny pamphlet of eight pages containing an explanation of the Nichols's conversion to Catholicism and an apology for the same.⁹ The main statement is preceded by an "Introductory Letter" to the Archbishop of Cincinnati (Dr. J. B. Purcell), in which the writers,

⁹It bears the title: *Letter from Dr. T. L. Nichols and Mrs. Mary S. Gove Nichols, to their friends and coworkers, giving an account of their conversion to the Holy Catholic Church*, and it was printed at *The Democratic Expositor* office, Springfield, Ohio. I am indebted to the Very Rev. Canon Norris, of Brentwood, for a copy of this rare and most curious tract.

after mentioning that they have been "the centre of a large society of Reformers, who have acted with us, more or less, in the propagation of our opinions and in our efforts to prepare for a new Social Order," proceed to inform his Lordship that —

"The intelligence of our conversion will be received with incredulity by some, with astonishment and indignation by others, by many doubtless with ridicule and contempt. The Socialists, Spiritualists, and Reformers with whom we have been connected will regret or blame our defection and desertion; or say, as one has already said in the bitterness of her heart, 'Have the Nicholises, too, sold the Blessed Lord for thirty pieces of silver?'"

In the body of the pamphlet the writers beg their former fellow workers to believe that they have in no way lost their practical interest in the projects of social reform because they have come, "through Infinite Mercy, to accept the Grace of God through the Order of His Church as the Divinely appointed means of removing these evils." But the main feature of the apologia is a narrative of facts, beginning thus:

"In the autumn of 1854 Mrs. Nichols became what is called a subjected medium for spiritual manifestations and communications. . . . We have had abundant proof that there are good and bad spirits, as there are good and bad men, and we judge both by similar rules. In the beginning of the manifestations Mrs. Nichols was told: If you open your mind indiscriminately, bad and worthless communications will be made to you. From this warning . . . we were effectually put on our guard against indiscriminate communications; so much so, that we have not been willing to visit mediums, or to receive communications as verities except from three mediums, nor have we always given these full reliance. . . . Those who say that we have accepted the dogmas, morality, and discipline of the Catholic Church because they have been communicated to us by spirits, in a mere blind credensiveness [*sic*], without faith or understanding, do not know what they say. . . . We have accepted the dogmas of the Church, as explained by what purported to be the spirits of two

eminent Catholic saints; but so clear and beautiful was their explanation of the soul and meaning of these dogmas, that we could as well have turned voluntarily from Heaven to Hell, as to refuse to believe these Heavenly Doctrines."

The writers go on to say that in the winter of 1856 a spirit appeared to Mrs. Nichols, "while in circle," who declared himself to be a Jesuit and announced that the aims of his Society were no other than the same moral reform striven for by high-minded social workers. He urged her, consequently, to enquire into the history and doctrines of the Society. As Mrs. Nichols was always obedient to the counsels of her "guardian spirit" who had promised to protect her from all harm, and as the Jesuit communicator had not been formally recommended by this guardian spirit, she paid no attention to the advice so given. Her husband, however, knowing nothing of the Jesuits or of Catholicity, had the curiosity to procure a Protestant history of the Society. But stranger things followed:

"Six months after the circumstances related above, a venerable shade appeared in circle to Mrs. Nichols, wearing a dress resembling that worn by the Order, which she had not then seen, and having also a rope girdle about his waist, the knotted ends of which were stained with blood. He rebuked her earnestly for not having examined Jesuitism, and exclaimed: 'Justice! Justice to the Society of Jesus!' He said his name was Gonzales and we heard afterwards that he was one of the early Jesuit Fathers—a missionary and a martyr.¹⁰ So earnest was the demand of this spirit that we should examine the doctrine and records of this Society, that Mrs. Nichols wrote to the Archbishop of Cincinnati stating the circumstances and asking what books we should procure, and was by him referred to the Rector of St. Xavier's College.

¹⁰There were many Jesuits of this name, but the priest here intended seems to be Father Roque Gonzalez de Santa Cruz, a native of Asuncion (Paraguay), who was martyred by the Indians of that province, November 15, 1628. His skull was smashed to pieces by blows of a wooden club. See Astrain, *Historia de la Compañia de Jesús en la Asistencia de España*, Vol. V, pp. 513-514.

"Near the same time, the shade of the venerable Founder of the Society, St. Ignatius de Loyola, appeared to Mrs. Nichols and gave her what he called 'a method of reduction' [*sic*]. It was directions for an order of life, that we believe to be divinely inspired, and to which we hope, by the grace of God, communicated through His Church, to live in a holy obedience."

Although husband and wife still remained wholly ignorant of Catholic doctrine, another guide manifested in the same way and declared that he was St. Francis Xavier. Through this last spirit a complete course of instruction was communicated to the enquirers upon which they expatiate in considerable detail and with great enthusiasm. The teaching began with the Sacrament of Baptism and culminated in the Immaculate Conception. The final outcome is thus narrated:

"When these sacred mysteries had been explained and illustrated to us, with such clearness of demonstration or such power of grace that we were constrained to believe, we had not yet read any books of Catholic Doctrine. . . . We were then directed (by the spirit) to procure the authorized books of Catholic doctrine. We did so, and became satisfied of the identity of the doctrines taught us and those held by the Roman Catholic Church. We also wrote to a Catholic layman and afterwards to a Jesuit priest, sending them accounts of our experience. Both assured us that every item, thus communicated to us, was of Catholic faith.

"We were now directed by our spiritual father, whom we believe to be no other than the blessed St. Francis Xavier, to seek the grace of baptism, and the oral instruction of the Church. This we did by going to Cincinnati, and on the 29th of March receiving the Sacrament of Baptism at the hands of Father Oakley, Rector of St. Xavier's College."

Then, after referring to the marvels recorded in the *Life of St. Francis Xavier* and in those of other saints, the writers add in reference to the spiritualistic movement:

"May it not be that the Almighty has permitted similar manifestations, out of the Church, to awaken people to the great fact of a spir-

itual existence, and then to be the means, as in our case, of bringing them into the fold of His Church, which is truly spiritual, and full of divine and miraculous manifestations?"

This is a strange story, and one can hardly help suspecting that it is based upon some extraordinary faculty of self-delusion. Still, Dr. and Mrs. Nichols can have had no conceivable pecuniary or other motive for conscious deception. Whether both remained faithful and practical Catholics until their death I am not altogether able to say, but I have before me some letters of theirs written twenty years later when they were resident in England. In one of these Dr. Nichols states that he came to London in 1861 with letters of introduction to Cardinal Wiseman, Bishop Grant, etc., and that since then Dr., afterwards Cardinal, Manning had twice said Mass in the house occupied by himself and his wife at Malvern. At the same time, it is clear from Dr. Nichols' letter (which was addressed to the late Canon Gilbert of Moorfields), that the Doctor thought it no harm to assist at spiritualistic manifestations. He says for instance: "I have very carefully observed the so-called materialisations which sometimes occur in the presence of Mr. Eglinton (the medium) and though I was suspicious of fraud I became entirely satisfied of his good faith." Similarly, his wife, writing at the same date (1877), refers to the priest under whose direction she has remained continuously for twelve years, and speaks in every way as a devout Catholic, though she also alludes to the séances with Eglinton at which she has assisted and to the exercise of her own clairvoyant powers. Of course, it must be remembered that at this date participation in séances and mediumistic practices had not been forbidden in the same explicit terms as those used in the decrees of the Holy Office which have been reproduced in Chapter I.

In a curious book published by T. L. Nichols, in 1887, with the title *Nichols' Health Manual; being also a Memo-*

rial of the Life and Work of Mrs. Mary S. Gove Nichols, he tells again briefly the story of their conversion. Certain additional facts may here be learned. He remarks, for example:

"I have no reason to believe that Mrs. Nichols, a Puritan, Quaker, Swedenborgian, Fourierist, had ever read either the Nicene or the Athanasian Creed. Her father was a Freethinker—her mother an Universalist. She did not know the number or the names of the seven Sacraments. We had no Catholic books—no Catholic acquaintances; yet she gave, day by day, speaking in a kind of trance, so full and clear a statement of Roman Catholic theology, that when we sent a synopsis of it to the only Catholic we happened to know personally, then living at Richmond, to ask if it were true, he sent it to a Jesuit Father in Virginia, who wrote: 'I offer no opinion as to the mode in which this has been received, but I can assure you it is, in every item, of Catholic faith.'"

Dr. Nichols goes on to state that his wife remained a devoted member of the Catholic Church until her death in 1884, and on the last page of the book we are presented with an engraving of her tombstone in Kensal Green Cemetery, London. It is a simple stone cross with the single word JESUS engraved in large letters in the centre, and at the foot the words "Pray for the Soul of Mary S. Gove Nichols" with dates. The author further declares that when he and his wife first came to London and presented themselves to Cardinal Wiseman, narrating the strange story of their conversion, "he received us very kindly and said he had known several similar cases." Dr. Nichols adds, "I give the facts and do not attempt any explanation."¹¹

One final remark must be added in this place. Among the friends whom the Nicholoses made in England were William and Mary Howitt, both of them writers of some distinction. The husband died in 1879, the wife in 1888, and both are separately commemorated in the *Dictionary of National*

¹¹*Nichols' Health Manual*, p. 97. See also the reference to Mrs. Nichols' conversion in the Appendix to this volume.

Biography (Vol. XXVIII). They were ardent spiritualists, and the husband, in 1863, brought out a *History of the Supernatural* which is still of value for the curious facts he has gathered up from out-of-the-way sources. Of the Howitts, *The Times*, in an obituary notice, remarked: "Their friends used jokingly to call them 'William and Mary,' and to maintain that they had been crowned together like their royal prototypes. Nothing that either of them wrote will live, but they were so industrious, so disinterested, so amiable, so devoted to the work of spreading good and innocent literature, that their names ought not to disappear unmourned." After her husband's death Mrs. Howitt became a Catholic, and she died most piously at Rome in 1888. William Howitt was a frequent contributor to the spiritualistic journals and in 1875 he wrote a rather violent article in the *Spiritual Magazine* attacking Catholic devotion to our Blessed Lady. To this Dr. Nichols replied with an "Expostulation," in which, after expressing his "great respect for Mr. William Howitt and his warm personal regard for all the members of the family," he concludes his letter with the following protest:

"Not only are all Catholics 'spiritualists' [this is true, in the sense that they believe in a world of spirits which may on occasion communicate with mankind as we see, for example, in the case of St. Jeanne d'Arc] and therefore entitled to fair and decent treatment in a spiritualist magazine, but many spiritualists, in England and America, have become Roman Catholics. Some remarkable mediums are among the number—one of the Fox girls, for example, and the daughter of the late Judge Edmonds. I am personally acquainted with many such. With what feelings do you imagine that they will read Mr. Howitt's eighteen pages in your January number?"¹²

That Judge Edmonds's daughter became a Catholic does not seem to have been generally known, but Dr. Nichols is

¹²*The Spiritual Magazine*, 1875, pp. 143-4.

not likely to have been misinformed on such a point. Certain it is in any case that the late Earl of Dunraven, in his book *Past-times and Pastimes* (1922), speaks of her in terms of the most cordial regard. Making reference to a visit which he paid to the United States in 1869, Lord Dunraven says:

"I had a few letters of introduction; among them one given to me, I have no doubt, by my friend D. D. Home, the famous medium, to Judge Edmonds; and it was to him we paid our first visit. Judge Edmonds was a most charming man, a most interesting and lovable personality — a typical American of those days. He was a New Englander, I think; at any rate, he represented the best characteristics of that type. That he had commanding intellect and acquired learning, his position as Judge of the Supreme Court abundantly proves. That in moral courage he excelled is shown by his declaration of faith in Spiritualism. It takes some courage even now for a man eminent in any phase of life requiring keen powers of observation and a calm dispassionate judicial mind, to avow his belief in that theory and to assert the reality of the phenomena attributed to it; but it must have been a trial indeed to a man in the highest legal position in the land to assert his belief, sixty or seventy years ago, in a system universally condemned as founded on the most barefaced trickery and deception, and accepted only by credulous fools. Whether Judge Edmonds was right or wrong does not matter; he was a very courageous man. Quaint, full of human kindness, brilliantly intelligent, he was a most delightful host and companion. He was a dear old gentleman; and his daughter Laura Edmonds, afterwards Mrs. Gilmour, was a feminine replica of him — they were a picture, and the setting of it was worthy of them. . . . Mrs. Gilmour corresponded with me at intervals till her death at Glen Falls three years ago — a charitable, kindly and noble woman."

As we learn from her father, Laura Edmonds, before 1854, had developed mediumistic powers which were altogether remarkable. Falling into trance she at times held converse with those who addressed her in different Indian dialects and in modern Greek — languages of which she was quite ignorant — making intelligent replies to the questions which

were put to her. As to her practice of Catholicism after her reception and her perseverance in the faith, I unfortunately know nothing. But, in any case, it seems clear that the beliefs adopted by the father at the cost of so much self-sacrifice did not permanently satisfy the needs which the daughter felt of inspired religious guidance.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONVERSION OF HOME, THE MEDIUM

THAT the medium, Daniel Dunglas Home, was received into the Catholic Church at Rome, and was admitted to an audience with Pius IX, is a fact well known to all who have given any attention to the career of that famous psychic. To do him justice, Home deals with the subject very fully in the first series of recollections which he published under the title of *Incidents in My Life*. Whether the writer's candour be real or only apparent, it is not perhaps easy to determine, but he evidently wished to produce the impression of meeting his critics fairly and in the open. At the time when Home came to Rome he was twenty-three years of age, having been born in Scotland in 1833, though nearly all his life since early childhood had been spent in the United States. The medium's spirit-rapping experiences began in 1850, and in the following year he had already acquired a considerable reputation, sometimes holding circles as often as six times a day.¹ In 1855 he crossed the Atlantic, and after spending a few months in England, he came to Florence in the autumn. There, in the month of December, an attempt was made to assassinate him, but only a very slight dagger wound was inflicted. The motive of the outrage was never discovered, and some scoffers even have doubted the reality of the occurrence, despite the very circumstantial account of the affair which Home supplies in his *Incidents*. To his biographer, however, who emphasizes "the shock caused to his sensitive temperament" both by the outrage and the

¹Mrs. Home, *D. D. Home, His Life and Mission*, p. 11.

extreme severity of the winter, the state of the medium's health seemed mainly responsible for the fact that shortly afterwards he lost, or at any rate declared that he had lost, his special psychic gift. On the evening of February 10, 1856, as Home himself records, "the spirits told me that my power would leave me for a year." At this time he had been on the point of undertaking a journey to Naples in company with Count Branicki and his family who were all Catholics. The psychic wrote to explain that, as he was no longer able to promise any manifestations, he felt he ought to decline their invitation to join them. He was informed, however, that he need feel no scruples, as he was wanted for his own sake and not for any exhibition of his powers. The party spent three weeks in Naples, and in spite of the suspension of his mediumship, phenomena took place in Home's presence, though he explains them by saying that his being there seemed to develop the power in others. It is stated that one of the Royal Princes, who joined in a séance which was held in the house of the American Minister at the Court of Naples, was himself a medium, and manifestations occurred by which Mr. R. Dale Owen, the Minister in question, was converted to Spiritualism. Then, on a change of scene, new influences were encountered, and Home's religious views underwent a change, which his second wife, in her *Memoir*, introduces as follows:

"From Naples, the Branicki family and their guest went to Rome, where the Catholic influences that surrounded him exerted themselves constantly and effectively to turn his thoughts towards seeking refuge in the Church. They were aided by the cruel experiences he had recently suffered. The falsehood of friends to whom he was much attached had wounded him keenly, the occurrences that closed his stay in Florence had profoundly saddened him; and while these clouds darkened the natural sunshine of his spirit, a veil had been suddenly dropped between him and the world beyond, and all

counsel and comfort from it was withdrawn. In this gloomy moment, Catholic advisers suggested to him that the peace of mind he longed for might perhaps be found in the Church of Rome, and he sought and read with intense eagerness works relating to her doctrines."²

Home's own account, written in 1863, states that, when all natural and spiritual consolations were withdrawn, "life seemed to me a blank," accordingly he was led to read Romish books, and then,

"Finding them expressive of so many facts which I had found coincident in my own experience, I thought that all contending and contradictory beliefs would be forever set at rest, could I but be received as a member of that body. My experiences of life and its falsity had already left so indelible a mark on my soul, from my recent experiences of it at Florence, that I wished to shun everything which pertained to this world, and I determined to enter a monastery."

We really have no record of experiences at Florence, save the attempt upon his life, which seem adequately to explain so profound a depression. It is impossible not to conjecture that either some love disappointment had occurred or that his sudden propinquity to the next world had thoroughly frightened him. Be this as it may, the account goes on:

"After two or three weeks of serious deliberations on the part of the authorities, it was decided that I should be received as a member of the Church and I was confirmed. The Princess O(rsini) was my godmother, and the Count B(ranicki) my godfather on the occasion. I was most kindly received by the Pope, who questioned me much regarding my past life. He pointed to a crucifix which stood near to us, and said: 'My child, it is upon what is on that table that we place our faith.' He also gave me a large silver medal which it has since been my misfortune to lose."

From the Memoir written by Mrs. Home we learn that "an English prelate, Msgr. Talbot, accompanied Home to the Vatican," and it appears that the same Msgr. Talbot, a personage with whom readers of Purcell's *Life of Cardinal Manning* are made very familiar, had been instrumental in

²Home's *Life and Mission*, pp. 67, 68.

arranging for his confirmation. A letter of his to Home, giving him directions regarding this, was preserved among the papers found after the medium's death, as was also a special Papal blessing which, Mrs. Home declares, "guaranteed to him and his relatives an entry into Paradise." The fact that the writer belonged to the Orthodox Russian Church may explain the quaintness of this impression regarding the purport of a Papal blessing, as also the following remark connected with the reception: "There was nothing said of demoniacal possession. Possibly in welcoming her new son, the Church had hopes that she might one day canonise him as a worker of miracles."³ On the other hand, I know of no evidence to suggest that Home's conversion was regarded in Rome as an important conquest. He was received, and baptised conditionally, by Father John Etheridge, an English Jesuit then resident in Rome. Brother Arthur Everard, S.J., who died only in 1922, was present on the occasion, and I learned from him that the little ceremony took place quietly. I can find no mention of the reception in *The Tablet* or in the *Civiltà Cattolica* or in the *Giornale di Roma*, in all of which the more striking occurrences of this kind were commonly recorded. No doubt Home's aristocratic friends, like the Branickis, will easily have procured him an introduction to the Hon. and Very Rev. Msgr. George Talbot, who even then, as we learn from the *Catholic Directory*, was a Cameriere Segreto of His Holiness and resident at the Vatican. It is also possible that at this very early date in his career, when the young medium had hardly been six months on the Continent, and had never remained long in one place, his fame as a psychic had awakened no echo in Papal Rome. In that case it may quite conceivably have happened that no special warning was addressed to him regarding spiritualistic

³Mrs. Home, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

practices, the more so that his avowed intention of entering a religious order would have disarmed suspicion. This purpose was apparently quite serious at first, even from Mrs. Home's account of it. She writes:

"Whom the king smiles on, courtiers smile on; and the gracious bearing of the Pope was imitated by all the hierarchy of Rome from cardinals downwards. The path that led the young convert up to the monastery gates was strewn with roses, and amidst the applause and encouragement of all around him, he might have finally seen those gates close upon him, but that—but that the nearer he drew to the monastic life the less that life allured him and the stronger became his misgivings. . . . Convinced that to shut himself up in a convent cell would be a fatal error, he drew back and refused to enter. This determination was no sooner arrived at than he quitted Italy; and in company with the Branicki family came to Paris in June, 1856."⁴

It all sounds very much like:

The Devil fell ill, the Devil a monk would be;

The Devil got well, the *devil* a monk was he.

At the same time I find it hard, indeed practically impossible, to believe that Home, living for six weeks among the type of Catholics to whom a budding vocation must have introduced him, can have failed to carry away a clear understanding of the attitude of moral theology towards the practices of the séance room. Although his power had left him, or perhaps more correctly, the prickings of conscience deterred him from exercising it, there was plenty of talk in Rome at that date about "Magnetismus," and under this term was included not only hypnotism, or mesmerism, but the whole body of related phenomena. It was in the month of August of that very year, 1856, that the Congregation of the Holy Office published a notable encyclical on this matter, and although Home left Rome in the preceding June, such decrees are not issued before much discussion has taken

⁴Mrs. Home, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

place and considerable interest has been awakened in the subject in ecclesiastical circles beforehand. In this encyclical the practices of those are denounced who "boast that they have discovered certain principles of augury and divination," and the phenomena which passed under the name of "clairvoyance" and "somnambulism"⁵ were definitely condemned as "superstitious," while special reference is made to those who profess "to call up the souls of the dead, to obtain replies, and to discern things unknown and distant" (*animas mortuorum evocare, responsa accipere, ignota et longinqua detegere*). The conclusion is drawn that, "whatever the process followed," this use of physical means to procure a non-natural effect involves a deception which is altogether unlawful and heretical, and is an offence against sound principles of morality.⁶ Without being able to pronounce too positively, I get the impression from Home's manner of speaking in his book, *Incidents*, that he was by no means unacquainted with the standpoint of Catholic moralists, and that he was rather ingenious in so wording his references to his psychic phenomena as apparently to justify them from theological censure. For example, speaking of the Papal audience granted to him, he remarks:

"It has since been frequently said of me that at this interview with the Pope, I had promised him that I would not have any more manifestations; but it is hardly necessary, after what I have narrated, to say that I could not have made any such promise, nor did he ask any such promise to be made."⁷

Of course, Home could not promise that he would not have any more manifestations, any more than a man could promise that he would never see a ghost or hear the wail of

⁵It is worth while to note that Dr. Haddock's experiences with his psychic "Emma" were published in 1851 under the title *Somnolism and Psycheism* [Sic].

⁶The more significant passages of this encyclical are printed in Denzinger-Bannwart, *Enchiridion*, nn. 1653-1654.

⁷*Incidents*, p. 95.

a banshee; but Home could very well promise, and the Pope might very sensibly have exacted a promise, that he would never hold any more séances or deliberately *provoke* manifestations. The very fact of his choosing to contradict an allegation which no sane critic could put forward, points to the fact that the medium very probably did give a demanded pledge of the kind I have suggested. Home's little economies in the matter of phraseology may sometimes be discerned by a comparison of his own statements with those made, generally from manuscript materials, in the biography which was afterwards compiled by his second wife. The following passage, which may be quoted at length, will supply an illustration:

"In June, 1856, I went to Paris, and as I had been advised to do by the Pope, I sought the counsel of Père de Ravignan, one of the most learned and excellent men of the day. During the winter I again fell ill . . . and for some time I was confined to my bed. The time was fast drawing nigh when the year would expire, during which my power was to be suspended. The Père de Ravignan always assured me that as I was now a member of the Catholic Church it would not return to me. For myself I had no opinion on the subject, as I was quite without data except his assurance on the point."⁸

Now it seems that Père de Ravignan's assurance was not an absolute prophecy but a conditional one, which Mrs. Home, no doubt from a letter, gives more correctly as follows: "Have no fear, my child;⁹ as long as you go on as you are now doing, *observing carefully all the precepts of our Holy Church*, your powers will not be allowed to return."¹⁰ It is quite certain, as we shall see, that Home did not carry out

⁸*Incidents*, p. 95.

⁹Home preserved several short letters from Père de Ravignan (*ibid.*, p. 73). They usually begin "*Mon bien cher enfant*." It will be remembered that at this date the medium was only twenty-three. Three of these letters are printed in the Second Series of *Incidents in my Life*, pp. 55, 56.

¹⁰*D. D. Home, His Life and Mission*, p. 70.

the condition I have italicized. Be this as it may, his account of the renewal of the manifestations runs as follows:

"On the night of the 10th of February, 1857, as the clock struck twelve, I was in bed, to which I had been confined, when there came some loud rappings in my room, a hand was placed gently on my brow, and a voice said, 'Be of good cheer, Daniel, you will soon be well.' But a few minutes had elapsed before I sank into a quiet sleep, and I awakened in the morning feeling more refreshed than I had done for a long time. I wrote to the Père de Ravignan, telling him what had occurred, and the same afternoon he came to see me. During the conversation loud rappings were heard on the ceiling and on the floor, and as he was about to give me his benediction before leaving, loud raps came on the bedstead. He left me without expressing any opinion whatever on the subject of the phenomena."¹¹

It will be noticed that Home adopts the attitude of being merely the subject of these manifestations. If we could trust the fidelity of his account, they came to him unsought, and since he alone had the experience, it is impossible to contradict him. The same pose is maintained in the paragraph which immediately follows, though his widow, as we shall see, gives him away in the biography she compiled in 1888:

"The following day (Feb. 11th) I had sufficiently recovered to take a drive, and on Friday the 13th, I was presented to their Majesties at the Tuileries, where manifestations of an extraordinary nature occurred. The following morning I called on the Père de Ravignan to inform him of this. He expressed great dissatisfaction at my being the subject of such visitations, and said that he would not give me absolution unless I should at once return to my room, shut myself up there, and not listen to any rappings or pay the slightest attention to whatever phenomena might occur in my presence. I wished to reason with him and to explain that I could not prevent myself from hearing and seeing, for that God having blessed me with the two faculties, it was not in my power to ignore them. As for shutting myself up, I did not think, from my having before tried the experiment, that it was consistent with my nervous temperament, and that

¹¹*Incidents*, pp. 95, 96.

the strain on my nervous system would be too great if I were thus isolated. He would not listen to me, and told me I had no right to reason. 'Do as I bid you, otherwise bear the consequences.' I left him in great distress of mind. I wished not to be disobedient, and yet I felt that God is greater than man, and that *He* having bestowed the power of reason on me, I could not see why I should be thus deprived of it."¹²

Anyone reading this version of the story will be led to infer that Home, even according to the standards accepted by Catholic theology, had done nothing blameworthy. The manifestations had presented themselves unsolicited. The medium had been perfectly frank with his confessor, and it was not in his power to prevent the noises and other phenomena from happening. No man was bound in conscience to take such extraordinary precautions against a recurrence of the phenomena as the shutting himself up in his room. But every intelligent reader who has any acquaintance with Père de Ravignan's character will be satisfied that the great preacher can have said nothing so foolish. Home had not been merely the passive victim of this visitation of spiritual influences. It is his widow, a quarter of a century afterwards, who makes the matter quite plain. She informs us that the news of the return of Home's powers spread to the Court. So preternaturally rapid was the diffusion of this intelligence that two days afterwards, in spite of the medium's invalid condition:

"An Imperial invitation to the Tuileries followed and he was presented to the Emperor and Empress. This was on the 13th of February, and certain personages of the Court were selected to be present at a *séance* held the same evening."¹³

So it was not merely that during his visit to the Tuileries "manifestations of an extraordinary nature occurred," but

¹²*Incidents in My Life*, p. 96.

¹³Mrs. Home, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

that Home went back the same evening to hold a séance in the presence of a company of invited guests. If he is thus convicted of improving upon the facts to suit his purpose in one particular, he is clearly capable of doctoring his account in other directions. I accordingly suggest that the whole story of the spirits' warning that his power was to be suspended for just a year, was nothing more than a convenient fiction. So far as I can discover, it lacks all independent confirmation. It depends upon the medium's word alone, and there is no evidence that it was ever heard of until Home had grown tired of the restraints of Catholicism and wanted once more to figure before admiring eyes as the most wonderful magician of his time. I believe that if the real facts of the case could come to light, it would be found that Home had got a hint that Napoleon III was anxious to witness the phenomena which had attracted so much attention in America, England, and Italy. So flattering a prospect would have been seductive to any young man, and there was certainly a strong blend of snobbery in Home's composition. He accordingly invented the tale that the suspension of the phenomena was not due to any religious scruple of his own, but to the action of the spirits. By great good fortune the spirits had so arranged things that the fallow year expired and his health was miraculously restored just in time for him to go to the Tuileries and to be presented to the Emperor and Empress, and thereupon a séance duly followed.¹⁴

One extremely suspicious feature in Home's story of the year's suspension is a certain incident which occurred in Paris and which he assigns in his book to the summer of the year 1857, under the chapter heading: "1857-8 — France,

¹⁴The curious thing is that an exactly similar and equally sudden recovery of powers which Home declared to be in abeyance took place when he was invited to attend a reception by the Czar in the Imperial Palace at St. Petersburg.

Italy and Russia — Marriage." The account had best be given in his own words:

"In an hotel situated on the Boulevard des Italiens, I was introduced to a family, consisting of Mr. H—, his wife, and their two sons, both of whom were at that time in the English army, and had just returned from the Crimean campaign. The father, a cool-headed, truthful-minded man, was a countryman of mine, and our conversation soon turned upon the wonders of second sight and ghost seeing. Presently, whilst we were talking together, we were startled at hearing loud sounds coming from a distant part of the room and slowly approaching us. I at once suggested to them that some spirit desired to communicate with us. The unseen one assented to this by making the sounds for the alphabet,¹⁵ and the name Grégoire was spelt out, with the additional information that he had passed from earth, giving the time of his departure. This the two young officers at once and strongly contradicted, for they recognized in the name a very intimate friend, an officer in the French army in the Crimea, whom they had only just left there suffering under a slight wound, but so slight that it gave no apprehension of an unfavourable kind. He, however, now gave them other proofs of his identity, and during the whole of the remaining hours of the afternoon and evening he continued to make his presence manifest. Several times things were brought from parts of the room distant from us and there were frequent raps and his friends felt touches. Sounds resembling the firing of musketry were heard."¹⁶

The rest of the story, with the verification of the death of "Grégoire," is of no particular interest in the present connection. The point which concerns us here is that the incident did not, and could not have been taken place in the summer of 1857, when the Crimean War had long been over, but in the summer of 1856, when the troops were returning. This fact was pointed out by a reviewer of the book

¹⁵In this process of communicating by raps, five raps was the convention usually adopted to indicate that the spirits wanted the alphabet to be called in order that they might spell out a message.

¹⁶*Incidents*, p. 123.

in *The Spectator*, and Home himself, writing to the same journal, admitted that the date must be 1856.¹⁷ It follows, of course, from this that the incident occurred during the supposed suspension of Home's mediumistic faculties and not very long after his reception into the Church. Moreover, it cannot for a moment be maintained that Home on this occasion was merely a passive instrument who could not help what had happened. The alphabet was called — obviously a long and cumbrous process of communication — and the name was spelled out with other messages, while the manifestations continued the whole afternoon and evening. None the less, Home declares in the preceding chapter that until the power returned, as predicted, on February 10, 1857, he "had followed out Père de Ravignan's injunctions most conscientiously."¹⁸ It is evident that there is a serious contradiction here even if we confine ourselves to the medium's own narrative, and it is not less plain that the transposition of the "Grégoire" incident from 1856 to 1857 was somehow a very convenient lapse of memory in the interest of Mr. Home's credit for consistency. But what throws a still more significant light upon the possible motives for this little inversion of chronological order, is the statement made about the convert medium in de Ponlevoy's *Life of Father de Ravignan*. Home himself has the courage to quote the whole passage in his *Incidents*,¹⁹ but I prefer to use the published English translation.

"We cannot conclude this chapter [says Père de Ponlevoy] without making some mention of that well-known American medium

¹⁷*The Spectator*, April 4, 1863, p. 1838.

¹⁸*Incidents*, p. 99.

¹⁹It must be remembered that Home's book appeared simultaneously in French and English and that the popularity of de Ponlevoy's *Vie du R. P. Xavier de Ravignan* was so great among all classes of French readers that its allegations could not be passed over in silence.

who possessed the unfortunate talent of turning other things besides tables, and of calling up the dead for the amusement of the living. Much has been said, even in the newspapers, about his close and pious intimacy with Father de Ravignan; and it seems that an attempt has been made to use an honoured name as a passport to introduce into France and establish there these precious discoveries of the New World.

"The facts simply stated are as follows: It is quite true that after the young man had been converted in Rome, he was there furnished with an introduction to Father de Ravignan, but at this time he had given up his magic together with his Protestantism, and he was welcomed with the interest which is due from a priest to every soul, ransomed with the blood of Jesus Christ, and especially, perhaps, to a soul which is converted and brought back to the bosom of the Church. On his arrival in Paris he was again absolutely forbidden to return in any way to his old practices. Father de Ravignan, agreeably to the principles of the faith which condemns all superstition, prohibited under the severest penalties he could inflict, all participation in or presence at these dangerous and sometimes guilty proceedings. Once the unhappy medium, beset by I know not what man or devil, was unfaithful to his promise: he was received with a severity which prostrated him. I chanced at the time to come into the room and I saw him rolling on the ground and writhing like a worm at the feet of the priest, so righteously indignant. The Father was touched by this frenzy of repentance, raised him up and pardoned him, but, before dismissing him, exacted a written promise confirmed by an oath. But a notorious relapse soon took place, and the servant of God breaking off all relations with this slave of the spirits sent him word never again to appear in his presence."²⁰

The "notorious relapse" was evidently the séance given by Home before the Emperor at the Tuileries, the fame of which spread even to America. The other backsliding, which under Père's de Ravignan's severe rebuke elicited such a "frenzy of repentance," may well have been this very "Gré-

²⁰A. de Ponlevoy, S.J., *Life of Father de Ravignan*. Eng. trans., pp. 545-546. (French edit., II. pp. 298-299.) I have corrected one or two phrases in the English version.

goire" episode which has just been recounted. Home was forced to make some reply to the uncompromising indictment of Father de Ponlevoy. After quoting the passage he comments as follows:

"If the rest of the book is not more truthful than this statement it is certainly not worth reading. The good Father de Ravignan well knew that I was not an American, and that this power had begun with me before I ever saw America, for I had told him all my history. He also knew that I never invoked the spirits.²¹ No good name is, or ever will be, required to introduce, or accredit a God-given truth, and I know far too well the power of facts to think that they required the passport of even Father de Ravignan's name. His biographer must have had a limited education too, both religious and historical, to write of these things as being the 'fine discoveries of the New World,' for they are readily to be traced in every country of which any record is preserved to us.²² It is perfectly untrue that I ever abjured any magical or other processes, for I never knew anything of such, and therefore I could not abjure them."²³

Home then declares that he told Father de Ravignan that the spirits would return to him on February 10, 1857, but that the Father assured him there was no fear of that as long as he went to the sacraments. "I followed his injunctions most conscientiously, but on the very day promised they came as I have described." Finally the medium asserts:

"I never yet violated any promise to my knowledge, and as to the biographer coming in and finding me rolling on the ground and crawling like a worm, it is an entire falsehood. But had it even been true, it would not have been the place of a priest to make such a thing public. If I took an oath, and wrote it down as alleged,

²¹This seems to me a very quibbling reply. To form a circle and to sit awaiting manifestations, to do this in a darkened room in order to observe "spirit lights" (*Incidents*, pp. 25, 33, 36, 38, 49, 66, 72, etc.) is surely a manner of invoking spirits.

²²And yet the spiritualists, both of England and America, every year celebrate the 31st of March as the anniversary of the foundation of modern Spiritualism, which took place in 1848 at Hydesville, New York.

²³*Incidents*, p. 98.

that writing will have been kept. Let it be forthcoming to save the character of this Father A. de Ponlevoy, that he may prove the truth of the statement he makes. In the meantime, I say that it is without even any foundation of truth. The last time I saw the good Father de Ravignan, I would only reason with him, for as I then said to him, no man had a right to forbid that which God gave. I left him without confessing even, so that I had not been on my knees at all, much less crawling like a worm."

No impartial person who will make acquaintance with Père de Gabriac's *Life of de Ponlevoy*, a man who became at a later date Provincial and Master of Novices, and who for his austerity, charity, and holiness was universally revered, can for a moment believe that his description of the scene between Home and Père de Ravignan was an unscrupulous fabrication. It seems equally impossible to suppose that it was a case of mistaken identity, or that Home had fallen into a trance state and did not know what he was doing. There is practically no choice but to conclude that one of the two was telling a deliberate untruth, and can we hesitate to decide on which side the perjury lay? Home had every motive of interest impelling him to contradict a story in which he played so ignominious a part. He was also by nature an intensely sensitive man. On the other hand, Père de Ponlevoy had no adequate motive for inventing such a tale. He almost certainly would not have touched on the matter at all, except for the fact that Home *more suo* was magnifying his acquaintance with the great preacher and had managed to convey that this intimacy was equivalent to an approval of his mediumship. It may be noted that at a later date (January, 1864), after the first series of Home's *Incidents in My Life* had been published in English and French, the medium was banished from the States of the Church on account of his spiritualistic practices. Thereupon he endeavoured, though without success, to induce the British

Government to make his expulsion an occasion for diplomatic intervention. But the story (recounted at wearisome length in the second series of *Incidents*) is too long to tell here. It will be sufficient for my present purpose to have shown that there was certainly a strain of insincerity in Home's character, and that his air of frankness and geniality was, at least to some extent, a calculated pose. It does not seem to me that this invalidates the evidence for his astounding phenomena, but it should probably render us cautious in accepting any statement for which we have no better authority than the medium's own word.

There will be occasion in future chapters to make frequent reference to the manifestations produced by Home. Sir A. C. Doyle has described him as "the most remarkable man since the Apostles," and as one who was "in some aspects more than a man." He tells us further that he was "of so sweet a nature and so charitable a disposition that the union of all qualities would seem almost to justify those who, to Home's great embarrassment, were prepared to place him upon a pedestal above humanity."²⁴ It must be admitted, however, that the judgment expressed by others, in their estimate of Home's character was not so favourable. Mr. Frank Podmore, who was a resolute sceptic, but who had not apparently come into personal contact with the medium, states in his book *Modern Spiritualism*:

"There can be no doubt that he [Home] produced on most persons the impression of a highly emotional, joyous, childlike nature, full of generous impulses, and lavish of affection to all comers. That he possessed in full measure the defects of his temperament there can be as little doubt; affections so lightly given were wont to be as lightly recalled: vanity seems to have been the permanent element in his character; he basked in admiration; for the rest he showed

²⁴Doyle, *The Vital Message*, p. 55.

throughout a disposition to take life easily, and to look out for 'soft jobs.' In short, as Mr. Andrew Lang has described him, 'a Harold Skimpole, with the gift of divination.' The malignant side of his character showed but rarely, and then chiefly in his attitude towards rival mediums. But it flashed out when his vanity was wounded; and after his second marriage he treated many of his old friends with indifference and some with marked ingratitude!"²⁵

Mr. Stainton Moses, who did know Home personally and who was himself a medium of considerable power, tells us that Home "accepted the theory of the return in rare instances of the departed, but believes with me that most of the manifestations proceed from a low order of spirits who hover near the earth plane"; adding further "he is a thoroughly good, honest, weak and very vain man, with little intellect and no ability to argue or defend his faith."²⁶ Home, was certainly not devoid of ability in certain directions. He gave recitations and readings which were remarkable for dramatic power, he played the piano with feeling, and, though a man of little or no education, he seems to have acquired a fair conversational knowledge of French and Russian. The very fact that, in spite of his humble origin, he managed to get himself accepted in high aristocratic circles, not only in England, but also in France, Italy, and Russia, seems to prove that he possessed a certain adaptability. The two Russian ladies whom he successively married both belonged to distinguished families who were received at Court, and there is good reason to believe that both wives were devoted to him. Still, even Sir A. C. Doyle seems to have discovered at a later time that Home, in his private capacity, was not quite the ideal character he had previously depicted. The

²⁵Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, Vol. II, p. 228.

²⁶Stainton Moses as reported in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. IX, p. 293.

frank statement made in the following passage is creditable to the writer's honesty of purpose.

"Whilst upon this subject [writes Doyle] I may say that when in Australia I had some interesting letters from a solicitor named Rymer. All students of Spiritualism will remember that when Daniel Home first came to England in 1855 he received great kindness from the Rymer family, who then lived at Ealing. Old Rymer treated him entirely as one of the family. This Bendigo Rymer was the grandson of Home's benefactor and he had no love for the great medium because he considered that he had acted with ingratitude towards his people. The actual letters of his father, which he permitted me to read, bore out this statement, and I put it on record because I have said much in praise of Home and the balance should be held true. These letters, dating from about '57, show that one of the sons of old Rymer was sent to travel upon the Continent to study art and that Home was his companion. They were as close as brothers, but when they reached Florence and Home became a personage in society there, he drifted away from Rymer, whose letters are those of a splendid young man. Home's health was already indifferent, and while he was laid up in his hotel, he seems to have been fairly kidnapped by a strong-minded society lady of title, an Englishwoman living apart from her husband. For weeks he lived at her villa, though the state of his health would suggest that it was rather as patient than lover. What was more culpable was that he answered the letters of his comrade very rudely and showed no sense of gratitude for all the family had done for him. I have read the actual letters and confess that I was chilled and disappointed. Home was an artist, as well as a medium, the most unstable combination possible; full of emotions, flying quickly to extremes, capable of heroisms and self-denials, but also of vanities and ill-humour. On this occasion the latter side of his character was too apparent."²⁷

In spite of these unamiable traits, it still remains true that Home as a medium was never detected in fraud. I believe I have read all that has been written on the subject, but the various stories told to Home's discredit, of his having shuffled

²⁷A. C. Doyle, *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*, pp. 171-172.

off his slipper and used his bare foot, for example, to touch those assisting at a *séance*, seem to me quite unconvincing and inadequately attested. The rationalists who were up in arms at the very idea of preternatural phenomena were just as ready to circulate stories to discredit Home as they were to fabricate calumnies against the Church. One statement must be here referred to, because it has been more than once quoted of late, and because it seems to rest upon an authority whom all Catholics regard with deep respect. "Cardinal Mercier," we are told, "in his book *La Psychologie* (II, § 239 note), mentions that Home, shortly before his death, confessed to a friend (Dr. Philip Davis) that he had disgracefully deceived the public as to the nature of his actions. '*Ce n' était qu'un habile charlatan*,' adds the Cardinal."²⁸ Now Dr. Philip Davis in the book referred to, affirms a dozen times over that Home's phenomena were produced without any kind of trickery. In the preface, and elsewhere, Dr. Davis declares that he had been present when in a good light a large dining-room table rose off the ground without anyone touching it, and he describes other manifestations which he had himself witnessed. If, on the other hand, he says that Home, just before his death, reproached himself with deceiving people, the deception, as Davis clearly explains, consisted in this, that the medium had pretended that the phenomena were produced by spirits, whereas he did not know how they were produced, and doubted the existence of any such spirits. The Cardinal's statement, which occurs only in a casual footnote, was probably made upon some secondhand report of what Davis had written.

²⁸*La Fin du Monde des Esprits*; see pp. 287-289. There seems to be some question as to the identity of the writer of this book. It has been alleged that the name "Dr. Philip Davis" was merely a pseudonym adopted by a writer who had no connection with the medical profession.

No one who examines the book *La Fin du Monde des Esprits* could for a moment suppose that the writer meant to charge Home with trickery. The whole work is written in a directly contrary sense.

Finally, not the least surprising of the anomalies in the career of Daniel D. Home is the religious attitude of his first wife, née Alexandrina de Kroll, who was a goddaughter of the Czar Nicholas of Russia. In an appendix to Home's book *Incidents in My Life* (first series) is an account written by Mary Howitt (who eventually herself became a Catholic) of Mrs. Home's last days on earth. She died of consumption, at her sister's residence, Château Laroche, Dordogne, France, on July 3, 1862, being then only 22 years old. When "Sadia" learned from her doctors that she was doomed, she, from the first, showed perfect resignation, and Mrs. Howitt says of her:

"The sting was already taken from death, nor through the whole after-trials and sufferings of her physical frame did she lose her equanimity or firm confidence in the future. This calmness indeed, became the most striking feature of her long and painful illness. It was so profound and marked as to be almost phenomenal, and was noticed as such by the eminent physicians who attended her in London and subsequently in France, as well as by the Bishop of Périgueux,²⁹ who frequently visited her during the latter part of her earthly life. The last Sacraments were administered to her by the Bishop, who wept like a child and who remarked that 'although he had been present at many a death-bed for heaven, he had never seen one equal to hers.'"

After dwelling upon her singularly joyous spirit, as one who with the simplicity of a little child accepted the divine love as a natural gift, the writer continues:

²⁹This must have been Monseigneur Charles T. Baudry, who himself died in March, 1863, nine months later. He had previously been a much-esteemed professor of theology at Saint-Sulpice.

"She loved the Saviour and rejoiced in Him, responding to His unspeakable goodness with the whole allegiance of her soul, but Gethsamene and the bloody hill of the Crucifixion were not present to her mind; the agony and woe had no place in her experience. She was, it must be remembered, the embodiment of her own Greek church; of that church in which she was educated, the most ancient faith of which has ever recognised the Saviour less as the Crucified than the Arisen, the triumphant over suffering, sin, and death, as the Victor not the Victim, as the Lord who said to His chosen ones: 'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'"

There is much in these expressions which is surprising, though we must, of course, remember that Mary Howitt was not at this time a Catholic, and would probably, if questioned, have called herself a Christian Spiritualist. We are further told that during her illness "Mrs. Home commenced to see and converse with the denizens of the spiritual world," notably her mother and father, and the mother of her husband.

"Frequently also, during the first three months and last two months of her illness, not only she, but all those about her, heard delicious strains of spirit music, sounding like a perfect harmony of vocal sounds. During the last month, also, the words were most distinctly heard, and were recognized as the chants for the dying used in the Russian church."

None the less the funeral service is stated to have been performed by the vicar-general of the diocese, and the servants and peasantry seem to have paid her remarkable tributes of respect and affection. One would be disposed to think that Mrs. Howitt had misconceived the whole situation, or had perhaps accepted unquestioningly the husband's highly imaginative version of these last scenes. But the third Earl of Dunraven, who was a practising Catholic, and knew Home well at a later date, quotes without suspicion the state-

ment that the Bishop of Périgueux administered the last Sacraments to Home's first wife.

That the first Mrs. Home shared her husband's beliefs as to his intercourse with spirits in the beyond can hardly be doubted, and we have evidence that she was frequently present at his séances. On the other hand, he states quite positively in his *Incidents in My Life* (first series) that they "were married first in the private chapel of the country house of my brother-in-law according to the rites of the Greek Church, and afterwards, at the church of St. Catherine according to the rites of the Romish Church." The whole situation is very puzzling and I have no adequate explanation of it. My only purpose is to state without prejudice the facts so far as they are known to me. The vicar-general of Périgueux, who is said to have presided at the burial of Mrs. Home, was Msgr. Félix de Las Cases, who in 1867 was consecrated Bishop of Constantine and Hippo in Algeria, by Msgr. (afterwards Cardinal) Lavignerie.

CHAPTER V

"DANGER; KEEP OFF THE ICE"

IN AN "explanatory addendum" inserted in the tenth edition of *Raymond*, Sir Oliver Lodge, replying to certain criticisms, remarks:

"One difficulty which good people feel about allowing themselves to take comfort from the evidence (*i.e.*, the evidence for survival, obtained through mediums) is the attitude of the Church to it and the fear that we are encroaching on dangerous and forbidden ground. I have no wish to shirk the ecclesiastical point of view: it is indeed important, for the Church has great influence. But I must claim that Science can pay no attention to ecclesiastical notice-boards: we must examine wherever we can, and I do not agree that any region of inquiry can legitimately be barred out by authority.

"Occasionally the accusation is made that the phenomena we encounter are the work of devils; and we are challenged to say how we know that they are not of evil character. To that the only answer is the ancient one — 'by their fruits.' I will not elaborate it. St. Paul gave a long list of the fruits of the spirit."¹

Sir Oliver clearly means to imply that the fruits of Spiritualism are in substance identical with the fruits of the Spirit — charity, joy, peace, etc., as enumerated by St. Paul. Perhaps we may go with him so far as to agree that these virtues are naturally fostered by a belief in immortality and all which that involves. But Spiritualism, after all, is not the only creed which teaches that man was created for higher ends than his individual well-being in the world in which he finds himself. On the other hand, if the Church has banned Spiritualism, she has not banned psychic research,

¹*Raymond*, p. XI.

neither has she, despite a widespread impression to the contrary, pronounced all the phenomena of mediumship and the various forms of automatism to be necessarily diabolic in origin. The "ecclesiastical notice-boards" complained of do not, then, bear the legend, "Trespassers will be prosecuted," but they are, on the other hand, very necessary warnings. What we are meant to read upon them is "Danger; keep off the ice." Such signals are set up to restrain the public from crowding in their thousands upon a surface imperfectly frozen or which has become rotten and treacherous. Though the skillful and wary skater may be able to dart along in comparative safety, the neophyte cannot do so, still less a troop of neophytes, and we should have a poor opinion of the man who makes a grievance of such a prohibition and exhorts his fellow-citizens not to submit to tyrannous interference. Undoubtedly the Church regards Spiritualism with profound distrust, and it is precisely in its evil fruits, or at best its barren and deceptive promises, that she finds the justification of her attitude. It is the purpose of the present chapter to try to set out concisely some of the chief grounds for this condemnation, but before going further I should like to make one quotation from a distinguished foreign scientist, to show that, in declaring that Catholics under suitable conditions are not debarred from psychical research, I am only stating what is well known even to anti-clericals on the Continent. Dr. Joseph Maxwell, of Bordeaux, in his important work, *Les Phénomènes Psychiques*, writes as follows:

*The intolerance of certain savants is equalled by that of certain dogmas. To take an example. Catholicism considers psychical phenomena as the work of the devil. Is it worth while at this hour to discuss so obsolete a theory? I think not. However, superior ecclesiastical authorities, with the tact and sentiment of opportunism which they often show, permit many Catholics to undertake the experi-

mental study of psychical facts. I cannot blame them for recommending prudent abstention to the mass of the faithful; spiritism appears to me an adversary with which they will have to reckon very seriously some day."²

In confirmation of this, one may appeal to the excellent essay which appeared not very long since in the series *Philosophie und Grenzwissenschaften* published at Innsbruck. Dr. Alois Gatterer, a Jesuit Father and professor of that city, obtained permission to attend sittings with the mediums Rudi Schneider and Frau Marie Silbert, and he availed himself of these personal experiences to compile a sober and admirably documented volume which is called *Der wissenschaftliche Okkultismus und sein Verhältniss zur Philosophie*.³ Both from his own observations in the séance room and from his study of much printed evidence, Father Gatterer has persuaded himself that beyond all reasonable doubt certain phenomena, both of telekinesis (movement of objects without contact) and materialisation, do take place in the presence of some of the best mediums. But for the moment the conclusions he arrived at are not to the point.

We are here concerned with the Church's warnings, and the dangers I propose to discuss, the fruits, in other words, of attempted communication with the spirits of the dead, may be ranged under the following five headings. It will be convenient perhaps to give them in this summary form before proceeding to consider them more in detail. Experience shows, then, so Catholics contend:

I. That in these attempts to communicate influences are encountered which are directly evil and malignant.

²J. Maxwell: *Metaphysical Phenomena* (Eng. Trans.), p. 396. This translation is introduced by prefatory notes both from Professor Richet and from Sir Oliver Lodge.

³Felizian Rauch (Innsbruck, 1927).

2. That the communications themselves are unreliable.
3. That systems of religious belief are assumed or expounded by the spirits, which, while often mutually contradictory, are nearly always subversive of Catholic teaching.
4. That such pretended communications after eighty years have added nothing to our knowledge and have brought no benefit to mankind.
5. That the menace to health and to mental and moral sanity is not inconsiderable.

I

Let me deal first with the question of directly malignant influences. So far as I am aware, none of the more representative spiritualists, from the days of Judge Edmonds to the present time, question the reality of these unpleasant communicators. The *Spirit Teachings* of Mr. W. Stainton Moses, the eighth edition of which was brought out in 1918 by the London Spiritualist Alliance, may be looked upon as a classic in this matter. Sir Oliver Lodge, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, and a number of other leaders in psychical research, have always regarded this medium as a witness above suspicion. Sir William Barrett has written of him: "I knew Mr. Moses personally for many years and, like other of his friends, I believe he was wholly incapable of deceit."⁴ Well, it would hardly be possible to speak more strongly or more copiously about "the foes of God and man, enemies of goodness, ministers of evil,"⁵ than does Mr. Moses echoing his spirit guides. He does not call these evil beings devils, because in his view they are the souls of men once on earth that have been "low in taste and impure in habit," souls which are "not changed

⁴Barrett, *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 73. Sir William, as I can attest, spoke quite as strongly in favour of his friend in private conversation.

⁵*Spirit Teachings* (8th ed.), p. 13.

save in the accident of being freed from the body," but "they have banded themselves together, under the leadership of intelligence still more evil, to malign us (*i.e.*, the highly developed and beneficent spirits) and to hamper our work."⁶ This is a fundamental point in Mr. Moses' *Spirit Teachings*. It is dwelt on with emphasis in his first chapter, and solemn warnings against the danger of intercourse with these beings recur constantly throughout the book. The medium was evidently at one time so much impressed that he almost came to believe that "the result of Spiritualism is not for good." But the control, "Imperator," replies: "You err, friend. Blame man's insensate folly, which will choose the low and grovelling rather than the pure and elevated" (p. 99). But still more explicitly "Imperator" declares at a later stage:

"It is the old battle between what you call the good and the evil. . . . Into the ranks of that opposing army gravitate spirits of all degrees of malignity, wickedness, cunning and deceit: those who are actively spurred on by the hatred of light which an unenlightened spirit has. . . . The poor wreck whose lusts have survived the death of that body in which and for which alone he lived, have survived the means of direct bodily gratification, finds his resource in seizing on an impressionable medium, and goading him on to sin, so that he may get such poor enjoyment as alone remains to him."⁷

But are not the majority of potential mediums, or sensitives, apt to be "impressionable," and consequently are they not particularly exposed to this form of danger? In another work of Mr. Moses, also reprinted not long since by the London Spiritualist Alliance, in a section headed "The Gates being ajar a Motley Crowd rushes in," we read how, "unfortunately for us," the spirits that are "least progressive, least developed, least spiritual, and most material and earthly

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷*Spirit Teachings*, p. 243.

hover round the confines," and are the most eager to seek communication with living men.⁸ He tells us also that "in proportion to the undeveloped character of the spirit will be its power over gross matter, its cunning and in some cases its malignity."⁹ The picture he draws of the fate of many mediums — he seems to imply that this is almost the more common experience — is not an attractive one.

"Too often what happens is this. A number of persons assemble, most of them densely ignorant of any condition to be observed; some animated by mere curiosity, a few by the dumb desire to see what can be had through the only source open to them as evidence of a future life; all, in nine cases out of ten, unfit, for one or more of many causes, for the solemn work they have undertaken. . . . The burden is more than he [the medium] can bear; and if he be a model of integrity, a very storehouse of psychic power, he becomes distressed and broken down. His nerves are shattered; he is open to the assaults of all the malicious, tricky spirits that his vocation brings him in contact with, and as a consequence he is in grievous peril . . . of moral, or mental, or physical deterioration. Then comes the necessary sequel: temptation, obsession, fraud, buffoonery, and all that we so lament as associated with phenomenal spiritualism."¹⁰

Now, of course, we are perfectly free to believe either (1) that Stainton Moses (as Mr. F. Podmore and Dr. Tuckett not obscurely hint) was a fraudulent person himself; or (2) that he was honestly deluded by the figments of his own subconsciousness; or (3) that he actually received messages from the other world which warranted these statements. But it is the men who hold this third view, men like Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir A. Conan Doyle, who reproach the Church with her narrow intolerance in condemning intercourse with the dead. Consequently, against such objectors she is free to reply: "On your own showing the medium is

⁸*Spirit Identity*, p. 16.

⁹*Spirit Teachings*, p. 230.

¹⁰*Spirit Identity*, p. 21.

beset with spirits who are malignant, depraved, cunning, and untruthful. You admit that it is perilous to put oneself in communication with such influences. The evil is certain; the good problematical. Surely, then, it is the part of wisdom to abstain."

Neither must it be supposed that Stainton Moses stood alone in his recognition of the power and malice of these evil influences. Judge Edmonds, in the very early days of the movement, held much the same views, and we have from him a most curious account of an incident which may well serve as an illustration of this aspect of mediumistic experience. Edmonds was an American whose eminence as a jurist was spoken of with sincere respect by Lord Brougham. His integrity of conduct and the honesty of his spiritualistic convictions, for which he made great sacrifices, have never been questioned. He tells us how one day, holding a sitting with his intimate friend, Dr. Dexter, who acted as his medium, Dexter was suddenly controlled, *i.e.*, possessed, by a spirit which purported to be that of a man whom Edmonds had lately sentenced to death for a brutal murder. He describes how Dr. Dexter's hand, in the trance state, wrote with violent contortions sentences of angry abuse. But this was not all. "Several times," Edmonds goes on, "the pencil, paper and books were thrown at my head with great violence. Dr. Dexter's fist was doubled, and thrust out towards me as if he wanted to strike me, and once or twice he looked at me with concentrated feelings of hate and defiance."¹¹ The fact that Judge Edmonds claims to have tamed this brutal spirit by forbearance and a fearless demeanour does not alter the alarming character of such an experience. Neither, it

¹¹Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism* (New York: 1853-1855), Vol. II, pp. 511-512.

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¹¹Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism* (New York: 1853-1855), Vol. II, pp. 511-512.

would seem, are these manifestations of malignity on the part of the spirits altogether things of the past.

There was a little book published on this subject in 1919, which seems to me of very high value both from the clear presentation of the results of attempted communication with the spirit world and from the frank admission of difficulties and dangers. Under the title, *Voices from the Void*, Mrs. Travers Smith, who is the eldest daughter of the late Professor Edward Dowden and niece of John Dowden, Bishop of Edinburgh, has printed her impressions of a long series of personal experiments in automatism. From the outset one is led to recognise the sobriety of judgment with which the writer approaches these problems and the care which she takes to avoid exaggeration. I may confess that I myself am the more impressed with her trustworthiness because in its general character her account exactly agrees with much that I have read in unbiased sources elsewhere, and agrees also with the experiences of private friends of my own of whose integrity I have every reason to be assured and who can have had no possible motive for wishing to mislead me. Mrs. Travers Smith is evidently in full accord with her friend, Sir William Barrett, who often took part in her experiments, and believes with him that "spiritism reveals the existence of some mysterious power which may be of a more or less malignant character," and that "it is necessary to be on our guard against the invasion of our will by a lower order of intelligence and morality."¹² On the other hand, it is perhaps worth noticing that when Sir William, in another passage, speaks of the regrettable experience of certain friends of his own, he cannot be thinking of Mrs. Travers Smith.

"It not infrequently happens [he writes], as some friends of mine found, that after some interesting and veridical messages and answers

¹²Sir W. Barrett, *The Threshold of the Unseen* (1917), p. 250.

to questions had been given, mischievous and deceptive communications took place, interspersed with profane and occasionally obscene language. How far the sitters' subliminal self is responsible for this it is difficult to say; they were naturally disquieted and alarmed, as the ideas and words were wholly foreign to their thoughts, and they threw up the whole matter in disgust."¹³

Seeing that Mrs. Travers Smith has never given up her practice of automatism, she cannot be one of the persons here referred to, but she also bears testimony to the intervention of similar undesirable influences. After furnishing an account, too long to quote, of the spirit of a suicide who persistently attempted to communicate, and affected Mrs. Smith herself with such an abnormal depression that she adds, "I have never experienced such sensations before or since,"¹⁴ the narrative goes on:

"This was, I presume, a clear case of attempted obsession, first of Mr. X, then of me; it seemed quite clear that some external entity of a most dangerous kind was present at these sittings; it illustrates one of the greatest dangers connected with psychic work.

"I cannot urge too much upon my readers that the greatest caution should be used in the choice of sitters, and also that unpleasant communicators should be dismissed; the dangers of obsession are hardly realized by those who have not had some experience of them."¹⁵

This is a matter to which the writer more than once recurs. For example, she warns her readers:

"Never encourage communicators who profess to have led evil and criminal lives. The fact that they will tell you these things generally means that they will eventually attempt obsession."¹⁶

One other passage in this account may be given by way of illustration:

"Almost immediately Mr. X fell again into trance conditions and

¹³*Op. cit.*, p. 322.

¹⁴Travers Smith, *Voices from the Void*, with an Introduction by Sir William Barrett (1919), p. 100.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

appeared greatly distressed, complaining of some very depressing influence, and we broke off the sitting as before. Later in the evening the Rev. S. H. (Mr. Savill Hicks, a Unitarian minister of Dublin) hypnotised Mr. X, put a pencil into his hand, and asked him to do some automatic writing. He wrote very violently the same message again and again: 'Send this terrible thing away; it's coming again.' We thought it best to put an end to the sitting."

It is quite plain that the writer, after her six or seven years' experience with the ouija board, in which, be it noted, she never attempted to induce physical manifestations of any kind beyond the mere writing of messages, was nevertheless convinced of the reality of the danger which intercourse with possibly malicious spirits was likely to create.

One might fill a volume if any attempt were made to gather up such warnings and to recount the experiences which led to them. As previously stated, this type of trouble began as soon as the Fox children were transferred to Rochester immediately after the first episodes at Hydesville. Whether the presence of a certain Calvin Brown, who was the centre of these disturbances, contributed to the result, there is no way of determining, but violent racketings went on. Leah, the eldest sister, declared that the feeling of the family was "strongly adverse to all this strange and uncanny thing."

"We regarded it [she continues] as a great misfortune, as an affliction which had fallen upon us; how, whence or why, we knew not. The influence of the surrounding opinion of neighbours and the country round about, reacted upon us in conformation [*sic*] of our own natural and educational impressions, that the whole thing was of evil origin, unnatural, perplexing and tormenting; while its unpopularity tended to cast a painful shadow upon us. We resisted it, struggled against it, and constantly and earnestly prayed for deliverance from it, even while a strange fascination attached to these marvellous manifestations thus forced upon us against our will by in-

visible agencies and agents whom we could neither resist, control nor understand."¹⁷

Nearly all self-respecting mediums give advice similar to that just quoted from Mrs. Travers Smith; for example:

"Never for one moment attempt spirit communication with a purpose of levity or idle curiosity. Your results will be leaden or sodden, you will draw to yourself earth-bound and still evil spirits, no further advanced than when they went over, mischievous messages will follow, and oft-times actual mental damage to yourselves!"¹⁸

"But you must 'beware of strangers' [writes another]. There are scalawags ready to jump into all conversations, and mix things up if they are permitted to do so."¹⁹

In a still more recent book on the subject, the author, who, in spite of his advocacy of spiritistic communications, gives proof of a certain sobriety and breadth of judgment, speaks as follows. He is arguing against Mr. Belloc's implication that *all* communications which may possibly come from the beyond are necessarily from evil spirits:

"I do not for a moment deny that it is possible for dabblers in the mysteries of communication between the two worlds to come into contact with 'evil spirits.' I will even go so far as to say it is more than probable this is precisely what will happen to those who allow themselves to embark upon this quest actuated by no higher motives than idle curiosity, or an unhealthy desire for sensationalism; but having made this admission there still remains something further to be said. In the first place it is a demonstrable fact — as serious and reverent investigators will know — that the 'evil spirits' so contacted do not belong to a special non-human creation brought into being as evil things *ab initio*; they are neither more nor less than discarnate humans who have lived, in various ways, bad and unclean lives on earth, and have, as the result of this, remained after death in the lower regions of the spirit world in a condition that is generally termed 'earth-bound.' Having no longer the physical bodies which

¹⁷*The Missing Link*, p. 55.

¹⁸Mabel V. Robertson, *The Other Side of God's Door* (London: 1920), Preface.

¹⁹*Thy Son Liveth* (Boston: 1918), p. 22.

in earth life provided them with the means of gratifying low tastes and desires, and having still desires that are incapable of *direct* gratification, they haunt the earth sphere, lying in wait, as it were, for the opportunity of obsessing weak and vicious persons still in the flesh, and so attaining their end vicariously. No person should attempt to invite communication with the 'spirit world' until he has learned . . . *something* of the nature of the research he is starting upon!"²⁰

Like Mrs. Travers Smith, Mr. Purchas speaks from a personal experience continued through many years, and as the administrator of important commercial interests in South Africa, we cannot think of him merely as a neurotic visionary scared by his own ghosts. I will add only one final and still more recent testimony to the nerve-racking shocks which may be sustained by those who expose themselves incautiously to the invasion of malevolent spirits.

The name of Mrs. Osborne Leonard who figures so conspicuously in Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond* as well as in the widely circulated books of Mr. Dennis Bradley, has already been mentioned above. According to the testimony of all who have had relations with her — and I personally know many such — her gifts as a medium are not only exceptional, but she is an absolutely sincere and trustworthy person who has never been detected in any kind of trickery. She is not a medium for physical phenomena. Like the famous American, Mrs. Piper, who so profoundly impressed the psychologist, Professor William James, Mrs. Leonard is simply the channel of communications which purport to emanate from spirits in the beyond. These messages on many occasions have proved to be strangely veridical, imparting information which was not at the time known to anyone present and

²⁰T. A. R. Purchas, *The Spiritual Adventures of a Business Man* (London: 1929), pp. 218-219. Mr. Robert Blatchford, whose conversion from aggressive rationalism to a belief in a future life made some sensation a few years ago, attributes that conversion to Mr. Purchas and contributes a preface to the book. Mr. Blatchford was at one time editor of *The Clarion*, a journal which was conspicuous for its hostile attitude towards the Christian revelation.

which could not normally have been acquired by the medium herself. Nevertheless subsequent investigation often proved the statements made to be correct. Mrs. Leonard has recently published an autobiography with a foreword by Sir Oliver Lodge, and in this she recounts certain experiences of hers connected with the early days before she became a professional medium. One of these is very striking as an illustration of the dangers to which the rash investigator may unwittingly expose himself. With two girl friends named Florence and Nellie, Mrs. Leonard, who already knew that she was a sensitive, embarked upon an impromptu séance with the definite object of obtaining materialisation phenomena. Though the blinds were pulled down, some light filtered in and the room was not perfectly dark. Neglecting superfluous details, I quote Mrs. Leonard's own account of what followed.

"Suddenly I became aware of something standing between Nellie and myself. I did not see or hear anything at this point, but the air near me seemed filled by something unpleasant—something that pressed against me! I looked for a cause but could see nothing, only felt the invisible but tangible Something. 'Don't become imaginative,' I said to myself.

"I then happened to glance in Nellie's direction again. On her right shoulder, the one nearest to me, I saw a small black patch. As I looked it lengthened gradually. It grew larger and then took on a curved shape which extended from her right shoulder across the upper part of her chest. Just then the light through the blind became a little stronger, and the line across Nellie grew plainer. I then saw that it was not a shadow or mark—but an arm! Not an arm like yours or mine, but a much longer, thinner arm of a darkish colour, and it was covered with hairs!

"I wondered if I should tell Nellie what I could see. As I hesitated I saw the arm moving upwards towards her neck. Becoming excited myself, I was yet anxious not to startle Nellie, so made an effort to speak quietly and naturally to her.

"I got no further than 'Nellie, there's an' when she jumped up with a piercing shriek, knocked over the chair, pushed us both to

one side, and rushed blindly for the door, which she shook violently, forgetting in her terror that it was locked.

"Florence had the presence of mind to find the switch and turn on the electric light. Nellie was in a pitiable condition, white as a sheet, and trembling from head to foot.

"She told us that she had been aware of the same pressure that I had felt, and knew that something was laid on her shoulder and chest but had waited to see what would happen. Then suddenly she felt the weight transferred to her throat, and it gave her such a feeling of intense fear that she could bear it no longer."²¹

It will be remembered that this story is not told by an assailant of Spiritualism but by a highly respected believer who makes her living by what in old days would have been called divination. It may be that the whole incident was nothing more than a fit of nerves transmitted from one to another of this little group of highly sensitive experimenters. But in any case one seems justified in concluding that a procedure which leads to such episodes cannot be regarded as either morally or physically healthy.

II

Upon the question of the untrustworthiness of communications which purport to emanate from the spirit world there is even more to say. The most convinced believers fully admit the difficulty — indeed the utter impossibility — of determining how much is veridical in the messages received, whether they come through automatic writing, or through voice mediums, or by means of raps, or other prearranged signals. As regards the process, it is assumed that normally we have at least four intelligences concerned. First, there is the spirit communicating; second, there is the "control,"²²

²¹Mrs. Osborne Leonard, *My Life in Two Worlds* (1931), p. 35.

²²Many psychic researchers prefer to regard this "control" as a secondary personality of the medium.

or intermediary spirit, which, owing to its privileged and quasi-permanent relation with the medium, is able to impress her sensitized perceptions; third, we have the medium herself, who materializes the message by voice or writing; fourth, we have the sitter, or sitters, taking part in the séance, who ask questions and also listen to, read, or record the messages. Now from this complexity there must result grave danger of what Sir Oliver Lodge conveniently calls "sophistication," *i.e.*, the colouring, distorting, or interpolating of the messages. Assuming for argument's sake that there is a genuine communication which some spirit on the other side desires to transmit, it is liable to be modified, not to say perverted, in the course of transmission both by the prepossessions or mannerisms of the control, and by ideas latent in the subconsciousness of the medium or the sitters. As I have written elsewhere, "the plain fact remains, familiar to all students of the subject, that when we are in possession of what purports to be a message, we are never quite sure how much of it is due to the communicator, how much to the control, or how much to the subconsciousness of the medium or of those present in the room."

What is even more serious, those who seek to hold intercourse with the dead through such channels are apparently at the mercy of troops of freakish or impersonating spirits who deliberately set out to mislead. "Silly spirits who wanted to have a game" is a phrase used of one such episode by the supposed Raymond²³ communicating from the other side. Whole chapters of Mr. Stainton Moses' writings are devoted to the difficulty of unmasking these "personating spirits," as he calls them, a constant embarrassment to which he otherwise refers as "a class of spirits who from mischievous de-

²³*Raymond*, p. 194.

sign or from pure sportive fun . . . frequent circles, counterfeited manifestations, assume names and give erroneous and misleading information."²⁴ Does not Sir A. Conan Doyle himself admit the "foolish nature of many of these messages and the absolute falsehood of some," and that, in spite of the reality of inspiration, "the lapses were notable"?²⁵ It seems almost impossible in such experiments to get away from an atmosphere of downright deception. Mrs. Piper is generally regarded as one of the most reliable mediums of whom we have record, yet there is every reason to believe that the account which "Phinuit," the control under whose influence some of her most striking early successes were achieved, gave of his own history was a pure fiction. At a later date some of the best results obtained by Mrs. Travers Smith, notably the messages from Sir Hugh Lane after the *Lusitania* tragedy, were due to her control, "Peter Rooney." Now the account she gives of Peter Rooney runs as follows:

"At the second or third sitting of the circle referred to, Peter Rooney made his appearance. He stated that he was an American Irishman; that he had had a most undesirable career and spent much of his life in gaol; that ten days before he communicated with us he had thrown himself under a tram-car in Boston and had been killed. Sir William Barrett, having made careful enquiries, both from the Governor of the State Prison at Boston, Mass., and from the Chief of the Police in that city, found Peter Rooney's tale an entire fabrication. A certain Peter Rooney had fallen from a tram-car in August, 1910, had suffered from a scalp wound, but was alive in 1914, so far as could be ascertained.

"On being upbraided by us for assuming a name and identity not his own, Peter admitted that he had no desire that we should know who he was, and that he had adopted this name as it was as good as any other."²⁶

²⁴*Spirit Teachings*, p. 243.

²⁵Doyle, *The New Revelation*, p. 26.

²⁶*Voices from the Void*, pp. 11-12.

And yet it is through channels such as these that spiritualists bid us seek the solution of the most profound mysteries of man's existence and destiny. "Feda," the control of the medium, Mrs. Leonard, is described as "a little Indian girl, talking (through Mrs. Leonard's organs of speech, of course) in the silly way they do."²⁷ And we constantly read how Feda (in the person of the medium, a middle-aged woman, in the trance state) "jumps about and fidgets with her hands, just as a child would when pleased," or "jerked about her chair, and squeaked or chuckled, after her manner when indicating pleasure." As for results, Mrs. Travers Smith summarising her own experience as an automatist, writes:

"In the course of sittings extending over six or seven years many influences have spoken through our small circle. Of these some were obviously frauds, and impersonations were frequent. These disappointments are most dispiriting to the novice in psychic experiments. It must always be borne in mind that in order to attain to any firm ground from which one may review one's work and venture to form a judgment as to whether we are or are not in touch with the spirit world, a mass of evidence must be accumulated. This, of course, demands great patience and perseverance, and the experimenter must judge for himself whether the achieved results justify the expenditure of time and labour."²⁸

For an example of a case of direct deception, it will be interesting to recall an experience to which Professor Flournoy, of Geneva, has given prominence. Madame Dupond was a middle-aged lady, a Swiss Protestant. During a vacation ramble she met at a *table d'hôte* a young Catholic in whom she became interested. This lad, "Rudolph," had

²⁷Raymond, pp. 120, 182, 192. In Mrs. Osborne Leonard's book, *My Life in Two Worlds*, we read (p. 29) "Feda was an ancestress of mine. She had married my great-great grandfather. My mother had often told me about an Indian girl who married this ancestor."

²⁸Travers Smith, *Voices from the Void*, p. 10.



fallen under the influence of a priest whom M. Flournoy calls Don Bruno, but who seems clearly to have been the renowned and saintly Don Bosco, now beatified. Rudolph was on the point of joining Don Bosco's Order; Mme. Dupond tried to dissuade him, and he on his side apparently kept up a correspondence with her in the hope of winning her over to the Catholic Faith. At this stage she seems to have taken up Spiritualism and began to practise automatic writing. One day her hand wrote down a communication to the following effect:

"I am Rudolph; I died at 11 o'clock this morning (April 23d, 1881). You must believe what I tell you. I am happy. . . . I died at X., far from Don Bruno (?Bosco). Your father brought me to you. I did not know we could communicate thus. I am very happy. . . . A little before my death I sent for the Professor of Oratory.²⁹ I gave him your letters, begging him to return them to you; he will do so. After Communion I said good-bye to my colleagues. . . . The passage of death resembled that of sleep. I awakened near God, near my family and friends; it was beautiful, wonderful; I was happy and free. . . . I am attached to you. Do not fear that I love you less because I am no longer on earth. . . . Adieu, I go to pray for you. I am no longer Catholic, I am Christian."

After this first announcement, communications from Rudolph in the same automatic script followed daily for almost a week, but on the 30th of April a letter came by post from Rudolph himself, proving that, far from being dead, he was in perfectly sound health and in the same religious dispositions as before. Madame Dupond admits that during this short time the thought of Rudolph had become a perfect obsession with her, to such an extent that she found herself constantly tracing the letter "R" in the air with her fore-

²⁹This is a ridiculous blunder of the translator. The French original reads, *le directeur de l'Oratoire*. The greater houses of the Salesian Fathers are called "Oratories."

finger. When disillusionment came she gave up her automatic writing in disgust.³⁰ This authentic experience was harmless enough in its results, but it might easily have been otherwise. Professor Flournoy subjects the details to a minute analysis and appeals to it as confirming his theory that automatic writing is only the expression of the subliminal self, "the submerged complex of emotional feelings and desires." It may be so, but personally I am much more inclined to attribute the communication to what he calls a *farçeur de l'au delà*, or what Mr. Moses styles a personating spirit.

To say the truth, similar examples of direct deception have been very numerous at all stages of the history of Spiritualism, and they certainly cannot always be analyzed as the expression of subconscious desires. Thus Capron, writing in 1855, quotes the case of Judge Hascall, an American spiritualist and member of Congress, who

"had some very singular experiences, while in Washington, in regard to information being given him to the effect of some member of his family being sick or dead and the most solemn assurances given of its truth; when, on writing home, he ascertained that all was well and that the pretended information was totally false. On the other hand, occurrences taking place at a distance, of which he had no knowledge, were told with the greatest accuracy and truth."³¹

Further, I cannot help thinking that much of the respect now accorded to the data and conclusions of psychical research is due to the fact that its most conspicuous advocates, men like the late F. W. Myers, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir W. Barrett, Sir A. Conan Doyle, Mr. J. Arthur Hill, and the rest, have all along had the advantage of working with the very best class of mediums, or at least of consulting the re-

³⁰Flournoy: *Esprits et Mediums* (Paris: 1911), p. 270 seq. The English edition, which I have quoted above, does not reproduce the whole of Flournoy's volume.

³¹Capron, *Modern Spiritualism* (Boston: 1855), p. 336.

liable and critical materials presented in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. From their writings one obtains no idea of how Spiritualism works out for the masses, under the influence of second- or third-rate mediums, intent only upon exploiting the folly of mankind for their own advantage. Here is a letter which, at the time of another great spiritualistic boom in this country, that which marked the early seventies, was allowed to appear in *The Medium*, the leading spiritualistic journal of that period. It is headed, "Is there any remedy for Lying Spirits?"

"Dear Sir: Can any of your readers advise me what to do under the following circumstances? I will state my case very briefly. Unfortunately the uniformity of my experience enables me to do this very easily. I have been an earnest enquirer into spiritualism for the past five months, and during that time I have had more than a hundred sittings in my own house. We have had hundreds of messages and answers to questions. So far, good; this seems to me proof of an exterior intelligence in communication with the sitters. But this is my difficulty: all these communications have been of a lying character. For instance, I have been anxious to obtain tests of the identity of the spirits communicating. In seeking these, the spirits have given me what purported to be their names, with minute particulars of their earth life, their surviving friends, etc. In every case the information so given has proved to be utterly false. So of every other kind of information; it has invariably been totally untrue. And this the spirit or spirits unblushingly acknowledge after the deception has been found out. The only explanation I can get is that they 'like to catch fools,' or some such messages, accompanied by language of the most profane character. Nor do any expedients I may adopt produce any more satisfactory results. The falsehoods are sworn to in the name of God, the Bible, and everything that is sacred."³²

The first impression given by such a letter as this is that it must have been a practical joke. But it certainly was not; other correspondents backed it up, and some, while disagree-

³²*The Medium and Daybreak* (May 2, 1874), p. 301.

ing, commended the candour of the editor in facing difficulties.

Troubles of this sort were in no way new. The Rev. Adin Ballou, in what must be accounted the earliest reasoned treatise on Spiritualism which was ever printed — he himself was a convinced believer — admits the occurrence of many utterly deceptive messages. He tells us that "it seems reasonable to suppose that the lower spheres or circles of the spirit world are filled with gross and crudely developed human spirits — with almost countless multitudes of souls whose ignorance, or moral deficiency still remains such as to predispose them to sympathize with congenial spirits in the flesh and to repeat, when opportunity will allow, their old follies, deceits and mischievous exploits."³³

In quite recent times the uncertainties of communication are admirably illustrated by a series of sittings which Mr. S. G. Soal had with the medium Mrs. Blanche Cooper. The account is printed at full length in the *Proceedings of the (English) Society for Psychical Research* (Vol. XXXV, 1925, pp. 471-594). In twenty-three sittings, spaced out over several months, four notable personalities purported to communicate. The first was Mr. Soal's brother, Frank, who had been killed in the War. Speaking generally, it may be said that a number of correct statements were made, most of them about intimate matters which could not possibly have been known to the medium, and some of them concerning things which were not in the consciousness of Mr. S. G. Soal himself, although upon investigation they proved to be accurate. The second communicator was an entirely fictitious person and nothing could be verified concerning him. In the third case a boy named James Miles, who had been

³³A. Ballou, *Spirit Manifestations* (Boston: 1852), p. 68; and see the whole of Chapters VII and VIII.

drowned at Bath, professed to give some information about what happened to him, but there were many inaccuracies. The evidence, in any case, was considered unsatisfactory, for it was possible for the medium to have read some account of the accident in the newspapers. The most remarkable episode in the series was however, that connected with a Mr. Gordon Davis, who had been a school-fellow of "the sitter" Mr. Soal. I venture to borrow this gentleman's summary of these extraordinary communications. It was, he notes:

"a case in which a person *believed by the sitter to be dead*, communicates spontaneously through the direct voice. He reproduces more or less accurately the tone of his voice, its accent and his characteristic mannerisms of speech. He describes incidents of his boyhood known to the sitter and speaks of one or two matters unknown to the sitter. Most interesting of all, he gives an accurate description of the environment and interior arrangements of a house *which he did not occupy until a year later*. Going back into the past, he is able to reproduce accurately the place of his last meeting with the sitter and the substance of the conversation. Further, he is dramatised as if he were a deceased personality desiring to send messages of comfort to his wife and child. In the end we discover that he is still living. By means of a diary kept by him we can learn accurately just what he was doing at the time of the first two sittings."³⁴

Obviously these messages, though full of much accurate detail, did not emanate in any way from the spirit of Mr. Gordon Davis. At the time they were being uttered through the medium's organs of speech, Mr. Davis was busily occupied with quite other matters. He was not thinking of Mr. Soal, and had no knowledge of the arrangements of the house which he was only to occupy many months later. If the communications had their origin in the spirit world, they must have come from some freakish impersonator. I was present when Mr. Soal read to the Society an abstract of

³⁴*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. XXXV (1925), p. 479.

his paper (afterwards printed in fuller form), and the comments made by subsequent speakers in a critical audience showed they believed it to be reliable and evidential.

I have quoted previously from Mrs. Travers Smith's book *Voices from the Void*, and I am tempted to make two further brief extracts. She is a lady who is in touch with all that is best and most reliable in psychical research, and she believes in the objective reality of the spirits purporting to communicate from the other world. As an Agnostic or a Unitarian, she is hampered by no conscientious difficulties, and yet her practical advice to readers takes the following form:

"If I may venture to advise persons who long to speak once more with those whom they have loved who have vanished in darkness, I should say it is wise and sane not to make the attempt. The chances against genuine communication are ten to one; the disappointments and doubts connected with the experiment are great. Personally I would not make any attempt to speak to the beloved dead through automatic writing on the ouija board. The evidence they offer of their identity is too ephemeral and unsatisfactory; and as I would not undertake these experiments for myself, I would not willingly help others to risk them. . . . I fear the observations I have just made may be very distasteful to many who approach the subject from the spiritualist point of view. I cannot offer these people any apology for my attitude."

Again at the very outset of the volume she gives this warning:

"Those who are willing to devote some of their time to the study of what is commonly called 'Spiritualism,' should bear in mind that results are slow, uncertain and cannot be forced. Indeed one asks oneself whether time is well spent, seeking for the few grains of gold one finds in the huge dust-heaps of disappointment and dullness."³⁵

One can only express one's entire sympathy with this attitude of mind. If Mrs. Travers Smith had been an unsuccessful experimenter her advice would be open to suspicion as

³⁵See also Mrs. Travers Smith's contribution to Huntley Carter's volume *Spiritualism; its present-day Meaning* (1920), pp. 171-173.

dictated by pique or disappointment; but in view of the quite remarkable results she obtained on several different occasions, her warning must command the respect of all.

It will be understood, I trust, that I do not in the least dispute the existence of many veridical communications, some of a most startling and inexplicable kind. But even with the best mediums lapses of all sorts are frequent. The most experienced psychic researchers admit that we can be sure of nothing until confirmatory evidence is available from an independent source. On the other hand, much of the information imparted is what the writer just quoted calls "a Hades of disappointments and even absurdities."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT COMES OF IT

IT DOES not seem easy to ascertain precisely when and under what conditions Spiritualism first took shape as a recognised form of belief, whether we call it a religion, a philosophy, a revelation, or merely a theory. The point is of no particular importance, and it is sufficient to say that in 1852, if not in 1851, two or three years after the mysterious rappings at Hydesville, which brought fame to the Fox sisters, "Spiritualism" and "Spiritualists" were already freely discussed under these names in the newspaper press of the United States. The only matter which I wish to emphasize is the fact that from the outset the spirits were prolific in magniloquent promises regarding the new era which was dawning upon the world. The bulky work of Edmonds and Dexter, of which the first part appeared in 1853, supplies a number of examples. Here are a few concise specimens of the language used in the automatic script taken down by Judge Edmonds and his partner in the course of 1852:

"The human mind thus prepared for its advent, this new dispensation [i.e., Spiritualism] comes to supply the want to the countless thousands who are now slumbering in indifference or toiling in infidelity. . . . There is joy in heaven at the opening of this new intercourse with man. The spirits there never tire, never rest. Be ye like them. Go on. Heaven shall crown your efforts. . . . Doctor [Dexter], there is one thing certain. Our work, your work, is of more importance than you can at present realize. Spirits of higher position than any with whom you have had intercourse are to teach you through me and also personally to influence your hand. . . . The day is dawning when

the truth will gird up its loins and travel with speed through the world. You are its avant-guards. You are its companions."¹

But others among the pioneers of the new movement were honoured with similar messages. Dr. Robert Hare, a really distinguished man of science, who was professor of chemistry in the University of Pennsylvania, received a communication which purported to have been signed by a number of eminent men in the spirit world, including George Washington, J. Q. Adams, Dr. Chalmers, etc., and which contained such sentences as the following:

"Could you see the great glory which is to be the issue of your labours in the new unfoldings of spiritual science, you would not despair of your mission nor weary in your devotion to it. . . . Go on in your searchings, our good friend; the end is not yet with you. Brilliant minds with brilliant thoughts are burning to give utterance to earth through you. You are a selected instrument of our choosing, and we are watching and guiding you in the path and to the goal you seek."²

Those familiar with modern spiritualistic literature will be aware that the same type of message, addressed to the author of *Raymond* and other kindred enthusiasts, is still very prevalent. Through spirit intercourse, we are assured, the world is going to be fashioned anew; mourning for our dear ones and the fear of death itself will soon be banished forever. No doubt this is a very consoling prospect, but if we may judge of the future by the past it does not seem that we have much reason to put confidence in prophecies of this kind, from whatever source they come. Still the anticipations so confidently expressed some eighty years ago that the new revelation was about to inaugurate a golden age lends a certain interest to the inquiry outlined in the three headings left over from the last chapter. They deal mainly with Spir-

¹Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, I, pp. 48, 63, 67; II, p. 278.

²Robert Hare, *Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations* (New York: 1856), Preface, p. 12.

itualism in *its practical results*, and it is this aspect of the subject, tested by the experience of three quarters of a century, which claims our attention at present.

In the summary statement of the grounds for condemning Spiritualism previously set before the reader, the third heading runs as follows:

"That systems of religious belief are assumed or expounded by the spirits, which, while often mutually contradictory, are nearly always subversive of Catholic teaching."

That this contention is fully justified, will hardly be disputed by anyone who possesses even a superficial acquaintance with the literature of the subject. At first, both in the United States and in England, a certain religious conservatism, as well as the vagueness of the prevailing theology, prevented the antagonism between the new movement and Christian teaching from proclaiming itself too obtrusively, at any rate for many years. There was a general trend among leading spiritualists towards Swedenborgian views; but the majority were attracted only by the physical phenomena and by the supposed communications from their departed friends. Of a formulated system of spirit teaching regarding the relations between this world and the next we find comparatively little, and that little was by no means enthusiastically received or widely disseminated. In France, and on the continent generally, it was otherwise. It would hardly be too much to say that as early as 1857 the movement there was captured by a single individual, who provided it with a textbook, or rather a series of textbooks, and a press organ, *La Revue Spirite*, which secured a practical monopoly in the field of such discussions. This individual, Léon H. D. Rivail, better known by his pseudonym of Allan Kardec, dying in 1869 and buried in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise, is described, not without reason, on his tombstone as *Fondateur*

de la Philosophie Spirite. All that need concern us here is the fact that this philosophy, which he expounded in nearly a dozen different books³ and which he professed to derive from the communications made to him by all sorts of illustrious spirits in the other world, is at every turn in acute conflict with the teaching of the Catholic Church. We are asked to believe that Jesus Christ was a man in whose body one of the highest spirits became incarnate, that the Trinity and the other mysteries of the Christian creeds are mere fictions, that there is no such thing as everlasting punishment, and so on. Allan Kardec seems seriously to have persuaded himself that he was entrusted with a great mission by the powers which ruled on high. He believed that the revelation of which he was the mouthpiece was comparable with, and the fulfilment of, those of Moses and Jesus Christ.⁴ Religion as it actually existed in the world was corrupt and it had to be swept away. Hence, we find him recording spirit utterances couched in such terms as these:

"Spiritism is called upon to play an immense part in human affairs. This it is which will reform our legislation, at present so often in conflict with the laws of God. This it is which will restore the religion of Christ now degraded by the priests into a commercial speculation and a vile form of traffic. It will set up the real religion, natural religion, that which springs from the heart and goes straight to God, without being intercepted by the skirts of a cassock or the steps of an altar."⁵

But that which was and is most characteristic of Kardecian

³The first and best known of these was *Le Livre des Esprits*, of which the 52nd edition was published in 1912. Other popular works widely circulated and translated, were *Le Livre des Mediums* and *L'Evangile selon le Spiritisme*. See the admirable account of Kardec and his system given by Lucien Roure, S.J., in *Le Merveilleux Spirite*, Paris, 1917.

⁴For all this the reader may be referred to Roure, *Le Merveilleux Spirite*, pp. 11-18, 290-336, who gives references.

⁵L. H. D. Rivail, *Œuvres Posthumes* (1912), p. 343. This spirit communication appears to have been received April 15, 1860.

spiritism — the form of spiritism, I repeat, which has been adopted almost universally in Latin countries on the Continent — is its affirmation of the doctrine of reincarnation. This belief, explicitly taught by the spirits to Kardec, was, at any rate at first, just as explicitly rejected on spirit authority by the majority of spiritualists in England and America. The contradiction is absolutely fatal to belief in the trustworthiness of spirit guidance, and it has not passed unremarked by rationalist critics, even those who are themselves fully convinced of the reality of both the physical and psychic phenomena of mediumship. It would not be easy to put the case more clearly and forcibly than has been done by Professor Charles Richet, the distinguished physiologist of Paris.

"Unfortunately for spiritism," he writes, "an objection which seems to me irrefutable, can be made to the spirits' teaching. In all parts of Europe the spirits vouch for reincarnation. Often they indicate the moment they are going to reappear in a human body; and they relate still more readily the past avatars of their followers. On the contrary, in England the spirits assure us that there is no reincarnation. The contradiction is formal, positive and irreconcilable. Those who are inclined to doubt the correctness of what I affirm have only to glance through and compare the writings of English and French spiritists; for example those of Allan Kardec, Denys, Delanne and those of Stainton Moses. How are we to form an opinion worthy of acceptance? Which speak the truth? European spirits or Anglo-Saxon spirits? Probably spiritistic messages do not emanate from very well-informed witnesses. Such is the conclusion arrived at by Aksakoff, one of the cleverest and most enlightened of spiritists. He himself acknowledges that one is never certain of the communicating identity at a spiritistic sitting."⁶

That the divergence among spiritualists upon the reincar-

⁶C. Richet (Professor of Physiology in the Faculty of Medicine, Paris), in his Preface to Maxwell's *Metapsychical Phenomena* (Eng. Trans.), pp. 7-8. Prof. Richet also says: "I am neither spiritist, nor theosophist, nor occultist. I do not believe in occult sciences, nor in the supernatural, nor in miracles," p. 13.

nation question is not overstated will be clear to anyone who studies the periodical literature of spiritualism during the year 1875, when Miss Blackwell published a translation of Kardec's *Spirits' Book*.⁷ Curiously enough one of the arguments used by the English school to discredit the reincarnation doctrine was the allegation (so far as I know, quite unfounded) that Allan Kardec before he took up these views "belonged to the College of Jesuits," that he had acted under their instigation, and that "they were delighted at the schism he had brought about among spiritualists by a doctrine which had been selected because of its absurdity."⁸ While language of this kind may serve to illustrate the mentality of many anti-Kardecists, it would clearly be waste of time to discuss such rubbish seriously.

But although the spiritualist attitude in England and America was not at the beginning openly hostile to the creeds, it is impossible to make even a slight study of their literature during the first twenty-five years without perceiving that even in Anglo-Saxon countries the tide was setting strongly in a direction hostile to all Christian revelation. The case of Mr. Stainton Moses who renounced his orders in the Church of England and taught a vague theism which excluded belief in the Incarnation, etc., was typical of many others. The opposition between spirit teaching and the dogmas of Christianity manifested itself almost from the beginning. Judge Edmonds, though his sympathies were appar-

⁷See, for example, *The Medium*, August 13 and August 27, 1875, pp. 522 and 552.

⁸*The Spiritualist Newspaper*, June 18, 1875, p. 289, and *The Spiritual Magazine*, June, 1875, p. 262. It seems, however, to have been true, and it was certainly not very creditable to the founder of continental "Spiritisme," that he was drawing a salary as a member of the staff of the Catholic *Univers*, while, under the assumed name of Allan Kardec, he was writing articles subversive of all Catholic teaching.

ently Swedenborgian, did not attempt to conceal his disbelief in the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

"The spirits," he writes, "who were engaged in this work told me at an early day that they were determined now to avoid the error which they had fallen into 1800 years ago, and would not now, as in those days, concentrate all their powers in one person, so as by their marvellous character to induce an uninstructed age to worship man instead of God."⁹

Another representative spiritualist of high character, Robert Dale Owen, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* for December, 1874, stated that Spiritualism disavows all such dogmas as the following:

"That all men and women are originally depraved, therefore objects of God's anger, and that they can be justified before Him only by the blood of one of the persons of the Godhead, to wit, Jesus Christ, who was made to bear, and doomed to suffer for, the sins of the human race. . . . That God permits a personal devil to roam the earth, seeking whom he may deceive and bring to ruin body and soul."¹⁰

Without discussing details of terminology, the general purpose of this repudiation is plain enough. No doubt there was a party of "Christian Spiritualists," who from time to time protested against such expressions of opinion as those just quoted, but the more prominent and active adherents of the movement belonged to the "progressive" section, and the Christianity even of the right wing was of an extremely vague and hesitating kind.¹¹ So far as I am able to ascertain, the attitude of almost all the English-speaking spiritualists who have concerned themselves with the deeper issues of this new revelation was and remains irreconcilably anti-Catholic, if not anti-Christian. It would be easy to multiply

⁹Edmonds, *Letters and Tracts on Spiritualism* (1874), p. 344.

¹⁰*The Atlantic Monthly*, December, 1874, p. 729.

¹¹Those who care to pursue the subject will find much interesting material in *Medium*, October, 1875, and in the *Spiritual Magazine*, November, 1875.

illustrations, but I will content myself with a few sentences culled from an address delivered before the Dialectical Society in 1873 by a then well-known spiritualist, Mr. T. H. Noyes. He was replying to a paper entitled "Spiritualism, the new Superstition," and even in those mid-Victorian days he claimed that both the spirits and the mass of his fellow-believers supported him in such sentiments as the following:

"I know that we have spirit friends who are permitted to disabuse our minds of many fallacies which a corrupt priestcraft has taught us to reverence under the guise of religion. . . . Spiritualism claims to be a new revelation, iconoclastic of all superstition, and bids fair to extinguish the fungoid growths that have obscured the pristine lights of all former revelations, and claims to supplement and illumine them by its own electric rays. . . . It abolishes forever the deified devil of the Hebrews, the bloodthirsty god of vengeance, dealing in damnation and hell-fire, the creator of human fuel for eternal flames. . . . It abolishes the supernatural and extends the realm of nature and the reign of law to the invisible world. . . . It abolishes at one fell swoop the theology of the schoolmen, and the dogmas of the schools, and the mischievous absurdities of such formularies as the Athanasian Creed. It dethrones the blind idol of theological faith, and sweeps away the marvellous delusion of the orthodox, that belief in fictions is essential to salvation. . . . What wonder then that it is denounced by Bibliolaters and the devotees of the devil, scouted by priests and scoffed at by men of science, all as interested in the preservation of their private preserves and ancient monopolies as were the initiated of the sacred mysteries of old."¹²

Let me only add under this head that if the Church claims the right to inhibit the circulation of heretical or morally dangerous literature among her faithful adherents, she has every reason to include the great bulk of alleged spirit utterances under the same condemnation. The very fact that they profess to emanate from intelligences whose range of

¹²*The Spiritualist Newspaper*, December 12, 1873, p. 459. So far as I can discover; none of the readers of the journal protested against this language.

vision has been enlarged by their emancipation from the trammels of bodily existence must tend to give these messages a mischievous importance in the eyes of simple folk who are incapable of seriously investigating the problems involved.

If the unorthodoxy of spirit communications is a matter which touches hardly any but Catholics, their mutual contradictions over so fundamental a point as reincarnation is evidently of much wider import. When one set of spirits declare that the soul of man released from its tenement of clay returns to earth over and over again to occupy new bodies, and other spirits of equal authority maintain the exact contrary, it is plain that such disclosures are utterly worthless as a source of guidance in those things which it most concerns us to be sure about. The disagreement on this point between Anglo-Saxon and Continental spirits¹³ seems to be just as far from a settlement today as it was at Allan Kardec's death, sixty years ago. Surely in this fact alone we have warrant for saying that the new revelation, which promised so much to the generation of Edmonds and Hare and Owen, has been barren of practical results. If the spirits cannot tell us whether the disembodied soul returns to earth again — or rather, what is far worse, tell us with assurance contradictory things — what information can they give which a level-headed man can trust as even a betting probability about any question of fact whatever. In the early days anticipation ran high regarding the flood of light which spirit intercourse was destined to shed on the problems of physical science. Not a score of years had passed before the same type of spiritualists were ready to admit that this hope

¹³Those who are interested in the matter may read with advantage the discussion in the *Spiritualist Newspaper* in the latter part of 1875, pp. 74, 103, 117, 143, 314, etc.

was nugatory. In a leading article in *The Spiritualist Newspaper* for November 1, 1873, this avowal is already made in the clearest terms. I hope I may be pardoned a rather long quotation. The writer begins by saying:

"The power of clairvoyance to see scenes hundreds of miles away and the faculty conferred upon trance mediums of revealing truths (?reincarnation) relating to the life hereafter, naturally raise hopes of the noblest description in the breast of novices in Spiritualism. Here, think they, is a key, which, when properly applied, will give to man a true and unquestionable religion; here is a power where-with we shall be enabled to establish communication with residents in other planets. . . . With prolonged experience these natural anticipations are damped. . . . The novice soon becomes aware that a proportion of clairvoyant revelations are unreliable, and that trance revelations are coloured more or less, quite unconsciously, by the mind of the medium, or at least by the organs of expression of that mind."

Referring to certain trance utterances on scientific matters which had emanated from two well-known mediums, Mrs. Tappan and Mr. Morse, the writer declares that:

"As in the case of revelations about physical things given through all the trance mediums we have ever met as yet, truth and error, reliability and unreliability, were intimately blended. . . . A long time ago, Mr. Morse, while in the trance state, was questioned about the sun, and gave plenty of information opposed to facts which physical science proves to be true. It appears to be an illegitimate thing to question departed spirits about material problems which we ought to solve for ourselves; it would be a bad thing if spirits returned to earth to relieve men from the trouble of using their own brains, or to teach inquirers how to make money. . . . At all events the Koons family in America, and nearly all persons who have trusted to spirit guidance in commercial matters have been brought to commercial ruin. . . .

"It would be a hardship to the honestly industrious if media could outstrip them in the revealing of truth by simply going to sleep and permitting other intelligent beings to use their material organism.

This may be one reason why neither trance nor clairvoyance has yet made one single addition to human knowledge of physics of any practical value."¹⁴

This was written more than half a century ago, at a time when quite a number of books were being published embodying spirit communications, and professing to throw light on the dark places of history, science, and literature. For example, Professor Denton, the geologist, published three volumes dealing with the palæontology of our own earth and illustrating the conditions of life upon the other planets. His materials were mainly supplied by spirit communications obtained through mediums, but even in the opinion of his fellow spiritualists the book was not convincing. The same journal from which I have just quoted took occasion to affirm once more: "So far as our experience of trance mediumship is concerned, its statements relating to physical science have been altogether unreliable and mischievously deceiving, nor has any new discovery in physics ever been given to the world from this source."¹⁵

The astronomer M. Flammarion, who was all his life wedded to French Spiritisme and who delivered a funeral oration at the burial of Allan Kardec, tells us that in his early days he used to obtain a quantity of automatic script, dealing with mathematical and astronomical questions, which purported to emanate from the spirit of Galileo. For a time he was a good deal impressed by these communications and looked to them to obtain light upon the problems in which he was interested, but before long he satisfied himself that the whole was illusory.

¹⁴*The Spiritualist Newspaper*, November 1, 1873, pp. 371-373.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, July, 1875, p. 3. One definite example of an alleged veridical communication of scientific importance which is frequently appealed to, will be discussed in a separate chapter. It is connected with the discovery of the Edgar Chapel at Glastonbury.

"There can be no doubt," he writes, "that these thoughts were entirely the product of my own intelligence and that the illustrious Florentine had nothing to do with them. It has been the same with all communications of the astronomical class; they have not led science forward a single step; nor has any obscure, mysterious or misleading point in history been cleared up by the spirits."

It would be easy to accumulate specimens of the contradictions and futilities which swarm in what are alleged to be spirit utterances concerning life in the other planets. A single example will suffice.

"On Jupiter," wrote Prof. Denton, conducted thither by his guides, "the people do not look much different from people here. They have large beards; there is more hair on their faces than on their heads. . . . The men are larger if anything than they are here. They have very broad shoulders. . . . All the people I have yet seen are very beautiful not only in the outlines of the form but in the expression of the countenance. . . . The woman of Jupiter are taller and more slender than the average Anglo-Saxon, yet beautifully rounded; blue eyes predominate. . . . The robes worn by the ladies are each composed of one piece; except the sleeves, and fastened by a girdle. They are easy flowing and free from anything elaborate."¹⁶

Compare with this the equally authoritative account of Andrew Jackson Davis.

"The inhabitants of Jupiter do not walk erect, but assume an inclined position, frequently using their hands and arms in walking, the lower extremities being rather shorter than the arms according to our standard of proportion. And by a modest desire to be seen only in an inclined position, they have formed this habit, which has become an established custom among them."¹⁷

In 1873 a great boom in all the spiritualist press of England and America announced that Dickens' unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was being completed by the novelist himself from the spirit world through an American medium. Madame Blavatsky — this was before her Theos-

¹⁶Denton, *The Soul of Things or Psychometric Researches and Discoveries*, Vol. III (1873), pp. 281-289.

¹⁷A. J. Davis, *The Principles of Nature* (New York, 4th ed.), p. 189.

ophist days — was greatly impressed and set about translating the whole into Russian. The book, however, has never found a single champion among Dickens experts, and the highest authority on the subject has described it as self-condemned by its futility, illiteracy, and its American mannerisms.¹⁸

Just about the same time Signor Damiani, a vehement reincarnationist, writing in defence of this doctrine to the *Spiritual Magazine*, put forward the following strange argument:

"Over and over again have we been told with great assurance that reincarnation is only taught by low, ignorant, or mischievous spirits. I have before me a volume containing 24,130 lines, printed at Parma, and dictated there by the spirit of Ariosto to a medium who has never written a verse in his life. It is a description of the scenery and life in the spheres and in style and language so grand and sublime as would of itself give renown to the literature of any idiom. . . . Medium Del Giudice, of this town, has just completed under spirit dictation a most voluminous Encyclopædia, embodying such advanced views in all the branches of human learning as to make his spirit guides forbid its publication in the benighted times we live in. . . . Can these be tricks of low, ignorant, or mischievous spirits? For it is through these same spirits, one and all, that we are taught reincarnation as an integral part of the spirit philosophy."¹⁹

The argument of Signor Damiani, a man otherwise of some note and of undoubted ability, is a little unfortunate, for Ariosto's spirit poem has been accepted by no Italian critic worthy of the name.²⁰ But it is everywhere the same story, the spirits who profess to communicate through mediums or automatic writing never by any chance impart information which can be of use to mankind at large. If there

¹⁸J. Cuming Walters, *The Complete Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1912), p. 217.

¹⁹*The Spiritual Magazine*, December, 1875, p. 567.

²⁰My friend, Dr. Edmund Gardner, Professor of Italian in the University of London, and author of *Ariosto and the Court Poets of Ferrara*, whom I consulted, had never even heard of this supposed masterpiece.

were any real foundation for the belief that the beings in the other world, possessing an almost boundless range of knowledge and the kindest good will, have the power to communicate with living mortals, what endless services they might render in solving the problems of past history, in directing the researches of scientists, in preventing the miscarriage of justice. But in point of fact we get nothing but endless deceptions and futilities. As Mr. H. D. Jencken (who was the husband of Katie Fox, the earliest medium of modern Spiritualism) declared after many years experience, "the vast majority of the messages given through strong physical mediumship are objectless lies." Moreover the editor of *The Spiritualist*, in quoting this, adds of his own accord:²¹ "We are sorry to say that other persons intimately acquainted with the facts of strong physical mediumship have, as a general rule, had similar experience."

And against all the evil consequences of these disappointments and deceptions, against this atmosphere of doubt and imposture and puerilities, we have nothing to set except the fact that some few sceptics have had their belief in a future life strengthened by what seemed to them satisfactory proof of the existence of a world of spirits, and that some few mourners have been consoled in their sorrow by the conviction that they were once more in communication with the dear ones they had lost. It may be doubted whether the consolation thus resulting is commonly of a very permanent nature. Experience shows, I fear, that in too many cases while the craving for fresh assurance grows ever stronger, the evidence supplied by the mediumistic séance grows more and more faint. Doubts begin to awaken, and the resulting anguish of mind is bitter indeed.

When we come to discuss the results of Spiritualism in its

²¹*The Spiritualist*, December 31, 1875, p. 314.

effects upon health and character, we find ourselves upon rather more difficult ground. In the presence of any concrete example of mental, moral, or physical decay it can always be argued, with more or less of plausibility, that the end would have been the same if the spiritualist in question had been a Catholic or a Buddhist, a student of abstract philosophy or a labourer in the fields. None the less, all but the crudest type of determinists will admit that environment and self-discipline have everything to do with the development of those tendencies to good and evil, implanted, though in varying measure, in every son of man. We are all in some sense both potential villains and potential saints; and the same principle holds in the physical order. What I am contending for is that, so far as we can appeal to the experience of the past eighty years, the atmosphere of Spiritualism has proved thoroughly unhealthy. It develops morbid tendencies and checks the invigorating reaction of common sense. There is, I think, no evidence to show that those who have identified themselves with it have become better men or better citizens; while there is, on the other hand, a good deal which suggests that the belief in spiritual intercourse has often made them cranks or faddists, even when the deterioration has stopped short of complete mental decay. Statistics are lacking which would allow us to assert that Spiritualism is filling our lunatic asylums. Most of the wild statements which have sometimes been made are no doubt silly exaggerations, and can only do harm, but no thoughtful person will make light of the warning written during the War by the Medical Superintendent of the most important institution of the kind in Scotland, the Morningside Asylum at Edinburgh:

"I find it necessary," wrote Dr. G. M. Robertson, in his Annual Report for 1916, "at this time, as the result of several cases that have

come under my care, to utter a note of warning to those who are seeking consolation in their sorrows by practical experiments in the domain of spiritualism. I do not profess to pass any judgment on spiritualism itself, although I have been interested in it for thirty years. I recognise that it is a difficult subject worthy of patient and unbiassed enquiry by competent investigators. I do not, however, consider that those who are unversed in normal, and particularly in morbid psychology, are qualified investigators, and, least of all, that those who are wishing and longing for and unconsciously expecting certain manifestations from friends they have lost, make reliable observers."

The writer's moderation of tone will not fail to attract attention. Then, after characterising the gift of mediums "as being, if not morbid, at least closely related to the morbid," he goes on:

"I desire to warn those who may possibly inherit a latent tendency to nervous disorders to have nothing to do with practical enquiries of a spiritualistic nature, lest they should awaken this dormant proclivity to hallucination within their brains. I have known such a person who had lost her son, following the procedure in vogue at present, under advice, first hearing of him through mediums, then getting into touch with him herself and receiving messages from him, some as impressions and others as audible words, then increasing her circle of spiritual acquaintances and living more for her spiritual world than for this, to the neglect of her husband and household, till finally God conversed with her in a low musical voice at all times, and confided His plans for the future to her. I would ask spiritualists where in this case does Spiritualism end and mental disorder begin? Do they overlap? Do they coexist? Or is there such a state as disordered mental function at all? Or is it that Spiritualism was wholly absent from the case?"²²

Almost every physician and priest in populous centres will have come across similar examples, as I have done myself,

²²I quote this at second hand from Dr. Charles Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge* (Preface, pp. vii and viii). Dr. G. M. Robertson's original report is inaccessible to me, though I have read a summary of it in the *British Medical Journal*, which also quotes part of the above passage.

though happily the mischief does not always go so far as to involve the complete overthrow of reason.²³ Dr. Robertson's warning merits the more confidence because he is evidently alive to the danger of overstatement. He proceeds to point out that for those who are in the early stages of mental derangement Spiritualism has a great fascination, but that though it may retard their recovery it cannot, of course, be regarded in this case as the direct cause of insanity.

It hardly needs saying that the mediums themselves are more exposed to danger physically and morally than any other persons. The sad history of the two youngest Fox children, who are rightly described as the Founders of modern Spiritualism, has been told in a previous chapter. Even apart from the Free Love scandals which reached a climax in 1873-1875, an unwholesome atmosphere has marked every stage of the movement from the very commencement. As early as the year 1852, a reader, apparently a personage of some standing, addressed a letter to the editor of the *Spiritual Telegraph* declaring that he was at a loss "to reconcile the well-known character of some of the mediums with the intelligence of the spirits who are alleged to communicate through such questionable channels." In two leading articles (June 12 and 19), the editor replied to this criticism, not by denying the facts, but by making light of them. Very often, he urged, a man of high attainments is forced to employ unsuitable means in the accomplishment of his designs. When we engage a courier to be the bearer of important dispatches "we are accustomed to regard his fleetness rather than his high-toned morality, and it would be a most fastidious piety which stops to enquire into the morals of the post-boy, be-

²³Dr. Marcel Viollet, in his little book, *Spiritism and Insanity* (Eng. Trans. London: 1910), fully bears out Dr. Robertson's statement, and he quotes in his footnotes some remarkable cases. See, e.g., pp. 54 seq., and pp. 75 seq.

fore it will read a message from a long-absent friend." After which he remarks: "That some of them [the mediums] are of doubtful authority and questionable morals, we deem it no heresy to believe. But it was always so." And he thereupon refers to Balaam and other characters in the Old Testament.

It would not be easy to exaggerate the lamentations constantly appearing in all journals devoted to Spiritualism over the depravity and lack of principle so frequently exhibited by the mediumistic fraternity. Here is a frank admission taken from a leading article in *The Spiritualist* newspaper in 1875:

"The celebrated Neapolitan medium, Sapia Padalino [*sic*],²⁴ took to bad courses under the rule of evil spirits, nor up to the latest accounts from Signor Damiani which were published in this journal were her best friends able to save her. Two American mediums of great power, who visited England some years ago, and who could get marvellous manifestations when they were held hand and foot, forged two cheques for a large amount before they left this country, and at times seemed scarcely to have any consciousness whether they were telling the truth or the reverse. . . . Among the lower order of physical mediums also are some who have made desperate attempts to ruin each other by the deliberate invention and circulation of the most atrocious scandals about each other; indeed if all that is known upon these subjects could be brought together and printed in one volume a depth of depravity would be revealed which is simply appalling."²⁵

Now this, be it remembered, is not the verdict of a hostile critic, but it represents the sober judgment of an apologist in a responsible position, writing for his fellow believers. Neither is there any lack of confirmatory evidence. No man

²⁴This is, of course, the famous Eusapia Palladino, whose name in the early stages of her career seems to have been differently spelled. She was then (1875) about twenty years old.

²⁵*The Spiritualist*, June 25, 1875, p. 302.

probably ever possessed a wider personal acquaintance with Spiritualism in every part of the world than A. Aksakoff, an investigator whose financial and social position placed him beyond the suspicion of any sort of interested motive. His great work, *Animism and Spiritism*, is often described as a classic for all students of the subject, and he never wavered in his belief in the reality of some, at least, of the phenomena he spent his life in studying.

But Aksakoff's opinion of the trustworthiness of mediums and their controls seems steadily to have declined as years passed by. As Count Solovovo tells us in an obituary notice of Aksakoff in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*: "In answer to a question from me as to the part played by the 'spirits' in this admixture of possible fraud and supposed truth — Aksakoff rather vehemently expressed, as to the moral standard of the 'spirits,' ideas which I was astonished to hear from him."²⁶ Mrs. Sidgwick, the widow of Professor Henry Sidgwick, both of them among the pillars of psychical research in Great Britain, sums up the matter in these words: "Almost every medium who has been prominently before the public has at some time or other been detected in fraud, or what cannot be distinguished from fraud except on some violently improbable hypothesis."²⁷ But from another well-known writer on Spiritualism who has had an equally wide experience and who is also an avowed believer in the phenomena, I must quote rather more at length. Mr. Hereward Carrington, an American, speaks not only of the frauds and low moral standard of mediums but also of its harmful effects on family life. He

²⁶*Journal S.P.R.*, XI, p. 48 (1903); and cf. Aksakoff's article on "Reincarnation" in *The Spiritualist*, August 13, 1875, p. 74.

²⁷Mrs. H. Sidgwick, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* article, "Spiritualism," Vol. XXV, p. 707. Seventh edition (Cambridge, 1911).

tells us, for example, how he received a letter from a lady who had let herself go under the seduction of automatic communications, and who concluded by saying that "the communications grew to be of such a nature that it seemed that some power was trying to destroy my home life, so I stopped experimenting with it." Whereupon Mr. Carrington comments:

"In the case before us this tendency is clearly shown, and the odd mixture of lies and apparently supernormal information which so often occurs is also well illustrated. It is because of the supernormal knowledge displayed that many persons are led to believe all that the automatic writing tells them. The evil consequences are well brought out by the remark that the writing seemed to be 'trying to destroy her home life' — I have known many cases of like nature — and it shows us how careful we must be in experimenting in this manner."²⁸

What follows is still more to our purpose, for it proves that Mr. Carrington recognizes, as do Mr. Stainton Moses and Mrs. Travers Smith, that at times a distinctly malignant influence makes itself perceptible in these automatic communications. If the script, he argues, does nothing more than reproduce the fabric woven by the subconsciousness of the experimenter it is not easy to explain

"why the entity thus cultivated is so frequently evil and malicious, and why in the finest characters, in the purest young girls, it uses the vilest language and counsels the patient's own destruction. Many suicides have resulted in consequence of the instruction given by planchette. That I know."²⁹

Mr. Carrington is not the only authority who vouches for this suicidal suggestion which occasionally manifests itself in automatic communication. I myself have known one case and I have heard of two or three others. One cannot help

²⁸H. Carrington, *Problems of Psychic Research*, p. 334.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 336.

feeling a certain apprehension that the seductive picture of the experience of "passing over" set forth in the much advertised script of the Rev. G. Vale Owen, as also in *Raymond*, Claude's book and other similar revelations, will have for its practical result, not so much an increase of peace and comfort in the hearts of desolate survivors as a considerable augmentation in the statistics of suicide. The sufferings caused by bereavement are great, but the sufferings which result from poverty, illness, disappointment, anxiety, old age, and remorse are even greater, and for persons of average selfishness come much nearer home. If a man were really persuaded that by taking an overdose of laudanum he would wake up, restored to youth and vigour, in a world like this but free from all troubles, the temptation to put an end to this present existence would to many be irresistible. Shakespeare, as usual, knew all about it when he said that

"The dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of."

I am not at all sure that the certainty of a painless death and of a happy awakening in a land of brightness and peace would be a boon to mankind at large and a help to the better discharge of our social duties. But to return to the book last spoken of, Mr. Carrington is evidently puzzled by the problems presented by automatic writing. He is reluctant to confess belief in anything in the nature of a personal devil, but in using the ouija board with his wife, he admits that he had had strange experiences, and finds it hard to suggest an explanation.

"Then again," he writes, "there is the theory that the board is moved by some influence—a sort of devil theory in fact. It would hardly be necessary to do more than mention this theory here were

it not for the fact that, in our own records, there is so much evidence of evil influences and minds at work that something of the sort is certainly suggested. Of course I do not . . . think that an actual devil, with cloven hoofs and a tail, is behind the board moving it; but the answers to certain questions certainly seemed to suggest that an intelligence was operative—an intelligence of a low, cunning, malicious, lying, and altogether detestable character. . . . It is quite certain that the intelligence doing the writing was as different as possible from that of any of the circle. . . . On several occasions it called Mrs. Carrington and others names which they had never even heard of until they saw them spelled out on paper, and which are of such a nature that I cannot give them here."⁸⁰

Of cases of obsession which all who have much practical acquaintance with Spiritualism undoubtedly regard as not an imaginary but a real danger, I do not propose to say much.

That such occurrences are not uncommon almost any volume of an old Spiritualist magazine⁸¹ will suffice to prove. Representative exponents of the theory of communication, such, for example, as Mr. Stainton Moses, recur to the subject again and again, and sober modern experimenters like Mrs. Travers Smith are sufficiently convinced of the unpleasant consequences of such an experience as to urge extreme caution. A voluminous work published in the seventies by Mrs. Maria M. King, an enthusiastic believer, fully admits the fact of obsession, while contending that the phenomena are produced by spirits who, meaning well, unwittingly interpose their influence where it does mischief. Disregarding her explanation, it is interesting to find this lady saying:

"Obsessions by this grade of spirits are common among the lower class of investigators, who hold circles for amusement and to gratify

⁸⁰Carrington, *Problems*, p. 375.

⁸¹See, for example, *Light*, for 1896.

idle curiosity. Examples are not wanting where obsessions, in such circles, have ended disastrously for sensitives, who have acted the part of mediums under an influence they were unable to resist, which was of combined magnetic force, of spirits and sitters, that formed a battery so strong and so distracting as to craze the poor victim.

"... Strong men have been smitten with a species of madness that has developed into insanity and culminated, in some instances, in self-destruction by starvation or other means. The instances of this character that have occurred and are occurring among both sexes in consequence of the misapplication of the law of development are more numerous than is generally supposed by the advocates of the harmful practice so much in vogue, although exaggerated greatly by some statisticians."³²

As an illustration of the kind of case which is of frequent occurrence, I take one from India. In 1880 an English medical man wrote to the *Theosophist* concerning a patient of his "who was being made a medium against his wish." He had attended a few spiritualistic séances for the purpose of witnessing materialisation, and ever since he had been more or less subject to a series of persecutions by the controlling spirit, so that in spite of every effort of his to throw off the influence "he has been made to suffer most shamefully and painfully . . . the bodily functions overruled, even being caused to bite his tongue and cheeks most severely whilst eating." The correspondent adds that "the most painful features are not such as I can write to you," but we learn from further editorial comments that the unfortunate man had become "the bond-slave of some evil powers which force him to say and do painful and even disgusting things despite his resistance."³³

This, no doubt, was an extreme case, and it may have been a form of insanity, but there is every reason to believe that

³²King, *Principles of Nature*, Vol. III, p. 42.

³³*The Theosophist*, May, 1880, p. 207.

contact with spirit influences nearly always expose the rash experimenter to some danger of being dominated by unknown forces which may monopolize his energies and absorb him to the point of neglecting all other duties and interests. As far back as 1852, the Rev. C. Hammond, who seems to have been the earliest automatist to publish his script, says of himself: "Since I have become a writing medium, I have found no leisure to read any book. In fact, my taste for reading the productions of human wisdom is all absorbed in the divine."³⁴ This seems to me an extremely unhealthy state of things, and the same condition of mind often results from the efforts of grief-stricken mothers and widows to communicate by writing or voice mediums with the spirits of those they have lost. I learn from a book published a few years since, that Alfred Russel Wallace, F.R.S., though an ardent spiritualist, was deeply impressed by the dangers of this sort of spirit intercourse. He used to tell of a man who, "having practised automatic writing, became absolutely incapable of writing the simplest note without his hand being used by other agencies." The writer, Miss Jane T. Stoddart, tells us that Wallace "had a strong belief in the existence and activity of malignant low-grade spirits, who seek to gain control over men."³⁵ We need not attempt to determine more precisely what kind of spirits they are, but the whole difficulty lies there.

Something further ought perhaps to be said upon the question of Spiritualism and insanity. There has been much foolish exaggeration on both sides of the controversy. Many years ago, Dr. Forbes Winslow declared that there were ten thousand lunatics in our asylums who had been brought

³⁴C. Hammond, *The Pilgrimage of Thomas Paine* (New York: 1852), Preface, p. ix.

³⁵Stoddart, *The Case Against Spiritualism* (1919), p. 93.

there through their practise of Spiritualism. This statement, I understand, he afterwards retracted, but it continues to be quoted even by neuropath specialists like Dr. Schofield, who ought to know better. On the other hand, reference is still often made to an equally ancient pronouncement contained in the pamphlet of an American writer, Dr. Eugene Crowell. Sir A. C. Doyle, for example, in a newspaper controversy in which I happened to take part some years back, alleged that "Dr. Crowell examined the asylums of New England where Spiritualism is very common and found, out of 16,000 lunatics, four spiritualists and, I regret to say, 222 clergymen!" To this I replied:

"Here is the passage in Dr. Cromwell's pamphlet upon which Sir Arthur's statement is based. 'In 42 of the published reports of institutions for the insane which have come to hand, there are tables showing the previous occupations of the patients admitted or treated within one or more years and from them I find that out of a total of 32,313 male patients, 215 are set down as clergymen, while in the same reports the total number of male and female spiritualists is only 45. Insane clergymen are here in the proportion of one to every 150 inmates, while the proportion of insane spiritualists is only one in every 711.'³⁸

"It will be noticed that Sir Arthur's figures are a little inaccurate. The spiritualists numbered, not 4, but 45, and even the clergymen were, not 222, but 215. But, what is much more important, I note that as the 215 were persons whose occupation was entered as that of clergyman, the 45 were presumably persons whose 'occupation' was that of spiritualist. Few persons except mediums are spiritualists by 'occupation.' If a spiritualist doctor or a spiritualist shoemaker had been an inmate of one of these asylums there is no reason to think that he would have been entered as anything else but doctor or shoemaker. His spiritualism would not necessarily have been mentioned at all. Statistics of this kind may be made to prove anything, and it should be noted that the Dr. Crowell concerned was

³⁸Crowell, *Spiritualism and Insanity*, p. 7.

not a medical superintendent compiling an official report, but an ardent spiritualist writing a controversial pamphlet."

Sir Arthur admitted that his quotation, made hastily from memory, was inaccurate, and, in his final contribution to the correspondence, wrote: "I willingly acknowledge the moderation of Father Thurston's letter. The fact is that when the strong wine of religious emotion comes to a neurotic, it matters little what sect he or she may belong to, and we may all live in glass houses in this respect."³⁷

³⁷See *The Southport Visitor*, from January 22 to March 2, 1920.

CHAPTER VII

THE BIBLE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

IT HARDLY needs saying that Holy Scripture throughout its whole content is quite uncompromising in the language it employs concerning those who practise divination and traffic in the occult. There is no reason to develop the theme at any length, but the respect for Holy Writ and for tradition which the Church always inculcates will not allow us to leave this aspect of the subject altogether unnoticed.

Magic, in some shape or form, is found among all primitive peoples, and it certainly existed among the Hebrews. Admitting that it was foreign to their own monotheistic inheritance, they none the less learned something about it from the native races of Syria, Babylonia, Egypt, and Arabia with whom they were brought into contact. To find a satisfactory definition of witchcraft or of magic is by no means easy, and Biblical scholars are often perplexed by the difficulty of choosing the proper equivalent for the terms which are used in the Hebrew text. But the practises of the séance room would undoubtedly have been accounted by the Jews as a form of divination or necromancy. Against all such commerce with the occult the prohibitions of the Law were very strong. "Go not aside after wizards, neither ask anything of soothsayers" we read in Leviticus (xix. 31), and in the next chapter (xx. 6.) we are told regarding the soul that disobeys this ordinance: "I will set My face against that soul and destroy it out of the midst of its people." In the Anglican Revised Version, which more nearly represents the conclusions of modern critical study, we find: "Turn ye not unto

them that have familiar spirits, nor unto wizards," and a recent non-Catholic commentary explains the matter thus: "In both cases the idea is of a spirit residing in and manifested through a medium (enchanter)." Also it declares regarding one of the two words, as used in the Hebrew: "this means a spirit (not necessarily the ghost of a dead man) specially attached to a particular medium and speaking through him or her."¹ If this interpretation, representative of up-to-date Biblical scholarship, may be accepted, we have an exact anticipation of the conditions which prevail in modern séances. The medium, nearly always has a specified "control," or in other words "a familiar spirit" — this phrase has been current in English since at least the middle of the sixteenth century — who speaks through her lips, often in an entirely different voice, or else writes by her hand. So prominent in these cases was the intruding voice that the Septuagint translators, here and in Isaiah (viii. 19 and xix. 8), employ a Greek word which is the equivalent of "ventriloquists." Similar warnings to those just quoted from Leviticus are renewed in Deuteronomy (xviii. 10-12), where we read: "Neither let there be [found among you] any wizard nor charmer, nor anyone that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune tellers, or that seeketh the truth from the dead; for the Lord abhorreth all these things and for these abominations He will destroy them at thy coming." With this (the Douay) rendering, the Anglican Revised Version is in substantial agreement, though it speaks of "necromancers" instead of "those that seek the truth from the dead," a word which from its Greek etymology conveys exactly the same idea.

How the dead were evoked with the object of obtaining a knowledge of things hidden or things to come, is described

¹Bishop C. Gore, *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 1928, p. 117.

for us in the account given in the First Book of Kings² of King Saul's visit to the witch of Endor. Saul, when the Philistine armies advanced against him after Samuel's death, found himself in desperate straits. Consequently in his great fear, to quote the Douay version:

"He consulted the Lord, and He answered him not; neither by dreams, nor by priests, nor by prophets. And Saul said to his servants: Seek me a woman that hath a divining spirit (in A. V. and R. V. a familiar spirit) and I will go to her and enquire by her. And his servants said to him: There is a woman that hath a divining spirit at Endor. Then he disguised himself: and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night and he said to her: Divine to me by thy divining spirit, and bring me up him whom I shall tell thee. And the woman said to him: Behold thou knowest all that Saul hath done, and how he hath rooted out the magicians and soothsayers from the land: why then dost thou lay a snare for my life, to cause me to be put to death? And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying: As the Lord liveth there shall no evil happen to thee for this thing. And the woman said to him: Whom shall I bring up to thee? And he said bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice and said to Saul: Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul. And the king said to her: Fear not, what hast thou seen? And the woman said to him: I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said to her: What form is he of? And she said: an old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul understood that it was Samuel, and he bowed himself with his face to the ground and adored. And Samuel said to Saul: Why hast thou disturbed my rest, that I should be brought up? And Saul said: I am in great distress: for the Philistines fight against me, and God is departed from me and would not hear me, neither by the hand of prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest show me what I shall do. And Samuel said: Why asketh thou me, seeing the Lord has departed from thee, and is gone over to thy rival? for the Lord will do to thee as He spoke by me, and He will rend thy kingdom out of thy hand and will give it to thy neighbour

²This in the Protestant Bibles is called the First Book of Samuel, xxviii.

David. Because thou didst not obey the voice of the Lord, neither didst thou execute the wrath of His indignation upon Amalec: therefore hath the Lord done to thee what thou sufferest this day. And the Lord also will deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow thou and thy sons shall be with me, and the Lord will deliver the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines."

I have quoted this account at length because the agreement with modern mediumistic procedure seems to me very remarkable. Saul does not see the spirit which has been evoked, but the woman does, and the spirit speaks to him through her. She does not recognise Saul at first when in her normal state, but the moment the spirit comes upon her and she is entranced, she knows him at once. Some modern commentators have been so disturbed by this recognition that they have wanted to modify the text. They urge that in the passage "when the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice and said to Saul," the word Samuel by some copyist's blunder has been substituted for Saul. What must have happened, they contend, is that the woman recognized Saul at once when she looked at him steadily. This, however, is quite an arbitrary conjecture and there is no textual authority for it. Most of those who have consulted mediums at any time will readily admit that this Biblical account conforms quite strikingly with everyday experience. The medium only becomes clairvoyant when she is controlled by her familiar spirit.

There has, of course, been much lively controversy among commentators, both ancient and modern, as to the nature of the apparition. Some think that it was nothing but a trick—a typical case of simulation and ventriloquism on the part of the woman. Something of a difficulty is caused, however, by a passage (xlvi. 23) in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, where the sacred writer refers to this incident and seems

plainly to assume that Samuel did himself "lift up his voice in prophecy and show King Saul the end of his life." There are therefore others who believe that Almighty God allowed the spirit of Samuel to return to earth for the sake of the warning thus given to Saul himself and to all the people of Israel. But even from the time of the early Christian Fathers, there was yet a third opinion to the effect, that a spirit was really evoked, though it was not the spirit of Samuel, but a demon who impersonated him. It would be tedious to debate these various theories, with regard to which no generally accepted conclusion has yet been reached. I would only urge that the case stands on all fours with the numberless incidents which are alleged to happen all round us at the present day, when, for example, "Margery" (Mrs. Crandon) claims to be in constant communication with her brother Walter, or when Sir Oliver Lodge believes that he holds, or at any rate has held, long colloquies with Raymond, his son who was killed in the War. Let us note further that there is a very striking incident recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (xvi), in connection with the visit of Paul and Silas to Macedonia. We are told of "a certain girl having a pythonical spirit who brought to her masters much gain by divining." She cried after the Apostles saying: "These men are the servants of the most high God who preach unto you the way of salvation." It is remarkable that there was nothing untrue or disparaging in what the girl said. On the contrary, such testimony might have seemed likely to help the preachers in their mission. Nevertheless when this announcement was repeated, St. Paul, growing indignant, "turned and said to the spirit 'I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to go out from her.' And he went out the same hour." The girl, in consequence, lost her mediumistic powers, and her masters could no longer make

use of her for their mercenary purposes. Thereupon they laid an information against St. Paul and his companion, and we are told how "the people ran together against them, and the magistrates, rending off their clothes, commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the gaoler to guard them diligently." There is no occasion to recall the story of their miraculous release and the conversion of the gaoler which followed. The point is that some alien spirit, not in this case a lying spirit, had spoken through the lips of the girl, and that St. Paul held that this invasion of the consciousness and this exercise of preternatural powers for gain were something in themselves evil and not to be tolerated even when they worked harmlessly.

Throughout the early Christian centuries the writings of the Fathers are full of warnings against the many forms of occultism which, as the pagan historians themselves disclose, became increasingly prevalent in every part of the decaying Roman empire. In one of the earliest Christian synods of which we have detailed record, that of Ancyra, held in A.D. 314, the following canon was passed:

"Those who foretell the future and follow pagan customs, or admit into their houses people (magicians) in order to discover magical remedies, or to perform expiations, must be sentenced to a five years' penance — to three years of *substratio* (i.e., they were admitted to be present at the liturgy, not standing upright, as the rest of the faithful, but always prostrate) and to two years of praying attendance without communicating."

The magical and necromantic practises against which the early Fathers thundered were manifold in their variety. Some of them were mere superstitions — the use of spells, amulets, *ligaturæ* (charms tied on), etc. — but the most prevalent abuse of all was the belief in *mathematici* (i.e., astrologers) who in those days when astronomy and astrology

were very imperfectly distinguished, achieved a qualified recognition with certain Christian teachers who regarded the calculations of the *mathematici* as a sort of science. But there was also an unhealthy craze for "enquiring after hidden things and things to come," as well as for attempts to communicate with the dead, the two forms of dabbling in the occult which are mainly instrumental at the present day in bringing men to consult spiritualistic mediums. Even under the pagan emperors there was much legislation of a drastic kind prohibiting the publication of oracles and auguries and enacting severe penalties against transgressors. These laws were revived and made more stringent by Constantine and not a few of his successors, but the fashion spread in spite of all these repressive measures, and the sermons of such sacred orators as Origen, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Methodius, St. Augustine, etc., show clearly that there were many negligent Christians who succumbed to the temptation of trying to peer into the future. The Christian apologist Minucius Felix, who probably wrote in the second century after Christ, makes it plain, in the 26th chapter of his treatise *Octavius*, how insidiously a dependence on auguries and omens had wormed its way into the life of pagan Rome. Speaking mainly of the oracles he shows what he thought of the intelligences which thus manifested:

"The 'spirits' (*spiritus*) are untruthful and elusive. The powers which belong to them as heavenly beings have been depraved by the greed and filth of the earth. These same spirits have lost their gift of simplicity of substance, and laden as they are with all kinds of iniquity, they do not, while they themselves are ruined, cease to work the ruin of others. Corrupt in themselves, they instill the same corruption, and having turned against God, they employ base superstitions to keep men at a distance from Him. These spirits are demons. This the poets proclaim, and the philosophers make it the theme of their discussions. Of this, too, Socrates in particular was

aware, when according to the nod and decision of his familiar demon, he either left things alone or sought them for his own concerns. The magicians again not only know these demons, but whatever marvels they trump up, they perform by their aid. It is by their suggestion and participation that they produce their juggleries, making things seem to be which do not exist, or hiding from human gaze the things which really are."

Although the word *demon* did not at this period necessarily mean a fallen angel and myrmidon of Satan, still it was undoubtedly the general opinion of the Fathers of the Church that the phenomena, the prophetic omens and the other marvels which led men to have recourse to magicians, were all brought about by diabolical aid. Tertullian in chapter 57 of his *De Anima* discourses at some length upon the evocation of the dead. He speaks in such terms as to make it clear that many people in his time believed that the dead could be called back to earth by the sorcerer's art and could show themselves in material forms to the curious eyes of the living. It is all an illusion, he declares; the dead cannot really come back; and he appeals to the parable of Dives and Lazarus in which "the great gulf fixed" between this world and the next forbids any soul to return that has once passed over. There are only a very few, he adds, whom the power of God has recalled to their bodies as a testimony to His supreme dominion over life and death. The spectres that necromancers conjure up are no more than phantoms, an hallucination of the senses effected solely by the power of the spirit of evil.

To anyone at all familiar with the Christian literature of the early centuries it soon becomes plain that the great teachers of that age looked upon magic in its numberless ramifications as almost the deadliest enemy with which the Church had to contend. It was undoubtedly a far more potent influence throughout the Roman Empire than any lingering

attachment to the polytheism of pre-Augustan days; and allying itself, as it did, with Gnosticism, Manicheism, and certain other heretical sects, it became in a sense a foe within the camp tending constantly to undermine the loyalty of the less observant and by its own marvels, whether diabolical, natural, or simulated, to obscure and depreciate the miracles of the Gospels and the supernatural element in the Church's life. It would take us too far to attempt to draw out the analogies to modern Spiritualism which come to the surface in such documents as the apocryphal Clementine "Homilies" and "Recognitions." The "Philosophumena" of Hippolytus make it abundantly clear that the marvels at which the uncritical gaped were then, as now, in great measure, tricks carried out by more or less clever sleight of hand and audacious imposture. On the other hand, St. Augustine, while denouncing throughout all his vast literary output, the intervention of diabolical agencies in all the works of the *mathematici*, *genethliaci*, Manicheans, and others, shows now and again a rather surprising readiness to accept certain phenomena as the result of some natural psychic power or condition. But the majority of Christian teachers lacked the practical experience which St. Augustine's early intimacy with the Manicheans and pagan philosophers had given him. They knew nothing, of course, of hypnotism or telepathy, and on the other hand they had inherited an almost exaggerated belief in the power of the devil and much credulity regarding the range of diabolic interferences even in the physical occurrences of man's everyday existence. It is thus that we find Pope Sylvester II, one of the most learned and irreproachable of early mediæval pontiffs, accused of the practice of sorcery. The only foundation for such a charge was that he had taken interest in mechanical devices and was keen to acquire knowledge of such elementary physical

science as had filtered through from the East, mainly through Moslem or Jewish channels. Even a good pious monk like William of Malmesbury, writing a couple of centuries later, was ready to tell all the world that Pope Sylvester had made a pact with the devil and had in consequence perished most miserably. This belief in time became part of the popular tradition and was echoed by nearly all the later mediæval chroniclers. There can be no doubt that the conviction that Satan was everywhere active and was continually plotting not only against man's spiritual good but also against his temporal well-being, was productive of a great deal of foolish credulity. Although the Church for many centuries showed great moderation in her dealings with those accused of sorcery, still an atmosphere of suspicion developed in the course of time. The more people spoke and thought about witchcraft and the marvels which black magic was capable of producing, the more the reputed witches multiplied. In the end a fanatical mania of persecution set in among Catholics and Protestants alike which by an appeal to such texts as that of Exodus xxii. 18, "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" justified every severity. The reaction which followed in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is probably in large measure responsible for the unwillingness of so many at the present day to believe that genuine phenomena are ever produced by spiritualistic agencies.

CHAPTER VIII

TELEKINETIC PHENOMENA

ALTHOUGH the physical manifestations of Spiritualism may seem to be trivial, purposeless, and often a mere bait to unhealthy curiosity, still they provide the readiest demonstration of the existence of intelligent agencies outside the world of sense. They are, therefore, of value as a weapon against crude materialism, and for this reason, even apart from the question of fact, I should be disposed to deprecate the growing disposition to regard all such alleged happenings as fraudulent and illusory. It seems worth while to study the contentions advanced in a work by the Rev. Baron Johan Liljencrants, which some years ago was presented and accepted for the degree of doctor of theology in the Catholic University at Washington.¹ To regard this book, however, merely in the light of the ordinary scholastic thesis with which we are familiar in foreign universities, would be altogether to underestimate its importance. Issued by a well-known Catholic firm in a substantial cloth binding, and introduced by a variety of eulogistic appreciations, including a letter from the then Cardinal Archbishop of Baltimore and a "Foreword" by Mr. Maurice Francis Egan, late United States Minister in Denmark, this imposing volume of 300

¹*Spiritism and Religion: "Can you talk to the Dead?" including a study of the most remarkable cases of spirit control;* by Baron Johan Liljencrants, A.M., S.T.D. (Devin-Adair Co.). From the book itself we learn that Baron Liljencrants was born and educated in Sweden. He served in the Royal Svea Guards, but came to America in 1910, at the age of 25, and was there received into the Catholic Church. After that he made his theological studies and was ordained to the priesthood in 1915.

pages must claim respectful consideration. The learned author informs us in his preface that for the results of his enquiry he is indebted in large measure "to the members of the Faculty of Sacred Theology in the Catholic University of America, under whose generous guidance this work has been presented." He specially names four of these professors, and one of the four thus singled out, the Rev. John A. Ryan, D.D., Professor successively of Moral Theology and of Sociology, states in a note, printed on a fly-leaf, that this present volume, i.e., *Spiritism and Religion*, "is beyond doubt the best book on the subject in the English language." And after other remarks in the same strain he concludes by saying: "It is scientific without being dry, and its conclusions will not easily be overthrown."

What were the conclusions which were thus so cordially endorsed by the Washington professors? As the matter is of some importance I wish to be careful not to misrepresent the author, and we must allow him, as far as possible, to speak for himself. But seeing that his conclusions are not clearly formulated until near the end of the volume, the reader must derive his first impression of the general trend of the essay from Mr. M. F. Egan's "Foreword," where we read such things as these: "It seems strange to those around us that the Fox sisters, Katie King and that colossal impostor, celebrated by Browning, Daniel Dunglas Home, should ever have been taken seriously, but they were, and by intelligent persons too, in my memory." To describe Home as "a colossal impostor" is an easy way out of many difficulties, but it takes a good deal for granted. Dr. Liljencrants himself does not go quite so far, and admits, with Podmore, that "Home has the unique distinction among professional physical mediums never to have been exposed as an im-

postor.”² All the same, he does clearly insinuate that Home was guilty of fraudulent practices, and in particular that the evidence for his alleged levitations is very faulty. More must be said about Home later on, but for the moment we are concerned with the author’s own conclusions. Let me gladly admit that Dr. Liljencrants does not shirk the responsibility attending a bold enunciation of his views. Already, on page 178, he tells us: “Our brief survey so far has shown, we think, the absence of positive evidence for genuine physical phenomena.” This he reiterates on page 194, in the statement that, according to his interpretation of the facts, “the physical phenomena could not be proved not to have been mechanically produced by the medium. Deliberate fraud was found in great abundance, and no doubt would have to be suspected in most cases of physical mediumship.” But naturally it is in the last section of his work that we meet with his final and most explicit utterances. He leads off with the remark that “a study of the best authenticated phenomena on record has failed to show evidence for other than natural causes, and, consequently, we have arrived at the conclusion that Spiritism cannot be shown to contain a preternatural element.” This thought is more fully developed in the following passage, which it seems desirable to quote at length:

“Our study of the phenomena of Spiritism has led us to the conclusion that they do not exceed the powers of nature and that, where deliberate fraud is absent, they can be referred to psychological causes. Modern manuals of Moral Theology do not support our view, but it is to be noted that Theologians have referred the phenomena to diabolic agencies only where a natural causation would be inadequate for the explanation. Of course this standpoint must be admitted, but at the same time it must be admitted that Psychical Research has failed to show the inadequacy of a natural causation in the vast

²*Op. cit.*, pp. 25 and 134.

quantity of phenomena which has fallen under its investigation. We believe that the devil not only can, but actually does, interfere in the order of things, as has been shown, for instance, in cases of diabolic possession; but no case should be accepted as diabolical in the absence of sufficient evidence. It is possible, then, that spiritistic phenomena have been preternaturally caused, but, on the other hand, over thirty years of careful investigation on two continents have failed to produce evidence for such contingency."³

It is not at all my intention to discuss what may be regarded as the theological aspect of these questions, and even less to take for granted that all manifestations of the psychophysical order which transcend the powers of natural causation must necessarily be diabolic in origin. But one may be excused, perhaps, for pointing out, in passing, that the attitude of Dr. Liljencrants does not seem to agree very well with the long section accorded to this subject in the decrees of the Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866. This was apparently the first conciliar pronouncement on Spiritualism issued in any part of the world, and the bishops there assembled, while fully recognizing that a large proportion of the manifestations were due to trickery, none the less declare that "it can hardly be doubted that some, at least, of these phenomena must be attributed to diabolic agency, since it is scarcely possible to find any other adequate explanation."

It is plain, in any case, that Dr. Liljencrants considers that the criticisms of Mr. Podmore and other like sceptics have seriously shaken the testimony of Sir William Crookes, Lord Crawford, Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor Zöllner, Professor Richet, and the whole tribe of believers. He draws the inference that no one in the circumstances need admit that such phenomena as materialisation, levitation, elongation of the human body, spirit photography, and the rest are ever genuine. It may be that the author did not mean to say more

³*Op. cit.*, p. 273.

than this, and did not intend to commit himself personally to the opinion that these things do not happen. One can only regret, if this be the case, that he has not succeeded in defining his position more clearly. Ninety-nine readers out of a hundred will certainly carry away the impression that in the judgment of Dr. Liljencrants, upheld and endorsed by the Theological Faculty of the Catholic University of America, the most remarkable of the alleged physical phenomena of mediumship are nothing better than impostures or myths. This, I venture to urge, is not a helpful attitude of mind towards these manifestations, especially at the present juncture of affairs; first, because, as I hold, these things do happen, and the evidence attesting them is becoming every day more overwhelming; but, secondly, because the systematic pulling to pieces and discounting of human testimony regarding plain issues of fact which this process involves, seems to me in principle subversive of all belief in the historical record of the Gospels and, indirectly, of all belief in Christian revelation.

In setting out to justify this criticism of Dr. Liljencrants' volume I am tempted, at the outset, to regret that he has so generally limited his comments to certain famous and much-discussed examples, giving us, to a large extent, a mere echo of Podmore, whose defect it was to fasten upon the details of one well-known incident, ignoring all the confirmatory phenomena in other quarters. Again it may be questioned if the performances, however wonderful, of such a medium as Eusapia Palladino, who, by the testimony of her best friends, took to wrong courses before she was eighteen, and who, in the matter of fraudulent phenomena, remained utterly unscrupulous all her life long, ought, under any circumstances, to be given the chief place in the investigation with which we are concerned. In the presence of Eusapia

we know that we are in an atmosphere of trickery; she will use every concession made to her to deceive us if she can. She is just as much an illusionist as the professional conjurer. As far back as 1873 the spiritualists of Naples did their best to reclaim her, but, as one of their number wrote, the low class of "spirits" under whose influence she had fallen rendered all efforts fruitless. "We have done all in our power," he continues, "to remedy this evil which deprives us of one of the best physical mediums in existence."⁴ Much greater evidential value, as it seems to me, ought by comparison to attach to those simpler phenomena by which upright and able men, like Judge Edmonds, Professor Hare, or R. Dale Owen, in the very infancy of the movement, were won over to a belief which brought them nothing but obloquy. They were fully aware that the phenomena were attributed to toe cracking and other forms of fraud. Further, Judge Edmonds, Governor Tallmadge, and several other converts of that period, were used to weighing evidence. The first named had occupied with credit the highest judicial position in the United States, which he only resigned on account of the outcry against him when his spiritualistic convictions became generally known. He lived for twenty years afterwards, and suffered much for the cause he had made his own. Every work of reference I have consulted agrees with the dictum of the *Encyclopædia Americana*, that Edmonds' "moral character was above reproach, and his reputation as a learned and able lawyer remained unimpaired to the last." Now, in the work on *Spiritualism* written in 1854, in collaboration with his friend Dr. Dexter, Judge Edmonds speaks as follows:

"On April 23, 1851, I was one of a party of nine who sat round a centre table, on which a lamp was burning, and another lamp was

⁴See Signor Damiani's letter in *The Spiritualist*, March 15, 1873, p. 140-1.

burning on the mantelpiece. And then, in plain sight of us all, that table was lifted at least a foot from the floor, and shaken backwards as easily as I could shake a goblet in my hand. Some of the party tried to stop it by the exercise of their strength, but in vain; *so we all drew back from the table* and by the light of those two burning lamps we saw the heavy mahogany table suspended in the air.”⁵

Again, among many similar experiences, Judge Edmonds declares:

“I have known a mahogany chair thrown on its side and moved swiftly back and forth on the floor, no one touching it, through a room where there were at least a dozen people sitting, yet no one was touched, and it was repeatedly stopped, within a few inches of me, when it was coming with a violence which if not arrested must have broken my legs.”⁶

There were plenty of other witnesses who testified to this class of phenomena. The Hon. N. D. Tallmadge, ex-Governor of Wisconsin, published a letter he had written on April 12, 1853, describing séances with the Fox sisters which had taken place at Washington in the preceding February. In one of these, after certain communications had been rapped out:

“The table suddenly moved from the position it occupied some three or four feet, rested a few moments, then moved back to its original position. Then it again moved as far the other way, and returned to the place it started from. One side of the table was then raised and stood for a few moments at an angle of thirty-five degrees and then again rested on the floor as usual. The table was a large, heavy, round table, at which ten or a dozen persons might be seated at dinner. During all these movements no person touched the table, nor was any one near it.”⁷

Further manifestations followed, in one of which a smaller

⁵Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, Vol. I, p. 24.

⁶*Appeal to the Public on Spiritualism* (New York: 1858), p. 8 (written in 1853).

⁷E. W. Capron, *Modern Spiritualism, its Facts and Fanaticisms* (Boston: 1855), p. 349; see also Prof. R. Hare, *Experimental Investigation* (New York: 1858, 5th ed.), pp. 307-312.

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table, with Tallmadge sitting upon it, was raised in the air. It would be easy to multiply similar testimonies made by people of standing who had nothing to gain and everything to lose by this championship of an unpopular cause, but I prefer to draw attention to a letter written to Mr. Henry Spicer by an American gentleman in Baltimore, whose acquaintance he had made when visiting the States the year before. At the time of the visit this "Mr. G." had "paid no more attention to the rappings than such as one might consider due to an ingenious hoax," but personal experience in the interval had somewhat modified his views. He testifies to the extraordinary multiplication of mediums, and then remarks:

"This really curious subject . . . is cutting a wide swathe through the established common-sense experiences of our people, and leaving behind it insanities and hallucinations of a most distressing character, not infrequently productive of results of far too grave a nature to be referred to a cause so shallow as mere charlatanism, or trickery of designing persons."

This, I confess, strikes me as the remark of an eminently sensible observer. Mr. G. goes on to say that his own experience was limited to three sittings with the medium Miss Ada Hoyt at a house in East Boston. Upon the rappings and answers to questions, he comments:

"I am satisfied that they are phenomena; that they are not produced or controlled by any agency on the hither side of nature. I am more inclined to call them *subnatural* than *supernatural*, but certainly they lie out of the jurisdiction of an established code of physical laws. . . . *The table was lifted from the floor and moved aside*, while four of us (Dr. C., the two Messrs. O. and myself) were grasping it firmly and pressing it directly downwards. We held communications with the unseen intelligences, but I am sorry to say their contributions to our desire for knowledge were of no substantial value. Indeed, with a few slightly indicated exceptions, the set we had fallen in with seemed to have little respectability to commend them. They were, in

truth, a shabby crew. They would lie, and the truth was not in them. They would seldom have the decency to confess their ignorance of any subject on which they were questioned, but answered generally very promptly. Occasionally we detected one passing himself off for another person whose name he had assumed."

The author of the book (H. Spicer) did not apparently feel justified in printing the name of his correspondent without express permission. But the "Dr. C." mentioned in the letter, also happened to send an account of these sittings, and in his case Spicer had no scruple in informing his readers that Dr. Coale, of Boston, was the person referred to. This second witness declares like the first:

"The movement of the table was, however, very remarkable. Three of my friends present, all able-bodied men and of good weight, tried to hold the table down, while I also did my utmost to keep it firm. It was, however, raised from the ground, and swayed to and fro, the medium remaining perfectly passive and laughing at our ineffectual efforts to resist the movement."⁸

Taken in conjunction with a profusion of other similar firsthand experiences, this evidence seems to me excellent. There was no exclusion of light. In séances conducted in pitchy darkness, with entranced mediums groaning, or stirring uneasily, nerves are often in an acute state of tension, and an ideal atmosphere is created for hallucinations of every kind. But there was nothing of the sort here. Moreover, Judge Edmonds and ex-Governor Tallmadge were men who had legal training and experience. They must have known the value of evidence. Edmonds does not tell us the names of the mediums responsible for the many wonderful phenomena he witnessed, but D. D. Home was almost certainly one of them. Whether the Judge was ever present at

⁸See Spicer, *Sights and Sounds* (London: 1853), pp. 363-371. The séances described must have taken place in 1852. The whole account is well worth reading, and the evidential character of certain fragments of information which were given can hardly be questioned.

the séances which Home, then a young man under twenty, gave in the house of Mr. Rufus Elmer, of Springfield (Mass.), I have not been able to learn, but a statement, signed by Mr. Elmer and ten others, attested that on February 28, 1852 —

"The table, around which we were seated, was moved by an invisible and unknown agency with such irresistible force that no one in the circle could hold it. Two men — standing on opposite sides and grasping it at the same time, and in such a manner as to have the greatest possible advantage — could not by the utmost exercise of their powers, restrain its motion. In spite of their exertions the table was moved from one to three feet. . . . Five men, whose united weight was 855 pounds, stood on a table (without casters) and the table, while the men were so situated, was repeatedly moved a distance of from four to eight inches. . . . The manifestations occurred in a room thoroughly illuminated!"⁹

One more early manifestation, in which Home again figured, will not, I trust, exhaust the reader's patience. It occurred on April 15, 1852, at Mr. Elmer's house, and among those present was included the Professor of Electricity and Chemistry at Harvard, Mr. David A. Wells, who had previously been quite sceptical regarding spiritualistic phenomena. A statement of what occurred was afterwards drafted, in which among other things we read:

"While no visible power was employed to raise the table, or otherwise move it from its position, it was seen to rise clear of the floor, and to float in the atmosphere for several seconds, as if sustained by some denser medium than air. Mr. Wells seated himself on the table, which was rocked to and fro with great violence, and at length it poised itself on two legs and remained in this position for some thirty seconds, when no other person was in contact with the table. . . . During these occurrences the room was well lighted, the lamp was

⁹One of the eyewitnesses, Mr. S. B. Brittan, who appended his signature to this statement — it was printed shortly afterwards in the *Shekinah*, 1852, p. 291 — quotes it in full in his *Discussion with Dr. B. W. Richmond* (New York: 1853), pp. 233-235.

frequently placed on and under the table, and every possible opportunity was afforded us for the closest inspection, and we submit this one emphatic declaration: *We know that we were not imposed upon or deceived.*"¹⁰

This statement, signed by Professor Wells and the other witnesses, was printed and made public. It will be noted that the phenomena occurred, not on a stage, or with a table provided by Mr. Home, but in a private house where the spectators had every facility for examination. Moreover, the two séances last spoken of were appealed to by Mr. S. B. Brittan a year later in a printed discussion concerning Spiritualism and its phenomena. His opponent, the well-known American divine, Dr. B. W. Richmond, replying in due course to each of the contributions of Mr. Brittan, made no attempt to challenge the evidence of these statements. He does not directly dispute the facts but he refers vaguely to "the movement of ponderable bodies by will power," quoting Simon Magus and the absurd beliefs of the witch hunters, and then falls back on the phenomena of pith balls moved by electricity. It is incredible that any controversialist could adopt such a line of defence if he had seen any reasonable ground for impugning the credibility of the witnesses who were cited.

Now the critic is, of course, free to declare that these accounts are mendacious and written in bad faith, but short of some such violent hypothesis it is difficult to find any ground for rejecting them as statements of historical fact. Suggestion and expectant attention do not make people in well-lighted rooms see tables rise in the air in spite of efforts to hold them down. We cannot suppose that a man of the intellectual standing and practical experience of Judge Edmonds would, in three or four years, have deluded himself

¹⁰See S. B. Brittan, *A Discussion . . . of Spiritualism*, with Dr. B. W. Richmond (New York: 1853), p. 247.

as to what really happened in his presence, the more so that these manifestations exercised a determining influence upon the whole of his after life. If the possibility of malobservation or lapse of memory be pleaded as sufficient ground for rejecting such testimony, how can we quarrel with the rationalist who refuses to accept the evidence for the miracles of the Gospel. The witnesses in Judea were simple-minded and uncultured, but we believe their testimony because they recorded, even at some distance of time, the facts which their own eyes had beheld. If Judge Edmonds' experience had been an isolated one, more difficulty might be felt, but we have literally scores of able men who aver that they have witnessed exactly similar phenomena. Like him, they came to the investigation incredulous, and went away convinced. The trouble is that it is impossible to give any idea of the amount or the cogency of the evidence which is available. A large number of representative spiritualists, e.g., Professor Robert Hare of the University of Pennsylvania,¹¹ Mr. Cromwell Varley, F.R.S., Signor Damiani, and Mr. W. H. Harrison, afterwards editor of *The Spiritualist*, to name only a few, began by being absolute sceptics regarding the phenomena.¹² Professor Hare seems to have been finally convinced, after a long series of scientific experiments, by observing the movement of heavy tables under circumstances which precluded any possibility of natural causation. The fact that both he and Judge Edmonds were afterwards led to attach serious import to the fantastic communications from the spirit world obtained by automatic writing does not seem to me to invalidate in any way testimony regarding the phys-

¹¹See especially Hare, *Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations*, pp. 131 seq.; pp. 38-41, and 46.

¹²For Mr. Varley and Signor Damiani see the Dialectical Society's *Report on Spiritualism*, pp. 157 and 195. Mr. Harrison recounts his experiences in *The Spiritualists*, March 5, 1875.

ical manifestations which they witnessed. When they affirmed that in a good light they saw heavy tables shift their position, tilt right over, and even hang suspended in the air without contact, it is impossible to believe either that their eyes deceived them or that they were lying. A young child would be competent to decide whether these things did or did not happen. Probably the most remarkable record of such phenomena ever published is that contained in the once scarce volume, *Experiences in Spiritualism with Dr. D. D. Home*, which was privately printed in 1869 by the then Lord Adare and his father, the (third) Earl of Dunraven.¹³ Lord Adare, afterwards fourth Earl of Dunraven, not long before his death wrote to the newspapers to bear witness that in more than half a century his opinion of the facts had undergone no change. Over seventy séances, held between 1867 and 1869, are described in his book, and the names are given of some fifty people who were present on different occasions. A copy of the report was sent to each "with a request that if it coincided with their own recollection of what took place they would kindly allow their names to be appended as testifying to its accuracy." We are told that every answer was in the affirmative as to the correctness of the accounts. The names given include those of scientists like Dunraven himself, the Earl of Crawford, and Dr. Gully (the father of Viscount Selby, Speaker of the House of Commons), lawyers, soldiers, literary men, and a number of ladies well known in London society. The descriptions seem to have been written down within a day or two after the séances, and they are for the most part carefully dated. Although, unfortunately, definite information regarding the lighting of the room is not always given, still, in many of the accounts, there is men-

¹³It has now been reprinted by the English Society for Psychical Research in Vol. XXXV of their *Proceedings*.

tion of lamps, candles, or a bright fire. What lends additional interest and reliability to the volume is the fact that Lord Dunraven, père, a convert to Catholicism, although fully satisfied as to the reality of the phenomena, by no means proclaims himself a spiritualist. He asserts that "admitting even that the spirits are those of departed human beings, the difficulty of identification renders the whole subject at this present stage rather unsatisfactory," and he adds, "I cannot conceal my own state of doubt as to the source from which the phenomena of Spiritualism proceed, and my decided impression of the danger which in some respects seems possibly to accompany its pursuit or adoption."¹⁴

I am not proposing to discuss the more out-of-the-way manifestations, but confining ourselves for the present to the movement and levitation of furniture, of which more than a score of examples are recorded in Lord Adare's volume, it seems impossible to believe that, in the endless variety of conditions described, the spectators were always imposed upon. For example, in the very first séance at which Adare assisted, held at Malvern in the house of a Mrs. Thayer, there was a large lamp on the piano and two lighted wax candles, with pencil and paper, on the table, which was a heavy one. The table was repeatedly tilted up at an angle of 45 degrees. The surface was smooth, polished mahogany, yet the candles, paper and pencil did not move. Then, Lord Adare continues:

"The table was moved up against my chest and, as I pushed back my chair, it followed me up until the back of my chair was against the window and I could go no further; the table was then pushed close up against me. . . . Then a chair that was standing against the wall, at a distance of perhaps five yards, came suddenly and quickly

¹⁴Preface, pp. xvi and xx.

out from the wall and placed itself beside me at the table. The effect was startling."¹⁵

Surely no one will suggest that Lord Adare, writing this account for his father's perusal the next day, fabricated these incidents, or had dreamt them, or had been deceived by some mechanical apparatus attached to the chair which his eyes were unable to detect. Or who again will suggest delusion as explaining the following incident after a séance at 7 Buckingham Gate? We went into the next room, writes Lord Adare, and —

"We were at supper, eating, drinking, and chatting very merrily [assuredly not in the dark], not talking of, or, I believe thinking about, Spiritualism, when there came a knock at the door. Charlie (Capt. Wynne) turned his head and said, "Come in." The door did not open; but the next moment there came knocks upon the table and a chair glided out from the wall to the table (no one touching it), and placed itself in the most natural manner between Emmy (Mrs. Wynne) and Home."¹⁶

Similarly, on another occasion, when Lord Adare was sitting writing (and, therefore, presumably in a good light) alone in a room with Home, "a chair moved very slowly up to the table, no one touching it, a distance of eight feet eleven inches."¹⁷ No one will pretend that the writer of these accounts was a credulous and unpractical visionary. Already, in 1867, he had acted as War Correspondent to the *Daily Telegraph* in Abyssinia, and shortly afterwards he discharged the same functions for the same journal during the Franco-Prussian War and the siege of Paris. A few years later he published his well-known book, *The Great Divide*, and, subsequently, on two occasions, he became Under-

¹⁵Adare, *Experiences*, p. 2.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 148.

Secretary of State for the Colonies. Either the incidents did happen as described, or Lord Adare was lying, and this latter alternative is inconceivable.

One feels bound to apologize for the dull monotony of this type of manifestation. The mere lifting and movement of furniture is not half so exciting as the appearance of spirit lights and dim spirit forms, the floating about of musical boxes, bells, and tambourines, the pluckings and touchings of materialized hands, the rappings and sledge-hammer blows which diversified the séances of Eusapia Palladino, carried on, when she could have her way, in almost pitchy darkness. But when one has the word of honourable men like Judge Edmonds or Lord Adare, testifying to what their eyes beheld under circumstances in which there was no obscurity of vision, no staging or opportunity for the introduction of mechanical artifices, it seems to me to be a mere perversity of obstinate scepticism to doubt that these things really happened. For phenomena of this nature you do not want the observers to be expert scientists, although there is no lack of expert scientists, from Sir William Crookes, Sir William Huggins, and Alfred Russel Wallace, down to Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, and Professors Lombroso and Richet who have observed precisely the same movements under various combinations of circumstances. But every sober-minded man of fair intelligence knows, if he proclaims that he saw a table suspended in the air or moving of itself, that he is making a serious demand upon the credulity of his hearers. If he is an honest man, he will not affirm it unless he is convinced that the circumstances precluded all possibility of a natural explanation, and it is not always the man who is most profuse in details and in reasons to justify his conviction that is the most trustworthy witness to the fact itself. To determine the reality of the physical phenomena

of Spiritism in general we do not really need to go beyond the movement and levitation of material objects. I am not, of course, suggesting that because we have established the fact of levitation, such other phenomena as materialization, or apports through closed doors, or spirit lights, must follow of themselves, but we have at least shown that some of these physical manifestations lie outside the range of natural causation, and the proved existence of one form of "miracle" paves the way for the more ready acceptance of others.

In this matter of the movement and levitation of furniture excellent evidence is provided in the *Report on Spiritualism*, issued by the Dialectical Society in 1871. The first sub-committee in particular, possibly on account of the greater harmony of its members, obtained very good results. No paid mediums were employed, but the sub-committee included more than one medium among its own body. These, we are told, were "persons of good social position and of unimpeachable integrity, having no pecuniary object to serve and nothing to gain by deception." All the meetings took place in the private houses of members of the committee, and except when expressly stated were conducted in good gas light. Further, we are told that:

"Of the members of your sub-committee about four-fifths entered upon the investigation wholly sceptical as to the reality of the alleged phenomena, firmly believing them to be the result either of imposture or of delusion, or of involuntary muscular action. It was only by irresistible evidence, under conditions that precluded the possibility of either of these solutions, and after trial and test many times repeated, that the most sceptical of your sub-committee were slowly and reluctantly convinced that the phenomena exhibited in the course of their protracted inquiry were veritable facts."¹⁸

After forty meetings, distributed over more than a year, the members reported:

¹⁸*Report on Spiritualism* (Longmans, 1871), p. 9.

"That under certain bodily or mental conditions of one or more of the persons present, a force is exhibited sufficient to set in motion heavy substances, without the employment of any muscular force, without contact or material connection of any kind between such substances and the body of any person present."

They also declared that this force on occasion produced knockings and vibrations and that it was frequently directed by intelligence. Further, they appended, by way of illustration, an account of one particularly successful sitting in the following terms:

"After a committee of eleven persons had been sitting round a dining table for forty minutes, and various motions and sounds had occurred, the chairs were turned with *their backs to the table*, at about nine inches from it. All present then knelt upon their chairs, placing their arms upon the backs of the chairs. In this position the feet were, of course, turned away from the table, and by no possibility could be placed under it or touch the floor. The hands were extended over the table at about four inches from the surface.

"In this position, contact with any part of the table could not take place without detection.

"In less than a minute the table, untouched, moved *four* times; at first about *five* inches to one side, then about *twelve* inches to the opposite side, then about four inches, and then about six inches.

"The hands were next placed on the backs of the chairs and about a foot from the table. In this position, the table again moved *four* times, over spaces varying from four to six inches. Then all the chairs were removed twelve inches from the table. All knelt as before. Each person folded his hands behind his back, his body being about eighteen inches from the table, and having the back of the chair between himself and the table. In this position the table again moved four times, in like manner as before. In the course of this conclusive experiment, and in less than half an hour, the table moved, without contact or possibility of contact with any person present, *twelve* times, the movements being in different directions, and some according to the request of different persons present.

"The table was then carefully examined, turned upside down, and taken to pieces, but nothing was discovered. The experiment was conducted throughout in the full light of gas above the table.

"Altogether your committee have witnessed upwards of fifty similar motions without contact on eight different evenings, in the houses of different members of your committee, and with the application of the most careful tests their collective intelligence could devise."

An even more striking experience of the same kind is recorded by Mr. E. W. Cox, serjeant-at-law, the founder of the *Law Times* and the author of several important legal works. The dining table used was an unusually heavy one, twelve feet long; eleven persons were present who were standing quite clear of the table, in a well-lighted room, forming a circle around it. Under these circumstances the table, by a series of lurches, turned almost completely round, "that is to say, the end that was at the bottom of the room at the beginning of the experiment was at the head of it at its close." But the most startling incident was the finale:

"The table," writes Serjeant Cox, "had been turned to within about two feet of a complete reversal of its first position and was standing out of square with the room. The party had broken up and were gathered about in groups. Suddenly the table was swung violently over the two feet of distance between its then position and its proper place, and set exactly square with the room, literally knocking down a lady who was standing in the way, in the act of putting on her shawl for departure. At that time nobody was touching the table, nor even within reach of it, except the young lady who was knocked down by it."¹⁹

If these manifestations seem to be of a commonplace order and of relatively ancient date, they are chosen partly because innumerable other examples of similar phenomena are available, attested by witnesses not quite so well known as Judge Edmonds or Lord Adare, partly because an interval of time is perhaps desirable to allow facts to be seen in their right perspective. The experience of later investigators of physical phenomena, far from invalidating, has immensely

¹⁹E. W. Cox, *Spiritualism Answered by Science* (1871), pp. 6, 7, and 25; and cf. *Report of Dialectical Society*, p. 103.

strengthened the argument deducible from our older records. I can find nothing in Dr. Liljencrants' dissertation which offers any sort of plausible explanation of the movement of heavy tables and chairs, without contact, seen by witnesses of unquestionable integrity in a good light. No doubt a critic who approaches the subject from the standpoint of the late Mr. Podmore, will always be able to pick holes in each separate piece of evidence. But a Christian believer who accepts the scheme of apologetic adopted by Catholic theologians almost without exception, is constrained to defend the evidence for the miracles of the New Testament as established by the Gospels and Acts, considered simply as historic documents. Any sound belief in the inspiration of Scripture must depend upon our assurance of the divine personality and mission of Jesus Christ, and in order to establish these we must be able to treat the New Testament narrative as a trustworthy record. The line of argument followed by Dr. Liljencrants, in close imitation of Mr. Podmore, would, it seems to me, cut the ground from under the acceptance of normal human testimony for any miraculous event.

It may very naturally be objected that the examples I have appealed to here are all half a century old or even older. To this one may in the first place reply that the Gospel miracles, upon the reality of which every system of Catholic apologetic is based, are not merely fifty but nearly forty times fifty years old. Furthermore the tendency of recent psychic research has been to experiment with mediums who rarely produce phenomena except in very inadequate light. There seems to be a fashion in these things, and of late the main effort has been directed towards obtaining new forms of manifestations, ectoplasmic materializations, apparitions, finger prints, paraffin moulds, etc. For all these, darkness seems to be required, and to my thinking, however rigorous the con-

trol maintained, such experiments are never entirely satisfactory. The movement of heavy tables, or other furniture, without contact and in a good light, when recorded by intelligent observers, is much more convincing. One still hears of these things happening in private circles but the better known mediums at the present day apparently no longer "sit for" such phenomena. Still it is very interesting to read in Father C. M. de Heredia's lately published Spanish book, *Los Fraudes Espiritistas y los Fenomenos Metapsiquicos* (1931), how in five séances he has had with the medium "S" the "movements produced in a large dining table with six legs were truly extraordinary" (p. 263). Only the medium was in contact with the table. Father de Heredia and two friends of his were the only people present, but were there merely as spectators. The room was one which the medium had never visited before and it was fully lighted. It is noteworthy that the Father does not in any way suggest that trickery was responsible for the extraordinary movements he observed. On the contrary, he, though himself an expert conjurer and a leader in the campaign against fraudulent phenomena, declares that the conditions were such as to exclude the possibility of imposture and that the mediums were people above suspicion (*personas de entera confianza*, p. 260). With the smaller tables used to obtain raps, violent movements are still of very common occurrence and are frequently mentioned by the observers. Many instances of this kind might be quoted from Sir Oliver Lodge's book *Raymond* and in the course of a fuller discussion in Chapter XIV of that work the author speaking from the experience of his own family circle, remarks:

"A light table (used for communications) under these conditions, seems no longer inert, it behaves as if animated. For the time it *is* animated — somewhat perhaps as a violin or piano is animated by

a skilled musician and schooled to his will — and the dramatic action thus attained is very remarkable. It can exhibit hesitation, it can exhibit certainty; it can seek for information, it can convey it; it can apparently ponder before giving a reply; it can welcome a newcomer; it can indicate joy or sorrow, fun or gravity; it can keep time with a song as if joining in the chorus; and most notable of all it can exhibit affection in an unmistakable manner."

However fanciful this sounds, I am bound to say that the personal experience of many trustworthy people well known to me entirely bears out the impression conveyed. Moreover, similar observations are met with repeatedly in the published literature of the subject. Taking, for example, the latest work of the kind which has come into my hands — *We are Here*, by Judge Ludvig Dahl (1931) — we are told how the invisible spirit of his son, so the Judge believes, communicated through a light table.

"He displayed the most exuberant joy, whirled the table from under the hands of those sitting around it, and into my lap, as I was sitting merely as a passive spectator of this scene. We all felt deeply moved" (p. 27).

Let me note also that while recently we have heard much less of the movement of big dining-room tables such as those described in the experiences of Judge Edmonds, still a type of manifestation involving the use of great physical force is known to occur with certain mediums. Miss Kathleen Goligher was one of these. Suspicion, it must be confessed, had been cast upon her phenomena, especially the materialisation phenomena, by the report of E. Fournier d'Albe in 1922, but it is very difficult to reject the testimony of such observers as Mr. W. Whately Smith and Sir William Barrett who sat with her during the years 1915 and 1916. This is printed in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (Vol. XXX, 1919, pp. 306-337), and is concerned only with the knockings and the physical movements of the table. The

former witness declares that though he exerted a pressure of fully 100 lbs. weight, he could not prevent the table from moving. "At one time the table was made so heavy that I could not lift it; at another, when I had for a moment relaxed my grip, it levitated within six inches of me." Sir William Barrett says: "Then the table began to rise from the floor until it reached a height of some twelve or eighteen inches and remained thus suspended and quite level." He and a friend, Dr. W., were allowed to go beneath the clasped hands of the sitters into the circle and try to force the table down. "This both of us found it impossible to do. . . . I then sat on the table when it was about a foot from the floor, and it swayed me about, finally tipping me off." But the whole description ought to be read in order to obtain an adequate idea of the strength of the evidence. It must not be forgotten that both Sir William Barrett and Mr. Whately Smith were experienced observers, fully alive to the possibilities of mediumistic trickery. To this I would add that Sir William Barrett, who was at one time president of the (English) Society for Psychical Research records in the *Proceedings* (Vol. IV, pp. 25-44) some other remarkable examples of the physical movement of tables observed by himself. In one of these there was no contact with the table of any kind, and in perhaps the most notable case the medium was a little child of ten, in whose presence raps and partial levitation of the table occurred in full daylight.

Father de Heredia seems to entertain the idea that raps and even the violent movements of tables are produced by a purely natural force (*una fuerza de origen puramente natural*) which is exercised and controlled by the subconsciousness of the medium. This hypothesis apparently approximates closely to the "psychic force" postulated by Sir William Crookes and Serjeant Cox, but it is open to many

difficulties. The force, as the examples quoted above would show, is frequently exerted without any physical contact with the object moved, moreover it is found associated with an intelligence and knowledge which cannot easily be explained by anything in the medium's past history. But perhaps no better evidence can be found of the reality of the force exerted at a distance and at the same time of the impossibility of regarding it merely as a blind explosion of energy, such as we see in the thunderclap, than the accordion phenomena which were so peculiarly associated with the mediumship of D. D. Home. They may naturally claim a chapter to themselves.

CHAPTER IX

THE ACCORDION PLAYING OF D. D. HOME

THE name of Father C. M. de Heredia has already been mentioned, and many of my readers will probably be familiar with his book, *Spiritism and Common Sense*, which, published in 1922, went through two editions in six months and has been translated into German, Dutch, and Portuguese. It is to be noted that this distinguished Jesuit Father does not reject all physical phenomena indiscriminately as fraudulent. On the contrary, in his later work, *Los Fraudes Espiritistas* (1931), he expressly declares (p. 238) that he is inclined to believe that the levitation of such inanimate objects as tables and stools does take place. But the general impression left by his lectures and writings would undoubtedly lead the unobservant to conclude that his point of view does not notably differ from that of Dr. Liljencrants, who, as we have just seen, looks upon D. D. Home as no more than an exceptionally clever impostor. It would be a great simplification of many problems if one were able to say that all the varied manifestations of Spiritualism were merely tricks. But the strength of the evidence seems to me, as previously explained, altogether inconsistent with such an easy solution. The "common sense" which is appealed to on the title page of Father de Heredia's book, must compel reasonable men to recognise the validity of human testimony when that testimony remains uniform under very varied conditions, and when the possibility of mal-observation owing to defective light, etc., is excluded by the circumstances of the case. Moreover, I repeat that from the logical point of view, Chris-

tians who accept the miracles and other historical incidents recounted in the Gospels, are in an exceptional position. They cannot consistently throw overboard the reiterated statements of modern witnesses of credit who relate what their eyes have seen and their ears heard, in circumstances which apparently exclude the possibility of deception. Our whole system of apologetic is based upon the belief that the evangelists spoke truly when, for example, they recorded that our Lord walked upon the waters or appeared suddenly to His disciples in a chamber with closed doors.

To discuss the entire range of Home's spiritistic phenomena would need much space and is manifestly impossible here. I propose, then, to confine my present remarks to a simple type of manifestation, not because it seems to me the most conclusive, but partly because it is lightly dismissed both by Father De Heredia and Dr. Liljencrants, and partly because it is particularly well attested by a great variety of witnesses. Father de Heredia refers to this particular matter three times, but the principal passage runs thus:

"Father Ugarte de Ercilla makes much of Sir William Crookes' famous experiment with medium Home¹ in which an accordion held by the medium was played, supposedly, by the spirits. The accordion is held in one hand by the keyless end and the other end allowed to hang untouched toward the floor, so that manipulation by the medium is impossible. A wire netting is placed around the suspended accordion so that no hand can reach the other end to move the instrument to admit the air necessary for making the sound, or to press the keys to play the notes. Yet, after a few minutes, a tune is heard. This demonstration produces an extraordinary effect on the sitters. It can be done in full light. Usually the accordion is suspended under a table which is a haunt for spirits, or is, at least,

¹This observation refers to a book entitled *El Espiritismo Moderno*, p. 168, and to a series of articles contributed by Father Ugarte de Ercilla to the periodical *Razón y Fe* in 1922.

so considered. This is generally held as one of the best spiritistic phenomena.

"I offer the same demonstration in my lectures. After a few minutes of expectation, I give a signal to a friend behind the partition, who plays a tune on another accordion. As he is invisible and as the source of the sound is not discoverable, especially when attention is riveted on the simple instrument, the effect is as convincing as the humbug is simple."²

Dr. Liljencrants, following Podmore, suggests a quite different explanation. He writes:

"The experiment with the accordion was considered by Sir William Crookes and his assistants as a crucial test. It is evident that Home could not have played the accordion under the circumstances. On the other hand, the alleged phenomenon is so extraordinary that we cannot accept its genuineness unless all possibilities of prestidigitation or other forms of trickery can be eliminated. This, we think, cannot be done. . . .

"The music consisted of a few sounds, several notes in succession and a simple air. What could have been easier for Home than to produce this quantity of music by a music box carried concealed on his person? The most natural conclusion is, then, that the accordion did not play at all, and that the experimenters simply took for granted that the sounds from the concealed music box issued from the accordion. There is nothing in Sir William's account to suggest that he ascertained the exact source of the music."³

Dr. Liljencrants proceeds to discuss the matter further in some detail, but apparently with no fuller knowledge of the facts than might be obtained from Sir William Crookes' brief summary printed in his article and from Podmore's *Newer Spiritualism*. He entirely adopts the latter's suggestion that "no other apparatus was required for the trick

²De Heredia, *Spiritism*, pp. 67-68; cf. pp. 63 and 138.

³Liljencrants, *Spiritism and Religion*, pp. 136-137. He pursues the subject, pp. 138-39. But surely it is not easy to believe that a musical box can be made to sound like an accordion.

than a small musical box, a loop of black silk, and a hook with a sharp end."⁴

Reading the account given by Fathers de Heredia and Liljencrants, one would be led to suppose that the accordion phenomena had only been produced in the séances with Sir W. Crookes in 1871. In point of fact they were constantly exhibited by Home during a period of nearly twenty years, and they have been described in detail by a variety of witnesses far too numerous to specify here. The earliest account I have met with belongs seemingly to March 17, 1855, before Home had ever come to England. Mr. Rufus Elmer states:

"An accordeon [*sic*] held under the table in one of Mr. Home's hands, the other being on the table, with the keys downward was played in strong tones, three parts being maintained, and any tune performed that was called for—even foreign music. The instrument was played upon while held in the same manner by each person present—all hands except the one which held the accordeon being upon the table in sight. These manifestations were all made in a room well lighted by gas."

I quote this, not for its evidential value—all that I know of Mr. Rufus Elmer, in whose house these manifestations took place, is that he was a gentleman of some social standing at Springfield, Massachusetts—but for its early date. The account is printed in Professor R. Hare's book, *Experimental Investigation*.⁵ But assuming the truth of the statement that the accordion played in a private house, not only when held upside down by the medium, but also when

⁴Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, pp. 50-57.

⁵*Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations*. I quote from the fourth edition of Professor Hare's book printed at New York in 1856, p. 84. What we do know of Mr. Rufus Elmer is that scientists from Harvard, like Professor David Wells, and men of letters, like William Cullen Bryant, attended séances at this house.

similarly held by each person present, it would be difficult to suppose that either a musical box and a black silk thread or a confederate provided with another accordion in the next room could adequately account for the music heard.

For a second witness let us take Mr. R. Bell, the lifelong friend of Thackeray, and himself a man of letters who has earned a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Mr. Bell contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine* (August, 1860) an article on Home, under the title "Stranger than Fiction." Thackeray, in printing it, guaranteed "the good faith and honourable character" of the writer. The description of the accordion playing is far too long to quote in full. Mr. Bell grows eloquent regarding the beauty of the music: "We listened with suspended breath. The air was wild, and full of strange transitions; with a wail of the most pathetic sweetness running through it." Then he goes on:

"That an instrument should be played without hands is a proposition which nobody can be expected to accept. . . . The story will be discarded as a delusion or a fraud. . . . But we need not speculate upon what might be done by skilful contrivances, since the question is removed out of the region of conjecture by the fact that upon holding up the instrument myself in one hand, in the open room, with the full light upon it, similar strains were emitted, the regular action of the accordion going on without any visible agency. And I should add that, during the loud and vehement passages, it became so difficult to hold, in consequence of the extraordinary power with which it was played from below, that I was obliged to grasp the top with both hands. This experience was not a solitary one. I witnessed the same result on different occasions when the instrument was held by others."⁶

When a newspaper controversy arose, occasioned by this article, Dr. Gully (of whom more anon), who had also been present, fully corroborated Mr. Bell's account. The séance

⁶*Cornhill Magazine*, August, 1860, pp. 221-222.

had taken place in the house of a cabinet minister, Mr. Milner Gibson.

But let me turn now from Mayfair to a country house in Hampshire. This is what Captain Chawner declares to have occurred in his home at Newton Vallence in May, 1864:

"An accordion was played in the most ravishing manner in Mr. Home's hand under the table, but we had full opportunity of looking under the table while it so played. He held it in one hand, keys downward, the other hand being on the table. I asked for the "Last Rose of Summer," and in that position, with no human or visible touch of the keys, it entranced us with its sweet notes, which appeared to grow fainter and fainter, and at last died away in the distance, ending with a mournful echo that seemed out of the room. I requested that the instrument might be played upon whilst in my hand. I held it upside down with one hand. With no visible agent near, it was first gently shaken, then pulled, and a few chords struck. Afterwards the pulls and jerks were so forcible that it was with difficulty I could hold it. Another note or two was sounded and then it remained quiet. I was sitting three feet off Mr. Home when this occurred, between my wife and sister. Mr. Home had both his hands on the table. The accordion I had borrowed a few hours previously in our post town, and Mr. Home never saw it until that evening. My wife then took it, but though distinctly feeling something pulling, no sounds were elicited."⁷

Captain E. H. Chawner, of whom an obituary notice may be found in *The Times* of December 23, 1916, was a Justice of the Peace, and a well-known county magnate. In the letter just quoted, which is dated May 24, 1864, he declares: "Collusion is out of the question; delusion I equally repudiate. Every facility was offered us for examination. We looked under the table and some of us even sat under it. I am as convinced as I am of my own individuality that Mr.

⁷*Spiritual Magazine*, August, 1864, p. 378.

Home could not have caused by any human agency the phenomena we witnessed."⁸

Mr. Frank Podmore, in his final discussion of the accordion phenomena, makes two very astonishing statements. "I know," he says, "of no instance in which it is recorded as playing in a good light"; and he adds, "I am not aware of any good evidence that the keys were ever seen to move, and any conjurer, in a light of his own choosing, could make the instrument contract and expand while he held it by a loop of strong thread."⁹ For a man whose life was spent in the minute scrutiny of evidence this is a surprising misrepresentation. Take, for example, such testimony as the following. Writing of Dr. Carpenter's article in the *Quarterly Review* for October, 1871, on "Spiritualism," G. S. Thompson, M.D., of Clifton, Bristol, remarks:

"He [Dr. Carpenter] seems to express a desire that the experiment be tried in open daylight, and above instead of under a table, and in the presence of trustworthy witnesses. I think I can satisfy him on all these points. . . . At a séance in my own house, the accordion, while suspended by the lower end from one of Mr. Home's hands (while the other hand rested on the table), by which he held it at least two feet above the table, did play, and the whole party consisting of seven persons, heard it, and, moreover, saw the keys and the bellows move simultaneously. . . . I may also add that the room was fully lighted, every part of it being distinctly visible.

"I should also like to state that Mr. Home did not see the accordion till it was given him after we were seated at the table, and that during the time the accordion was playing, I passed my hand all round it, in order that I should be perfectly satisfied that nothing was attached to the keys."¹⁰

⁸*Ibid.* Cf. Capt. Chawner's report of another séance with Home, printed in the *Spiritual Magazine*, January, 1865, p. 47.

⁹Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰*Spiritual Magazine*, January, 1872, p. 42. Dr. Thompson gives his full address.

But let us take a more scientific witness. Sir William Crookes, F.R.S., speaking of a séance held at the house of Miss Douglas, 81 South Audley Street, London, W., on May 9, 1871, records in his contemporary notes:

"I took particular note that Mr. Home's feet had boots on and were both quiet, at some distance from the instrument, and that although the keyed end was rising and falling vigorously and the keys moving as the music required, no hand, strings, wires or anything else could be seen touching that end."

He goes on to remark that the room was lit by four candles, one on the table, two on the mantelpiece, one on a side table, and that there was a wood fire in the grate, though this was rather dull. The accordion was then given to others, Home's two hands remaining on the table, and while they held it, it played for a time.¹¹ Similarly Crookes' notes of another sitting at the same house record that "we then heard and saw the keys clicked and depressed one after another, fairly and deliberately, as if to show that the power doing it had full control over the instrument."¹² On this occasion three spirit lamps were used to examine the phenomenon at close quarters.

I have already made reference to Dr. J. M. Gully, M.D., a physician living at Malvern, who maintained close relations with Home for many years. Dr. Gully, of whom an account is given in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, was the father of the well-known Speaker of the House of Commons, who, before his death, was created Viscount Selby. In a series of articles contributed to *The Spiritualist* in 1873, Dr. Gully describes at great length the wonderful music played by the accordion on different occasions when Home was staying with him at Malvern. These enthusiastic appreciations must

¹¹*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. VI, p. 102.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 119.

be omitted here, but the following precise statement deserves to be quoted:

"Frequently the accordion was played whilst lying on the floor or on the sofa, not near to any of us; and once I recall how it was played whilst in the air over our heads, but very soon it fell, in consequence of our movements to observe, and the consequent disturbance of the conditions. I have myself held the instrument close to a bright lamp, Home only standing by the side, but not touching it, and marked the bellows' movements and those of the keys while the spirits were executing the chords."¹³

Dr. Gully was 65 when he wrote this and he lived for another ten years. In view of the other independent evidence of precisely the same kind, it is difficult to believe that in so writing he was either hallucinated or insincere. One striking piece of testimony by Mr. Serjeant Cox is in effect identical with Dr. Gully's. Home had been spending the day at Mr. Cox's house. After supper, on leaving the dining room, Serjeant Cox tells us:

"As Mr. Home and myself were entering the drawing-room lighted with gas, a very heavy chair that was standing by the fire, thirteen feet from us, was flung from its place through the whole length of the room and fell at our feet. No other person was in the room, and we were crossing the threshold of the door. Mr. Home seated himself at the piano and commenced to play and sing. As I was sitting by his side listening, it occurred to me to try if the accordion would play in my own hand as in his. I took from the box in which it had been sent, an instrument I had that day purchased at the Soho Bazaar, and re-seated myself, holding it by the end opposite to the keys, and suspended thus between myself and Mr. Home as he continued to play the piano. Presently I felt the accordion lifted up and down, and then some notes were sounded, and then it joined, though but imperfectly, in the tune he was playing. This was in the light, and, therefore I am sure it was not, indeed could not be, touched by him, for he was playing the piano with both hands. I then requested him to hold the accordion with his left hand (I was sitting on his left),

¹³*The Spiritualist*, March 1, 1873, p. 125.

and play an air on the piano with his right hand. He did so, and immediately the accordion held by him with the keys under, played beautifully in accompaniment to the piano, for at least a quarter of an hour, three or four tunes. The accordion was then passed to my hand, and while I held it by the end opposite to the keys, played a tune perfectly. The force of the upward pressure of the bellows was so great that it required all the strength of my arm to resist it."¹⁴

Naturally, here again, everything depends upon the credibility of our witness. Who was he? The *Dictionary of National Biography* will tell us that he was a successful barrister, as his legal distinction of Serjeant-at-Law implies. He wrote many books on jurisprudence, he founded and edited the *Law Times* (as well as several other newspapers), and down to the time of his death, in 1879, he retained the important official posts of Recorder of Portsmouth and Chairman of Middlesex Sessions. As he was a wealthy man, he could have had no conceivable interest of a pecuniary kind in lending his support to Mr. Home. Serjeant Cox was keenly interested in psychology. He founded and was president of the Psychological Society and was a member of the Dialectical Society. He never became a spiritualist, but, like Sir William Crookes and some others, he ascribed the phenomena he witnessed to what he called "psychic force." All things considered, one would be inclined to say that no better testimony could be offered with regard to any strange happenings than that of this keen and successful lawyer, who was also a shrewd man of business.

An apology is undoubtedly due to the reader for this dull reiteration of statements identical in purport. I can only assure him that the number of the witnesses to Home's accordion phenomena who are crowded out for lack of space, is

¹⁴*What am I? A Popular Introduction to Mental Philosophy and Psychology*, by Edw. W. Cox, Serjeant-at-Law, Vol. II, pp. 388-89 (London: Longmans, 1874).

considerably greater than that of those for whom I have found room.¹⁵ But I must still beg indulgence for two more citations. The first of these is from *The Times* of December 26, 1872. After the issue of the *Report of the Dialectical Society on Spiritualism*, in 1871, *The Times*, then at the zenith of its prestige, felt constrained to take some notice of the subject. A commissioner was appointed by the editor to investigate the alleged phenomena. He attended some séances and drew up a statement. But the article was kept back for more than a year, and was eventually published in a much edited form, so as not to jar too rudely upon the prejudices of unsympathetic readers.¹⁶ Still, the commissioner was allowed to say that he was utterly at a loss to explain the manifestations he had witnessed. The most important séance took place in a private house, at first in good light. Mr. Home and Miss Kate Fox acted as mediums. "On the table," says the commissioner, "was an accordion which we took to pieces and tried and found to be in every respect an ordinary instrument." I pass over all the other interesting manifesta-

¹⁵For those who may pursue the subject, I set down, without by any means exhausting the list of first-hand testimonies to Home's accordion phenomena, more than a dozen more references: (1) Robert Owen in *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, June, 1855, Vol. I, p. 30; (2) Garth Wilkinson, M.D., in the *Morning Advertiser*, October 12, 1855; (3) T. D. Barlee in *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 1856, III, p. 20; (4) "A Plain Man" in *Sunday Times*, February 17, 1861; (5) J. Enmore Jones in *Spiritual Magazine*, February, 1861, p. 69; (6) James Hutchinson, *Spiritual Magazine*, February, 1861, p. 90; (7) E. T. P. in *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, July, 1889, Vol. IV, p. 130; (8) General Boldero, *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 124-125; (9) Lord Dunraven (père), *Experiences with D. D. Home*, p. 111; (10) Professor von Boutlerow, in Mrs. Home's *The Gift of D. D. Home*, p. 345; (11) F. N. Brodrick in *Spiritual Magazine*, 1871, pp. 383-84; (12) P. P. Alexander, *Spiritualism, a Narrative with a Discussion*, 1871; (13) Dr. Philip Davis, *La Fin du Monde des Esprits* (Paris, 1892), pp. xiii-xiv. Several more testimonies will be found in the Dialectical Society's Report on Spiritualism, and in Home's *Life* by his widow.

¹⁶See, regarding this, *The Spiritualist* for January 1, and January 15, 1873.

tions and confine my extracts to what concerns the accordion. While the light was still good:

"Mr. Home holding the accordion under the table in his right hand and by the end farthest from the keys, it played a distinct tune, Mr. Home's left hand being on the table and his feet so raised as to be visible. All other hands were on the table."

After the dark séance began:

"Presently, Mr. Home's and Miss Fox's hands and feet being in strict custody, we felt the accordion pressing against our knees. We put our hand under the table, when the instrument appeared to be moving round till its wooden base was placed between our fingers. In that position we held it with its keys downwards; it seemed to be pushed up towards our hand and played a few bars."

Finally, the commissioner reports in general:

"Mr. Home seemed to wish to conceal nothing, and gave us every opportunity consistent with the above conditions for satisfying our scepticism. Yet we need hardly say that we were unable to satisfy it. At his request we got under the table with a lamp a great many times, insisted always on seeing his hands and feet, or on having them, as well as those of Miss Fox, held firmly. As to the hand with which Mr. Home held the accordion under the table, all we know is that on one of our sub-mahogany expeditions with the spirit lamp, we saw the hand quite still, and we saw the accordion moving up and down and playing music. . . . We tried our best to detect imposture, but could find no trace of it. We searched Mr. Home and found nothing upon him but his clothes."¹⁷

The last occasions known to me in which the accordion phenomena were exhibited with Home in England occurred in April and May, 1873. The sittings took place in Miss Douglas's house, 81 South Audley Street. Mr. Stainton Moses, Sir William Crookes and his wife, and Mr. Serjeant Cox were present. The first named, in some contemporary

¹⁷*The Times*, December 26, 1872, in an article of three and a half columns. The commissioner who wrote the article was Mr. Broome, afterwards, Sir F. Napier Broome, Governor of Western Australia and later of Trinidad.

notes published later by the Society for Psychical Research, records how:

"He [Home] took the accordion up in his right hand and held it under the table. Soon it played. . . . Finally it played 'Home, sweet Home,' very sweetly. At one time Mr. Home's hand was withdrawn from under the table, and he allowed it to go where it was impelled, still holding the accordion. It drew steadily towards the reading lamp and in full light we saw it playing, expanding and contracting steadily. Mr. Home held it by the bottom, the keys being downward. After this it was replaced under the table, still in Mr. Home's hand, and Serjeant Cox was told to look under the table. There he saw the hand — a full-sized man's hand, apparently — playing the accordion. About that he is absolutely certain. It was light enough to be quite visible."¹⁸

At a similar meeting held on May 7, 1873, "the accordion (held as before) played a strange weird melody unlike anything earthly I ever heard."¹⁹

A still later séance at Florence is described in *The Medium and Daybreak* (August 7, 1874), where we have first of all a letter from Cavaliere Sebastiano Fenzi, dated Florence, July 27, 1874, and, as an enclosure, a letter from Mrs. B. Webster. Cavaliere Fenzi pledges himself to its truthfulness and he himself assisted at the first séance mentioned, which took place in his own house. Mrs. Webster names the witnesses present, seven in number, all people known in Florentine society and one of them a senator. The phenomena included the apparition of many materialized hands which were felt and grasped, a candle all the while burning on the table. Two features, however, are of special interest. In the first case "the table was tilted up at a very sharp angle, a pencil laid on the cloth never stirring, nor an accordion and

¹⁸*Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, Vol. IX, p. 307. The hand here spoken of was a spirit hand, with no arm attached.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 310.

a glass candlestick that stood on the table making the least movement, which at such an inclination would have been impossible in ordinary conditions." Further "the whole table rose horizontally from the floor to the height of several inches." Later on, Mr. Home, we are told,

"took the accordion in his hand, or rather the harmonicon,²⁰ this being the only substitute that Mr. Fenzi had been able to procure in the city. It was a most unwieldy instrument, too heavy almost to hold in a single hand, and nearly unmanageable, the bellows being so long that the keys, which were downwards, nearly touched the floor, Mr. Home holding it by the bellows end upwards, his other hand resting on the table. Presently the bellows, unwieldy as it was, began to move, and a few long-drawn notes were sounded. Count Finocchietti was then requested to look under the table and endeavour to see the spirit hand playing. At first he only saw the keys playing apparently untouched, but at last he vaguely distinguished a hand on the keys. Others looked but failed to see the hand. When it came to my turn to crouch under the table, after a while I distinctly descried three fingers that looked as if they were transparent and made of gray gauze pressing down the keys."

A second séance took place in Home's apartments in the Pension Anglaise. Here again there was a company of seven, including the "Director-General" of the Tuscan prisons, as well as two prominent Florentine ladies—the Countess Passerini and the Countess Parrigai. Apart from other phenomena of materialized hands, and moving chairs and tables, we are told that:

"The accordion, a more moderate-sized one, brought by one of the visitors, was held by Mr. Home bottom upwards under the table, his other hand, like everyone else's, on the table. The influence being so strong, I was permitted to crouch under the table, and with a candle throwing its full light on the instrument, I distinctly saw a very large masculine hand, looking like very robust flesh and blood this time (and, by the way, as unlike Mr. Home's hand, whose

²⁰In the newspaper the word is printed "harmonium," but it seems more probable that the writer must have written "harmonicon."

fingers are thin, tapering and wan, as anything could possibly be) playing on, and pressing down the keys. *Nota bene* that the keyboard nearly touching the ground, it would have been necessary for any human hand to so touch the keys, that the person to whom it belonged should have been lying or crouching on the floor, or that the hand should have come through the floor itself."

Finally, Mrs. Webster gives some account of a third séance at which she was not present, but the details of which she heard from those who were. She tells us among other things that:

"Count Corbelli, at whose house it took place, having asked for his wife's favourite air, the accordion played throughout one of the airs of 'Marta' which was precisely the one asked for. It would have been as impossible for Mr. Home to have guessed what air this gentleman's wife preferred, as to play it with one hand."

No doubt the writer means to play it with the one hand which held the accordion.

Finally it would be unreasonable to omit any mention of the test experiment carried out by Sir William Crookes, the more so that this seems to have been the only account of which Mr. Podmore and Dr. Liljencrants thought it worth while to take notice. Crookes tells us that the room was lighted by gas, that the accordion used was a new one which Home had neither handled nor seen before the experiments began, and that the wire cage, provided to exclude the possibility of contact from outside, just fitted under the table at which Home sat. Dr. Huggins, afterwards Sir William Huggins, F.R.S., was also present with two of Crookes' assistants. Held by Home with the keys downwards in the manner so often described, the accordion inside the cage began to expand and contract and to play several notes in succession. The hand by which it was held was quite still, and Home's other hand lay flat on the surface of the table. Then a simple air was played. "But the sequel was still more

striking, for Mr. Home then removed his hand altogether from the accordion, taking it (*i.e.*, his hand) quite out of the cage and placed it in the hand of the person next to him. The instrument then continued to play, no person touching it and no hand being near it." Later on, as Crookes tells us,

"I and two of the others present saw the accordion distinctly floating about inside the cage with no visible support. This was repeated a second time after a short interval. Mr. Home presently reinserted his hand in the cage and again took hold of the accordion. It then commenced to play, at first, chords and runs, and afterwards a well-known sweet and plaintive melody, which it executed perfectly in a very beautiful manner. Whilst this tune was being played, I grasped Mr. Home's arm, below the elbow, and gently slid my hand down it until I touched the top of the accordion. He was not moving a muscle. His other hand was on the table visible to all, and his feet were under the feet of those next to him."

Here then is a selection of the evidence, extending over nineteen years. It will be noticed that every sitting which I have cited took place in a private house, a fact which seems to me fatal to Father de Heredia's theory of a confederate with another accordion, even if we could believe that an observer under the table could be mistaken as to the source of the sound which he judged to proceed from an instrument only a foot or two away from his ear. As for the musical-box suggestion, the nature of the music described in many of these experiences is utterly inconsistent with the theory of a mechanical origin, while the silk-thread hypothesis is preposterous in the case of an apparatus which passed into other hands round the table and was often visible in a strong light.

Then, as to the good faith of the witnesses, it is impossible to suggest any serious doubt. Out of more than fifty independent testimonies to this phenomenon which I have read and for which I am prepared to supply accurate references,

the majority come from well-known men who could have no interested motive for misrepresenting the facts. Apart from Count Tolstoy and the distinguished Russian scientist Butlerov, nearly a score of these witnesses find a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and its supplements. They are, to be precise: Robert Owen, Robert Bell, Dawson Rogers, Sir William Crookes, Sir William Huggins, Dr. Garth Wilkinson, Dr. Gully, Robert Chambers, W. Stainton Moses, S. C. Hall, two Lords Dunraven, Serjeant Cox, Sir F. N. Broome and the 26th Earl of Crawford. Others, like Mr. James Hutchinson, for many years chairman of the Stock Exchange, and Dr. Lockhart Robertson, editor of the *Journal of Mental Science*, were not so widely known, but were deeply respected within their own circle of acquaintances. It is as impossible to believe that these men were speaking untruthfully as it is to suppose that they were in each separate case hallucinated. If Home's manifestations had taken place in his own rooms, and with his own accordion, and in such darkness as that demanded by the Davenport brothers, we should very reasonably suspect some imposture, but it seems certain that he always offered every facility for thorough investigation.

Could anyone suggest a plausible theory as to how the accordion trick is worked by mechanical means, I should be only too glad to accept a natural explanation of the marvel, but meanwhile, one's trust in the validity of human testimony when founded on the simultaneous evidence of three senses — sight, hearing, and touch (I refer to the tugging of the accordion when held) — constrains me to the belief that in Home's presence the instrument did play without any normal human agency. Whether the influence at work was psychic, or spiritistic, or ectoplasmic, or diabolic, is a problem which I can make no attempt to solve.

I must add at the end of this chapter that I feel I have not half done justice to the strength of the evidence for the phenomena here discussed. To appreciate its full force one must read for oneself the testimony of witness after witness to the fact that in a well-lighted room the accordion moved of its own accord from place to place, that it played, even when lying at some distance when no one was near it, and that the beauty and variety of the music performed were something much beyond what anyone could expect from so unpromising an instrument. When Mr. Podmore speaks of "some simple air" and suggests that it was produced by a musical box, he can never have read, or at any rate must have failed to remember, the description given by more than a score of independent witnesses. No doubt the accordion often played familiar tunes like "Home, sweet Home" and the "Last Rose of Summer," but we also hear repeatedly of a quite different style of music. From the one book which records Lord Adare's experiences we obtain such references as these: "The accordion then played something like a voluntary on the organ. The peculiarity being that the last few notes were drawn out so fine as to be scarcely audible — the last note dying away so gradually that I could not tell when it ceased" (p. 55). "The accordion was now played with great power, like a sort of jubilant hymn. It was pulled with such force that Mr. Home was obliged to hold it with both hands" (p. 268). "The harmony could be heard dying away and then swelling again. The accordion was drawn out from under the table, Home still holding it, lifted over his head, and brought round to Miss D. R. It was lifted up and presented towards her; the same was done to me, and it was rested on my left shoulder, and while there, close to my ear it breathed out the softest sounds" (p. 67). "I expressed a wish that it might be played without being held

by Mr. Home, upon which he withdrew his hand, placing it on the table; the instrument was just touching the under edge of the table, where it remained, as it were suspended. It began playing very gently. He clapped his hands several times to show he was not touching it. Later 'Oft in the stilly night' was softly played" (p. 193). "A sort of prelude was played with tremolo effect. We then had the following message, the letters being chiefly indicated by notes on the instrument: 'There is spiritual discord, we pray for harmony.' The word 'discord' was given by a horrid discord being played; while 'Harmony' was expressed by beautiful soft chords" (p. 267). Mr. Home must have had a wonderful musical box in his pocket if it would do all these things. On each of these different occasions a variety of people were present, and it is to be remembered that when the account was printed and submitted to each of them, they all testified to its correctness. The references here indicated are to the edition of the Dunraven book printed in the *Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, Vol. XXXV.

Again, when Dr. Gully wrote to confirm the account given by Robert Bell in the *Cornhill Magazine* article (1860), he said:

"Then the accordion music. I distinctly saw the instrument moving and heard it playing, when held only at one end, again and again. I held it myself for a short time, and had good reason to know that it was vehemently pulled at the other end, and not by Mr. Home's toes, as has been wisely surmised, unless that gentleman has legs three yards long, with toes at the end of them quite as marvelous as any legion of spirits. For, be it stated, that such music as we heard was no ordinary strain, it was grand at times, at others pathetic, at others distant and long drawn, to a degree which no one can imagine who has not heard it. I have heard Blagrove repeatedly, but it is no libel upon that master of the instrument to say that he never did produce such exquisite distant and echo notes as those which de-

lighted our ears. The instrument played, too, at distant parts of the room, many yards away from Mr. Home and all of us."

This letter is reprinted in the *Spiritual Magazine*, Vol. II, (1861), p. 90.

What perhaps is even more curious, there were definite occasions when the accordion played very ill and seemed to be in the hands of some bungling performer. There is one example of this in the Dunraven book (p. 67), and another perhaps even more striking in a Dutch account of a séance with Home at the Hague (*Berigt van Manifestatien*, 1858, p. 12 — the anonymous author only styles himself *Oogetuige* — "Eyewitness"). When the "harmonica" began to sound, someone called out that this was surely the performance of a beginner, whereupon a chorus of spirit raps heartily endorsed the remark. But those present saw the keys moving, no one touching them, and we are told that there was good light from lamps in the room. At Edinburgh in 1871, Mr. P. P. Alexander records that a clumsy rendering of "Auld Lang Syne" was quickly followed by a perfect repetition of the piece on the same instrument.

As a rule, however, the tributes paid to the manner of playing of the accordion were most enthusiastic, and in many cases the music seems to have been of the nature of an improvisation. More than one auditor professes to have been spellbound by a realistic musical imitation of the tramp of feet, ending after a pathetic interlude in strains of triumph. It is described by some, seemingly on the ground of references made to it by Home himself, as "the March to Calvary."

What lends a certain importance to all this is the fact that extreme sceptics, who reject all psychical phenomena, are content to refer to the accordion experiences as a matter too foolish to call for notice, or else, like Dr. Liljencrants, appeal

to Mr. Podmore's discussion of the subject as if the whole question were settled by the suggestion of a crooked pin, a black silk thread, and a small musical box in Home's pocket. I can only invite the reader to examine for himself what is said on the subject by Professor Alfred Lehmann in the third German edition of his *Aberglaube und Zauberei* (1925), or by Graf Karl von Klinckowström in *Der Physikalische Mediumismus*, popularly known as the *Dreimänner Buch*. These critics brush the whole matter aside with a mere reference to Podmore and without a pretence of argument.

CHAPTER X

MATERIALIZATIONS AND "KATIE KING"

FROM whatever point of view we regard it, the materialization of a solid human form must be accounted the most inexplicable of all spiritualistic phenomenon. A mere phantom, which amounts to no more than an illusion of the sense of sight even if it be perceived by many persons simultaneously, is not so overwhelming. But the appearance of a clothed figure which cannot only be seen, but felt and clasped and weighed, which converses in a natural human voice, and returns intelligent answers to questions, seems to strain a sober man's capacity for belief almost to breaking point. It is, in fact, a kind of creation. And did not our Lord Himself make appeal to the test of solidity: "See My hands and feet that it is I Myself; handle and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see Me to have" (Luke xxiv. 39).

Although we do not hear much of materializations in the early years of the spiritualistic movement — there is little, for example, to be found in the works of Capron, Spicer, Hare, and Judge Edmonds — still this type of phenomenon seems to have been occasionally presented even from the beginning. Adin Ballou in his book *Spirit Manifestations* (Boston: 1852, p. 8) devotes a special section in his enumeration to "apparitions in some instances of a spirit hand and arm; in others of the whole human form; and in others of several deceased persons conversing together, causing distinct touches to be felt by the mortal living; grasping and shaking their hands and giving many other sensible demon-

strations of their existence." In the accounts preserved of Home's early séances in London (1855) there are many references to spirit hands and arms clearly seen and also felt, some of them being the tiny hands of children which from their size could not possibly have been the flesh and blood hands of the medium or of any confederate. For full form manifestations the earliest to attract any considerable amount of attention were probably those produced under the mediumship of Miss Kate Fox in her sittings with Mr. C. F. Livermore, a New York banker of recognized integrity. Mr. Livermore was not, as one might suspect, a septuagenarian in his dotage, but a practical business man under forty, who had become interested in the subject owing to the death of his dearly loved wife Estelle. The sittings, which began in 1861, and were continued for four or five years, were recorded in Mr. Livermore's diary. In one of the early manifestations we learn that, the figure of his wife appearing,

"I asked her to kiss me if she could; and to my great astonishment and delight, an arm was placed around my neck, and a real palpable kiss was imprinted on my lips, through something like fine muslin. A head was laid upon mine, the hair falling luxuriantly down my face. The kiss was frequently repeated, and was audible in every part of the room. . . . The figure at the close stood before the mirror and was reflected therein."

At a later stage in this series of sittings the spirit of Dr. Benjamin Franklin also materialized, "broad-shouldered, heavy and dressed in black," and on October 4, 1861, Mr. Livermore records how among many other manifestations, "the spirits of my wife and Dr. Franklin came to me in form at the same time — he slapping me heavily upon the back, while she gently patted me upon the head and shoulder." This simultaneous appearance seems to exclude all possibility of personation on the part of the medium. On another occasion his wife came "with the arm bare from the shoulder

with the exception of the gossamer. I found it," he goes on, "as large and as real in weight as a living arm. At first it felt cold, then grew gradually warmer." On January 30, 1862, he records that the figure of his wife "kissed me, rested its arm, while fully visible, upon my head and shoulders, repeating the same to the medium." Were these, one is tempted to ask, real experiences, or were they only the maundering of a man beside himself with grief who had fallen under the hypnotic spell of an artful little hussy, such as many will suspect Miss Kate Fox to have been? It is only fair to say that there was some corroboration, notably that of Dr. John F. Gray, who, though himself a spiritualist, seems to have been a respected physician in good practice. Dr. Gray attests that he was present at some of these manifestations, and so also was a Mr. Groute, who was Livermore's brother-in-law.¹

Mr. Livermore does not seem to have gone back upon his conviction of the genuineness of the materialization he had witnessed, for some years later, on July 26, 1871, we find him writing in the following terms to the Hon. Robert Dale Owen, who prints the letter in his book, *The Debatable Land*:

"My Esteemed Friend:

"I cannot refuse your request for particulars of some of these ex-

¹I have taken this account of Mr. C. Livermore's experiences mainly from the book of Mr. Epes Sargent, *Planchette, or the Despair of Science* (Boston: 1869), pp. 55-79. But Mr. Epes Sargent's summary is borne out in all respects by the contemporary descriptions of Mr. B. Coleman, an Englishman of good social position, who wrote from New York after holding many conversations with Mr. Livermore and Dr. Gray and after receiving many letters from the former, from which he quotes at length (see *The Spiritual Magazine* for 1861, pp. 385-400, and 481-498). Moreover, another full account of the same phenomena is given by the Hon. Robert Dale Owen, formerly the diplomatic representative of the United States at the court of the King of Naples, in his *Debatable Land*, pp. 385-401. Some interesting comments, on the Livermore manifestations will be found in M. J. Williamson's book, *Modern Diabolism* (1873), pp. 384-399.

periences which I have read to you from my Journal of 1861-1866. In giving them, I desire, by way of averting misconception, to make a few explanations.

"I commenced these investigations an out-and-out sceptic. They were undertaken solely with a view to satisfy my own mind, and with no thought or desire for publicity. After a thorough and careful scrutiny, I found, to my surprise, that the phenomena were real. After ten years of experience, with ample opportunities for observation (often with scientific men), I arrive at these conclusions:

"First, that there exists, in presence of certain sensitives of high nervous organization, a mysterious force, capable of moving ponderable bodies, and which exhibits intelligence: For example, a pencil without contact with human hand, or any visible agency, apparently of its own volition, writes intelligently and answers questions pertinently.

"Second, that temporary formations, material in structure and cognizable by the senses, are produced by the same influence, are animated by the same mysterious force, and pass off as incomprehensibly as they came. For example, hands which grasp with living power; flowers which emit perfume and can be handled; human forms and *parts of forms*; recognizable faces; representations of clothing, and the like.

"Third, that this force, and the resulting phenomena, are developed in a greater or less degree, according to the physical and mental conditions of the sensitive, and, in a measure, by atmospherical conditions.

"Fourth, that the intelligence which governs this force is (under pure conditions) independent of, and external to, the minds of the sensitive and investigator. For example, questions unknown to either, sometimes in language unknown to either, are duly answered.

"The origin of these phenomena is an open question.

"You may rely on these records as being free from exaggeration in each and every particular. Very sincerely your friend,

C. F. Livermore."

This certainly reads like the letter of a sane and sober-minded investigator; but we know little of Mr. Livermore, and we must pass on to the experiences of a famous man of science which, extraordinary as they may seem, are corroborated by a quite remarkable number of other responsible observers.

In the paper which the late Sir William F. Barrett, F.R.S., read before the Society for Psychical Research in 1920, as a tribute to the memory of his friend Sir William Crookes, he made special reference to the materializations of the *soi-disant*, "Katie King," which Crookes had investigated in 1874, and vouched for as authentic. The attitude of the writer himself was an extremely cautious one:

"One hesitates," says Sir William Barrett, "to express any opinion on these apparently incredible phenomena. They are unique in the records of psychical research. No such startling demonstration, under stringent conditions, of what seemed to be a perfectly natural human form, yet able to appear and disappear, had ever been observed before. . . . Crookes, we must remember, was one of the most exact and accomplished investigators the world has known. He was not suffering during his spiritualistic experiments from any mental failure, for he was concurrently conducting other scientific work of great value, work that has never been impugned. The hallucination theory Lord Rayleigh and Count Solovovo have discredited."²

Still one carries away the impression that the writer is not satisfied, and I afterwards learned from Sir William Barrett himself that such was in fact the case. On the other hand, M. Charles Richet, the famous Professor of Physiology in the Faculty of Medicine at Paris, despite his pronounced materialism, has made it clear in his *Traité de Métapsychique* that he regards Crookes's experiences as decisive and that he accepts his statement of the facts without reserve.³ To writers of the temper of Messrs. Edward Clodd, Joseph McCabe, I. L. Tuckett, etc., the whole story, of course, stands self-condemned as the very climax of absurdity, calling for no serious refutation.

But before we can go further, we need to have Sir William Crookes's allegations before us. His own account of the phenomena is somewhat too lengthy to reproduce in full, but I

²*Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 26-27.

³Richet, *Métapsychique* (1922), 630-633; and cf. pp. 588, 595 and 565.

may quote Mr. Frank Podmore's summary, feeling that in this way no injustice will be done to the contentions of the sceptical argument. Mr. Podmore is not likely to put the case too strongly against himself.

Neglecting, then, all preliminary history, we learn that on December 9, 1873, at one of the séances given by Miss Florrie Cook, who could not exactly be regarded as a paid medium,⁴ a figure which came outside the cabinet within which the medium was believed to lie entranced was seized by one of the spectators. The form, purporting to be that of one "Katie King," struggled in his grasp, and, with the assistance of other spiritualists present, regained the cabinet. The assailant affirmed his conviction that the figure was that of the medium herself masquerading as "Katie King," but there was no conclusive proof of this, and a controversy followed which was carried on with considerable acrimony in the *Times* and in most of the spiritualistic journals of the period. Thereupon, as Mr. Podmore proceeds to relate:

"Mr. Crookes, as one who had tested and satisfied himself of the genuineness of the materializations exhibited in Miss Cook's presence, felt bound to intervene. In his first letter the only proof offered, beyond the assertion of his own conviction, of the independent existence of the spirit form was that on one occasion, in the house of Mr. Luxmoore, when "Katie" was standing before him in the room, Mr. Crookes had distinctly heard, from behind the curtain, the sobbing and moaning habitually made by Miss Cook during such séances.⁵

"The evidence, no doubt, left something to be desired, and in two

⁴As may be ascertained from a letter to the *Times* for April 11, 1874, a Mr. Charles Blackburn, a Manchester gentleman of some wealth, had "made a little arrangement of compensation" with Miss Cook's family which secured her services for certain séances and relieved her of the need of taking fees from strangers.

⁵This sobbing and moaning of the medium in the cabinet while "Katie" was manifesting in the light, is attested by others, notably by Mr. C. Varley, F.R.S. See *The Spiritualist*, March 20, 1874, p. 135. On this occasion, a rigorous electrical test was applied, proving, so it was alleged, that the medium never moved from her place in the dark. — H. T.

later letters Mr. Crookes essayed to supply the deficiency. At a séance at his own house on March 12th, 1874, 'Katie,' robed in white, came to the opening of the curtain and summoned him to the assistance of her medium. Mr. Crookes followed 'immediately'⁶ and found Miss Cook, clad in her ordinary black velvet dress, lying across the sofa. But 'Katie' had vanished and he did not actually see the two forms together. Nor did he apparently ever succeed in seeing the *faces* of 'Katie' and Miss Cook simultaneously in his own house. Later, however, he claims to have seen their forms together, in a good light. Miss Cook gave a series of sittings in May of this year (1874) at Mr. Crookes's house for the purpose of allowing 'Katie' to be photographed. The sittings took place by electric light, and five cameras were at work simultaneously. Miss Cook would lie down on the floor behind a curtain with her face muffled in a shawl and 'Katie,' when ready, would appear in the full light in front of the curtain. Mr. Crookes adds: I frequently drew the curtain on one side when Katie was standing near, and it was a common thing for the seven or eight of us to see Miss Cook and Katie at the same time under the full blaze of the electric light.⁷ We did not on these occasions actually see the face of the medium, because of the shawl, but we saw her hands and feet; we saw her move uneasily under the influence of the intense light, and we heard her moan occasionally. I have one photograph of the two together, but Katie is seated in front of Miss Cook's head."⁸

Mr. Podmore goes on to object that even here full proof is wanting. "Apparently," he says, "all that Mr. Crookes and his fellow observers actually *saw*, besides the figure of 'Katie,' was a bundle of clothes on the floor, with a shawl at one

⁶Mr. Crookes states positively: "Not more than three seconds elapsed between my seeing the white-robed Katie standing before me and my raising Miss Cook on to the sofa from the position into which she had fallen." Seeing that Katie wore a white dress and was barefoot and that Miss Cook was dressed in black velvet with boots, this transformation seems to exceed the capacity of any quick-change artist, and the audacity of the appeal for help was in any case astounding, if the manifestations were fraudulent. — H. T.

⁷This is confirmed by Mr. Dawson Rogers, who was present. See *Katie King, Histoire de ses Apparitions, par "Un Adepte,"* p. 92. H. T.

⁸Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, Vol. II, p. 152. The letters of Crookes here cited will be found in the *Spiritualist* for 1874, I, pp. 71, 157-158, 270-271.

end, a pair of boots at the other, and something like hands attached to it." Mr. Podmore's tone is such as to suggest that Mr. Crookes was not alive to the possibility that the figure of the medium lying on the floor might have been a dummy. The insinuation, if it was so intended, was quite unwarranted. Not only has the critic ignored the statement, which he himself quotes that "we saw her [the medium] move uneasily under the influence of the intense light," but he has also overlooked a letter of Mr. Crookes addressed at the time to Mr. H. Cholmondeley Pennell. Nearly *two months before* the publication of the description just quoted of the photographing of "Katie" in Mr. Crookes's laboratory, Mr. Pennell communicated to *The Spiritualist* (April 10, 1874, p. 179) a letter he had just received from Mr. Crookes to the following effect:

"At the time of the occurrence [obviously the second séance described in his letter to the *Spiritualist*, printed on April 3] I felt its importance too much to neglect any test which I thought would be likely to add to its completeness. As I held one of Miss Cook's hands all the time and knelt by her, held the light close to her face, and *watched her breathing*,⁹ I have abundant reason to know that I was not deceived by a lay figure or by a bundle of clothes. As regards the identity of Katie, I have the same positive conviction. Height, figure, features, complexion, dress and pleasant smile of recognition, were all the same as I have seen there dozens of times; and as I have repeatedly stood for many minutes within a few inches of her face, in a good light, Katie's appearance is to me as familiar as is that of Miss Cook herself."

Now the point upon which I desire to insist is this, that even were we to suppose that Mr. Crookes was exaggerating his own alertness on the occasion referred to, the suggestion had evidently been made by Mr. Pennell or someone else that he had mistaken a bundle of clothes for the body of the medium. This possibility had therefore been pressed upon

⁹Italics mine.

Crookes's notice at least as early as April 10. But the photographing of "Katie" in the laboratory took place in May,¹⁰ and it is, to my thinking, inconceivable, after the dummy suggestion had been thus publicly ventilated, that either Mr. Crookes and his assistants could have neglected to take precautions against so obvious a trick, or that Miss Cook herself could have had the audacity to persist in the imposture despite the imminent danger of detection.¹¹ In any case, Mr. Podmore's statement that Crookes and his fellow observers made no claim to have *seen* more than the form of the medium is in contradiction with the facts. At Hackney, Mr. Crookes asserts that he watched the medium's breathing; in his own house he declares that the figure "moved uneasily" in the glare of the electric light.

In the face of his own most explicit statements it certainly cannot be maintained that Mr. Crookes reached his conclusions hastily. Writing to Mr. Serjeant Cox on April 14, 1874, he declared that he had had "between thirty and forty sances with Miss Cook before I felt justified in coming to a positive opinion."¹² Without disputing a considerable resemblance of feature between Katie King and her medium he also lays stress upon certain very positive differences. For example, he writes:

"Katie's height varies; in my house I have seen her six inches taller than Miss Cook. Last night (at Hackney), with bare feet and not 'tip-toeing,' she was four and a half inches taller than Miss Cook. Katie's neck was bare last night; the skin was perfectly smooth both to touch and sight, while on Miss Cook's neck is a large blister, which

¹⁰Mr. Crookes explicitly says that the photographs were taken "in the week before Katie took her departure," when "she gave sances at my house almost nightly." The date of "Katie's" last appearance was May 21, 1874.

¹¹The medium (a girl of seventeen) would have been less than human if she had abstained from reading the many communications devoted to herself in *The Spiritualist*, which a rival editor had nicknamed in derision "Miss Florence Cook's Journal."

under similar circumstances is distinctly visible and rough to the touch. Katie's ears are unpierced, while Miss Cook habitually wears earrings. Katie's complexion is very fair, while that of Miss Cook is very dark. Katie's fingers are much longer than Miss Cook's and her face is also larger. In manners and ways of expression there are also many decided differences."¹³

This letter was written on the 30th of March. Almost two months later, when Mr. Crookes had many times over seen Katie by the electric light in the course of his photographic experiments, he remarks:

"I have the utmost certainty that Miss Cook and Katie are two separate individuals so far as their bodies are concerned. Several little marks on Miss Cook's face are absent on Katie's. Miss Cook's hair is so dark a brown as almost to appear black, Katie's . . . is a rich golden auburn. One evening I timed Katie's pulse. It beat steadily at 75, whilst Miss Cook's pulse, a little time after, was going at its usual rate of 90."¹⁴

Mr. Crookes is speaking here of the observations made in his own laboratory, where, with five cameras at work simultaneously, he obtained altogether forty-four negatives of Katie, "some inferior, some indifferent and some excellent." He also remarks:

"One of the most interesting of the pictures is one in which I am standing by the side of Katie; she has her bare feet upon a particular part of the floor. Afterwards I dressed Miss Cook like Katie, placed her and myself in exactly the same position, and we were photographed by the same cameras, placed exactly as in the other experiment, and illuminated by the same light. When these two pictures are placed over each other, the two photographs of myself coincide exactly as regards stature, etc., but Katie is half a head taller than Miss Cook and looks a big woman in comparison with her. In the breadth of her face, in many of the pictures, she differs essentially in size from her medium, and the photographs show several other points of difference."¹⁵

¹³*The Spiritualist*, April 3, 1874, pp. 157-158.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, June 5, 1874, p. 271.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

In the critical examination which Mr. Podmore has made of such phenomena as those of Home and Miss Cook, it is unfortunate that he is apt to lay great stress upon occasional flaws in the main evidence, while ignoring almost completely the mass of subsidiary testimony which corroborates the facts in dispute. Sir William Crookes was undoubtedly the principal witness in the Katie King manifestations, but he was by no means the only one. The newspaper called *The Spiritualist*, for 1873 and 1874, contains many independent accounts of Miss Cook's séances contributed by those who were present. The writers, no doubt, were believers in the phenomena, but many of them were well-known men in good position, and there is no reason to doubt their sincerity. The facts which they attest are such as it required no scientific skill to observe. Any child could have observed them. Practically speaking, all the witnesses admit and lay stress upon the great resemblance between Miss Cook and Katie King, although those who attended many séances also state that this resemblance varied in degree. It was sometimes much more noticeable than at others. On the other hand, there is hardly less unanimous testimony to the fact that Katie King was altogether a bigger woman than the medium. She was taller, her figure was fuller, her hands and feet were conspicuously larger and her face was broader. Nearly all the descriptions to which I refer were printed some time before Sir William Crookes had his unrivalled opportunity of comparing the two. As he tells us himself:

"During the last six months Miss Cook has been a frequent visitor at my house, remaining sometimes a week at a time. She brings nothing with her but a little hand-bag, not locked. During the day she is constantly in the presence of Mrs. Crookes, myself or some other member of my family, and, not sleeping by herself, there is absolutely no opportunity for any preparation even of a less elaborate character than would be required for enacting Katie King."¹⁶

¹⁶*The Spiritualist*, June 5, 1874, p. 270.

On the other hand, in the photographic experiments, he and his assistants repeatedly studied Katie's features "in the full blaze of the electric light." When, therefore, Sir William asserts that "Katie is half a head taller than Miss Cook and looks a big woman in comparison with her," it is surely a very important corroboration to find that many months earlier other observers, who had good opportunities for comparing the two, expressed themselves with equal conviction in precisely the same sense. Take, for instance, Mr. G. R. Tapp, who contributes two long letters, one on March 1, 1873, the other on February 6, 1874.¹⁷ Even if his evidence be discounted as that of a spiritualist and a friend of the Cook family, he certainly could not have known what Mr. Crookes was going to write a year and a half later. Yet his testimony on both occasions is in complete accord with the subsequent observations of the famous scientist. Mr. Tapp declares, in March, 1873, that Katie "seemed to be about five feet six inches in height or rather more," whereas the medium was about five feet. He adds: "Her shoulders and waist were broad and solid looking, in fact 'Katie' was rather stout."¹⁸ In his letter of February, 1874, he repeats the statement that Miss Cook, who "is *petite* in figure," was much shorter and more slightly built than Katie. He notes that Katie's hair is "light brown," whereas the medium's is "very dark brown, almost black." Another observer who, like Mr. Tapp, had been present at an immense number of séances with Miss Cook, many of them being held in his own house, was Mr. J. C. Luxmoore, the head of a county family and an active magistrate for Devon. He writes, in March, 1873,

¹⁷Printed in *The Spiritualist* for these respective dates.

¹⁸There can have been no padding, for it was expressly ascertained on this and several other occasions that "Katie" wore only a single white garment without a corset or any underclothing.

that "Katie appeared to me to be quite two, if not three, inches taller than Miss Cook; her feet and hands were bare and much larger than Miss Cook's,"¹⁹ and he mentions incidentally that "Miss Cook's figure happens to be very small." Similarly, W. Oxley in *The Spiritualist* (November 14, 1873) declares that Katie was three or four inches taller, her hands bigger, and her hair much lighter. Again, Mr. B. Coleman, who attended a séance at Mr. Luxmoore's house on November 18, 1873, writing in defense of the theory that the spirit form is the "double" of the medium, declares that Katie "presented the exact features of Miss Cook." He says, too, that "her conversation and her knowledge of persons are the same, and some of the expressions which I heard her utter were, in emphasis and words, exactly those of Miss Cook."²⁰ None the less, he admits that "her height, as I observed by the measurement on that evening, is a couple of inches taller,"²¹ moreover, he notes that her voice, though like the medium's, "is much lower in tone." It would be easy to multiply such testimonies, and I may mention that after a very careful examination of a long series of letters I have come across nothing which conflicts with Mr. Crookes's statements of much later date. One document of special interest is a description by Dr. George Sexton printed in the *Medium and Daybreak*²² and referring to a séance which took place at Mr. Luxmoore's on November 25, 1873.

¹⁹*The Spiritualist*, March 15, 1873, p. 133. He adds "she stamped her foot on the ground to show she was not on tiptoe."

²⁰It is commonly asserted by spiritualists, even by those who do not accept the theory of "doubles," that the materialized form in most cases reproduces the features of the medium. Assuming that materialization is possible at all, this is not unnatural. A child usually resembles one or both of its parents.

²¹*The Spiritual Magazine*, December, 1877, p. 557.

²²For December 12, 1873, p. 587. The importance of this particular letter lies in the fact that it appeared in the *Medium*, which at this date was very hostile to *The Spiritualist* and distinctly adverse to Miss Cook.

Dr. Sexton, who was a convert from materialism, reports that: "Katie showed her feet, which were perfectly naked, and stamped them on the floor to prove that she was not standing on tiptoe, this latter fact being a very important one, seeing that she was at least four inches taller than Miss Cook. Her figure and complexion were also totally unlike those of the medium." Similarly, Dr. Gully protests against the supposition that Katie (who was "three inches taller," had "very much larger hands" and showed light hair while the medium's was black) could be identical with Miss Cook.²³

It is to be noted also that, at Mr. Luxmoore's house, Miss Cook in March, 1874, was controlled by an electrical test which, in the opinion of two such experts as Sir William Crookes, F.R.S., and Cromwell Varley, F.R.S., rendered it impossible for the medium to leave her seat in the cabinet without the fact being immediately betrayed. "Katie," none the less, showed herself, and wrote a note in sight of the observers. In particular Mr. Varley says:

"Towards the close of the séance the room was darkened and Katie allowed me to approach her. She then let me grasp her hand; it was a long one, very cold and clammy. A minute or two afterwards, Katie told me to go into the dark chamber to detrance Miss Cook. I found her in a deep trance, huddled together in her easy chair, her head lying upon her left shoulder, her right hand hanging down. Her hand was small, warm and dry; and not long, cold and clammy, like Katie's."

²³*The Spiritualist*, February 20, 1874, p. 95. With regard to the length of the hands, see also Mr. C. F. Varley, F. R. S., in *The Spiritualist*, March 20, 1874, p. 134; and concerning the figure generally, cf. Prince Wittgenstein in *The Spiritualist*, February 13, 1874, p. 83. Prince Wittgenstein, who was one of the *aide-de-camps* of the Emperor of Russia, in a longer letter addressed to the *Revue Spirite*, grows enthusiastic about Katie's chestnut hair (*cheveux châtain*) visible through her veil. He also says: "One might mistake her seen from a distance for Miss Cook . . . but Miss Cook, though pretty, is much smaller, and her hands are not as large as Katie's." *Katie King, Histoire de ses Apparitions* (Paris: 1879), pp. 51-52. This was written before any of Mr. Crookes's letters had appeared in print.

Mr. Varley and Mr. Crookes also record that while Katie during the séance was moving her wrists about and opening and closing her fingers, "we all distinctly heard Miss Cook moaning like a person in a troubled dream."²⁴ In any case it is difficult to see how in two or three minutes — and the time-chart seems to show that no greater interval was possible — a hand that was cold and clammy could be converted into one that was warm and dry; to say nothing of the alleged difference in size.

From all that has been said, two conclusions, I think, may be drawn without further discussion, first, that the "Katie King," who showed her bare arms and feet, walked about, conversed, sang, stamped her foot, was handled, embraced, had her pulse felt, and was successfully photographed, on two occasions in 1873, and some half dozen times by Mr. Crookes in 1874, was not a mere subjective hallucination of the mind. She had for the time a real independent existence. Secondly, that she was certainly not an automaton or any sort of lay figure. There remain, then, only four possibilities: first, that Katie was simply the medium herself masquerading; second, that she was an accomplice; third, that her part was enacted sometimes by the medium and on other occasions by an accomplice; fourth, that she was, as she purported to be, a materialized spirit form. I must confess that of these alternatives it is the last supposition which seems to me to be the least in conflict with the evidence available.

1. The hypothesis that the whole series of Katie King's appearances was a clever piece of masquerade carried out by Miss Florence Cook, herself, is beset, in my judgment, by insuperable difficulties. I lay no stress upon the respectability of the Cook family or upon the youth and seeming innocence of the medium — she is said at the time to have been

²⁴*The Spiritual Magazine*, April, 1874, pp. 161-165.

only seventeen — in these cases it often happens that *malitia supplet atatem*. But the definite points of difference in height, complexion, hair, figure, hands, and other details, observed in strong light by Mr. Crookes, and corroborated by other witnesses (no one contradicting) who preceded him in time, cannot be waived aside. It is not as if we were dependent upon a brief glimpse obtained in a single sitting. In his first sésances with Miss Cook, Sir William himself tells us that he was unfavourably impressed and inclined to suspect imposture; he only reached conviction after thirty or forty such experiments.²⁵ Moreover, it is impossible to ignore the strong evidence afforded by his photographs, though they have unfortunately never been published. Mr. J. H. Simpson, who had prints of twenty-two of them, declares that they prove that Miss Cook was several inches shorter than Katie, that her hair was both darker and shorter, her complexion darker and her hands smaller — all this being in exact agreement with what the early observers recorded.²⁶

Then we have the tests and control which were employed. In very many of the sittings the medium was secured with tapes, drawn tight around the waist and round her wrists, these tapes being both sewn and sealed and the slack end being secured outside the cabinet. Although any considerable movement under the conditions given would seem to be impossible, and the seals and tapes were almost invariably found intact, I do not wish to build too much upon the security thus afforded against juggler's tricks. But the searching, which nearly always took place when at Mr. Luxmoore's house, was a different matter. The ladies who searched her

²⁵*The Spiritualist*, June 19, 1874; but this letter itself was written on April 14. He had many sésances after this.

²⁶J. H. Simpson, *Twenty-two Photographs of the Katie King Series*, a pamphlet published in 1905. In one pair of these two were successively photographed against a fixed measuring tape.

declared that when she came into the cabinet she had nothing white about her. The cabinet was also examined, and there was nothing white there. Still Katie came forth and chatted freely for half an hour or an hour together in a good light, clad to her feet in a full white robe with a head veil and girdle. This was not gossamer or thin muslin, otherwise her whole form would have been visible through it and would have shown in the photographs. The visitors were sometimes allowed to handle the material. One declared it to be "like fine white canvas or bunting,"²⁷ another described it as "strong white calico."²⁸ Garments of this kind cannot be packed in a quill, or in the bones of a corset, or in the hollow heel of a boot.

But perhaps the greatest difficulty of all in the way of supposing that Miss Cook herself masqueraded as Katie is the completeness and suddenness of the disappearance of the latter. To appreciate the strength of this argument one ought to read patiently through the whole series of descriptions — to reproduce them, of course, is impossible here. In order to disappear, Katie would have had to get rid of every trace of her white garments, to put on her stockings and elastic-side boots, to attire herself in her former dress, to rearrange her hair — I say nothing about changing its colour — to replace the earrings in her ears, and to adjust the tapes round her wrists and round her waist without injuring the seals.²⁹ The tapes and seals, it is true, were not used in Crookes's

²⁷*The Spiritualist*, 1873, p. 119.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 453.

²⁹With regard to the instantaneousness of Katie's disappearance the evidence of Mr. B. Coleman (*Spir. Mag.*, 1873, p. 555), of Dr. Sexton (*Medium*, December 12, 1873), of Mr. W. Oxley (*Spiritualist*, November 14, 1873), Prince Wittgenstein (*Spiritualist*, February 13, 1874), and Dr. Gully (*Spiritualist*, February 20, 1874), is most important. The last named says that the interval between the disappearance of Katie and the finding of Miss Cook in her daily dress is "less than one minute, as I have frequently certified by counting."

laboratory. But even without this complication I find it impossible to reconcile any hypothesis involving the identity of the medium and Katie with that scientist's plain statements; for example, with the following:

"For some time past Katie has given me permission to do what I liked — to touch her, and to enter and to leave the cabinet almost whenever I pleased. I have *frequently* [I italicize the word] followed her into the cabinet, and have sometimes seen her and her medium together, but most generally I have found nobody but the entranced medium lying on the floor, Katie and her white robes having instantaneously disappeared."³⁰

I have already called attention in a note to the fact that once, when the medium had slipped off the sofa on which she had been lying, Katie came out in her white dress to summon Mr. Crookes. He declares that not more than three seconds elapsed before he entered his library which served as a dark cabinet, found the medium in a dangerous position, and lifted her entranced and velvet-clad body on to the sofa again. What is more, he states that the white-robed Katie did not precede him into the library, but "stepped aside to allow me to pass." A little later Katie came out again and invited him to bring his phosphorus lamp to look at the medium. Whereupon — "I closely followed her into the library, and by the light of my lamp saw Miss Cook lying on the sofa just as I had left her. I looked round for Katie, but she had disappeared." Can anyone conceivably maintain that the figure lying on the sofa which Mr. Crookes had lifted there a few minutes before was nothing but a dummy?

2. We seem, then, forced to the second hypothesis, that Katie King was not Miss Cook but a confederate who resembled her in feature. A year or two later, in the United States, during a long series of séances held under the mediumship of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes at the instance of Mr. R.

³⁰*The Spiritualist*, June 5, 1874, p. 270.

Dale Owen, this kind of imposture undoubtedly did take place. A sliding panel had been constructed in the side of the cabinet, and when each séance began, a living girl crept through the panel into the dark chamber. She personated "Katie King" successfully for several months until finally the trick was discovered. But the fundamental difference between the two cases was this, that the Holmes's séances took place on their own premises, whereas, in the instance of Miss Cook, many of the best and most successful sittings were held in Mr. Luxmoore's house or in Mr. Crookes's laboratory. By what conceivable arrangement could a confederate penetrate into either establishment just at the moment she was wanted, evading the careful search made of the room used as a cabinet? Moreover, even if she had succeeded in getting in, there remained the still more difficult problem of getting out again when the lights were turned up in the cabinet and Mr. Luxmoore or Mr. Crookes came to look after the medium as she recovered from her trance. Furthermore, the coincidence that the accomplice closely resembled the medium in feature would be an extraordinary one, and, finally, it appears to me certain that if Katie King and Florence Cook had really been two distinct individuals, Mr. Crookes would readily have been allowed to gratify his desire of seeing the faces of both together in a good light.³¹ In the Holmes's séances the two mediums sat in full view outside the cabinet, and all present could look upon the supposed spirit form of Katie without ever losing sight of the mediums. It must also be remembered that the séances at Mr. Luxmoore's, and still more at Mr. Crookes's were very exclusive. No one was admitted who was not personally known to the household.

³¹This he never succeeded in doing in his own house, and only once at Hackney, using, not gas light, but a phosphorus lamp. Graf von Klinckowstroem follows Podmore in maintaining that at Hackney Miss Cook had a confederate who personated "Katie."

3. It is plain from Mr. Podmore's insistence upon the resemblance between "Katie" and Miss Cook³² (he had seen Mr. Crookes's photographs) that he believed the two to be one and the same person as long as séances were held in the laboratory. But it is equally clear that in regard to other séances held at Miss Cook's own home in Hackney, notably on March 29 and on the farewell appearance of May 21, Mr. Podmore was convinced that the two forms were distinct, and that either Katie or the medium was personated by a confederate. I cannot see that this hypothesis helps us much, except that it gives the sceptic an opportunity of confusing the issues when pressed on any particular detail. All the differences which Mr. Crookes noted in his own laboratory between Katie and Miss Cook still stand good. On March 29 and May 21, at Hackney, if it was the *confederate* who personated Katie, then we have to suppose that for some two hours an entirely new Katie walked about in good gas light and conversed freely, without Mr. Crookes ever suspecting that it was quite a different Katie from the one he had seen and talked to and photographed and scrutinized closely, more than a score of times, either in his own laboratory or at Mr. Luxmoore's. On the other hand, if it was Miss Cook who again enacted Katie, while the confederate remained apparently entranced in the cabinet, then we are faced with a still more serious difficulty, for on both occasions Mr. Crookes, being in the cabinet with the two together, remained there until lights were brought and the medium recovered consciousness.³³ This means that, while he actually

³²*Modern Spiritualism*, II, p. 154.

³³See the letters in *The Spiritualist*, quoted above, or Crookes's book, *Researches in Spiritualism*, pp. 104-112. The physical obstacles in the way of a sudden disappearance are emphasized in Mr. C. Blackburn's letter in *The Spiritualist*, May 8, 1874, p. 225. He describes the cabinet at Hackney.

stood within a yard or two of them, Miss Cook must have divested herself of her white "Katie" dress, have put on another dress with boots and stockings, etc., and have lain down in the place of the confederate, who meanwhile left the room by some secret means of egress. On May 21, the medium came out of her trance before Katie vanished, and Mr. Crookes records:

"For several minutes the two were conversing with each other, till at last Miss Cook's tears prevented her speaking. Following Katie's instructions, I then came forward to support Miss Cook, who was falling on the floor, sobbing hysterically. I looked around, but the white-robed Katie had gone. As soon as Miss Cook was sufficiently calmed, a light was procured and I led her out of the cabinet."

I quote this also to show that even in the darkness of the cabinet there was sufficient light for Mr. Crookes normally to be able to trace the whereabouts of the white dress. At any rate, he expected to be able to trace it.

4. There remains, therefore, nothing but what we may call the materialization hypothesis, and, as already stated, this seems to me, on the whole, to present the fewest difficulties. I should have liked to give some detailed account of the gradual development of Miss Cook's materialization phenomena at an earlier period; but it must suffice to quote a statement made by Dr. Gully, who had known her from the first.

"That the power grows with use was curiously illustrated by the fact that, for some time, only a face was producible, with, occasionally, arms and hands; with no hair, and sometimes with no back to the skull at all — merely a mask, with movements, however, of eyes and mouth. Gradually the whole form appeared — after, perhaps, some five months of séances — once or twice a week. This, again, became more and more rapidly formed, and changed, in hair, dress and color of face, as we desired."³⁴

³⁴Letter of J. M. Gully, M.D., dated July 20, 1874, printed in E. Sargent, *Proof Palpable of Immortality*, Boston, 1875, p. 54. Cf. *The Spiritual Magazine* November, 1872, p. 516, and *The Spiritualist*, May 1, 1874, pp. 205-208.

Let me add there were also sundry incidents recorded of Miss Cook which directly favour the materialization hypothesis. I have not enlarged upon them, partly for brevity's sake, partly because they are isolated phenomena which seem to need further corroborative testimony before they can be accepted with any confidence. But Mr. G. Tapp declared that once when, by accident, he violently clutched Katie's arm, "her wrist crumpled in my grasp like a piece of paper, or thin cardboard, my fingers meeting through it." Similarly, when Katie was photographed by Mr. Harrison in 1873, Katie soon after the magnesium flash "requested us to look at her, when she appeared to have lost all her body. She seemed to be resting on nothing but her neck." (See *The Spiritualist*, May 15, 1873, p. 203.) On the same occasion "a masculine right arm, bare to the shoulder," was thrust out of the cabinet when Katie was in full view. Again several witnesses declare that, shortly before her final disappearance, Katie cut many pieces out of her white robe and distributed them as souvenirs. Then, before the eyes of all, "she gave it one flap, and it was instantly as perfect as at first."³⁵

On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that there were some suspicious happenings in Miss Cook's early career, and that in 1880, when she had become Mrs. Corner, an exposure of fraudulent practises took place from which her reputation never recovered. Moreover, at an earlier date, i.e., in 1873 and 1874, she was rather compromisingly associated with two very unsatisfactory mediums, Mrs. Bassett and Miss Showers.³⁶ Still, as has been previously said, this is no con-

³⁵*The Spiritualist*, May 29, 1874, pp. 258-259. Cf. Mr. Coleman's important article, *ibid.*, p. 235.

³⁶See *The Spiritualist* for April 1, 1873, p. 152, and May 15, 1874, p. 230. The exposure of Mrs. Bassett is recorded in *The Medium* for April 11 and April 18, 1873, pp. 174 and 182; that of Miss Showers in *The Medium* for May 8 and 22, 1874, pp. 294 and 326.

clusive proof that other phenomena were not genuine. Sir William Crookes, in particular, never varied in his belief of the reality of the phenomena he had observed. As late as 1916 he authorized the editor of *Light* to make it known that he "adhered to his published statements and had nothing to retract."

One further piece of evidence regarding Miss Florrie Cook after her marriage is too remarkable to be passed over in silence. It is a letter published in *The Spiritualist* for June 25, 1875, in the following form. The materialized figure then produced under Mrs. Corner's mediumship was called "Leila."

Materialization of Spirits in the House of Mr. Crookes

Mrs. Elgie Corner (Florence Cook) has favored us with the following interesting letter for publication.

20 Mornington Road, London, N.W.

June 20, 1875.

My dear Florrie — Great interest having been expressed as to the "Leila" materializations which have taken place through your mediumship at our house and elsewhere, I will with pleasure put down on paper some of the phenomena which have occurred under *my own* observation.

As the manifestations professed to be given for Mr. Crookes's information, most of the séances have necessarily been held here, but "Leila" has also appeared at three other houses. For the same reason my husband was at first almost constantly in the cabinet, and latterly he was allowed to go in and out as he liked; but it was by no means necessary for him to be present.

On several occasions we have all seen you and Leila at the same time. Once Leila and my husband were standing in the room with us talking, when you suddenly rushed out of the cabinet, pushed past them and fell insensible on the floor. Leila scolded Mr. Crookes for allowing you to leave the cabinet and disappeared. On another occasion you walked out in a trance, staggered about the room we were sitting in and then went back into the cabinet; as you entered the cabinet you held the curtain on one side and let us see Leila standing a few feet from us in her usual white robe. Several similar occurrences have taken place at other times.

I may add that on almost every occasion I have heard you cough, sigh, move about, or speak in the cabinet whilst Leila has been outside talking to us.

On two occasions Leila, whose feet were always bare, took one of your shoes off, and asked me to put it on her foot. I knelt down by her side, and tried my utmost to squeeze her foot into it, but found it impossible to do so, her foot being so much larger than yours. Leila has appeared at our house between twenty and thirty times, and tests of your separate identities were given almost every night. On some occasions visitors were present but we have had the best séances when you have been stopping with us as one of our family and no stranger whatever was present. Believe me, affectionately Yours

Ellen Crookes

Mrs. E. C. Corner

6 Bruce Villas, Eleanor Road, Hackney.

There cannot be a doubt that this letter was written by the wife of the distinguished Fellow of the Royal Society who was knighted twenty-two years later, in 1897. The address from which Mrs. Crookes writes, 20 Mornington Road, is the house at which the majority of the Katie King materializations took place in 1873-74. Although the letter was not sent to the editor of *The Spiritualist* by Mrs. Crookes herself, the subsequent issues of that journal contain no repudiation of its contents or protests against its publication. Neither is it easy to suppose that Mr. Crookes was unaware of what his wife had written. We may perhaps wonder that he left it to her to send the letter instead of bearing testimony to "Leila's" satisfactory test himself; but an explanation is probably to be found in the fact that the opposition and obloquy he had encountered had by degrees discouraged him from wasting more of his valuable time upon such investigations. We know at any rate, that he wrote to D. D. Home in the November of 1875: "I am so disgusted with the whole thing that were it not for the regard we bear to you, I would cut the whole 'Spiritual' connection; and never read, speak, or think of the subject again." He had not, however, lost faith

in the phenomena, for writing once more to Home nine years later, he stated "my belief is the same as ever, but opportunities are wanting."³⁷

With regard to the incidents just recounted, it is plain that if "Leila" scolded Mr. Crookes while Florrie had fallen fainting on the floor outside the cabinet, it cannot on that occasion have been true that Florrie was masquerading as Leila. Yet all this happened in the Crookes's own house, where surely it would have been impossible for any confederate to enact the part even once, let alone a score of times. I must confess that after reading very carefully the criticisms of Mr. Frank Podmore (both in his *Modern Spiritualism* and in his *Studies in Psychical Research*), of Professor A. Lehmann (*Aberglaube und Zauberei*, 3rd. ed., 1925), of Graf von Klinckowstroem (in *Der Physikalische Mediumismus*, 1925), and last but by no means least, of Mr. Serjeant Cox in *The Spiritualist*³⁸ and *The Medium*,³⁹ I still regard the theory of imposture on the part of Miss Florence Cook as the less probable explanation. That the whole business is mysterious and inexplicable to us with our present imperfect knowledge may be readily admitted. There seems, for example, every reason to believe that the intelligence which manifested itself in the very banal conversation of "Katie King" was none other than the intelligence of the medium herself.

Speaking of the materializations of another medium, Miss Showers, who was on some occasions associated with Florrie Cook, Mr. Serjeant Cox writes:

When Mr. Crookes tried with Miss Showers the ingenious electrical test invented by himself and Mr. Varley, it proved "Florence"

³⁷*Life and Mission of Home* (Ed Doyle), p. 218.

³⁸May 15, 1874, pp. 229-233; and June 5, pp. 272-274.

³⁹May 8, 1874, pp. 294-5; May 22, pp. 326-7; May 29, p. 342; July 10, pp. 435-6.

(the materialized figure) to be beyond doubt Miss Showers herself, precisely as by the accidental inspection of Mrs. Edwards she was seen to be by all the party at my house. When Mr. Crookes tried her by asking "Florence" to dip her fingers in some water which had the (to her) unanticipated effect of staining the fingers, the stain was found upon the fingers of Miss Showers!⁴⁰

Even were the fact of the staining of Miss Showers' fingers absolutely beyond dispute, I do not know that I should consider the incident quite conclusive. Col. E. A. de Rochas' *Extériorisation de la Sensibilité* supplies much matter for reflexion in this and similar cases. But while Mr. Crookes himself made no comment in *The Medium*, Sir Charles Isham wrote a fortnight later: "I hear from Mrs. Showers that Mr. Crookes told Miss Showers he could not detect any stains on that lady; neither could Mrs. Showers."⁴¹ As for the electrical experiment, Mr. Crookes denied in a letter to *The Spiritualist* (June 19, 1874) that he had committed himself to any explicit statement and declared that he had not had sufficient sittings with Miss Showers to come to a definite conclusion. What Crookes does state in the course of this communication seems to me worthy of very special consideration. Quoting from an earlier letter written to Serjeant Cox he says:

"I have had two experimental séances with Miss Showers, and have obtained certain results, but not enough to enable me to form a definite opinion. I must have more evidence. I have only had four séances altogether with her and that is quite an insufficient number. I had between thirty and forty séances with Miss Cook before I felt justified in coming to a positive opinion. I notice that with every new medium one or two séances only leave suspicion on the mind. It was so in the case of Home, Williams, Hearne, Miss Fox, Miss Cook, and Miss Showers. In all instances where a great number of séances have been available, this suspicion has been replaced by belief; so it is not fair

⁴⁰*Medium*, July 10, 1874, p. 435.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, July 31, 1874, p. 483.

to attach too much importance to the unfavourable impression given by the first few séances with Miss Showers."

I have mentioned the name of Miss Showers (a medium summarily dismissed as fraudulent by Mr. Podmore) because in some of her materializations a peculiar test of genuineness is alleged to have been given. Perhaps the most serious difficulty which all must feel in reading Sir William Crookes's account of his experiences with "Katie King" arises from the very perfection of the manifestations themselves. On no occasion is there any record that the Katie, who presented herself thirty or forty times over before the eyes of Sir William in a good light, was in any way maimed or physically defective. She never appeared minus her lower limbs (as her reputed father, John King, is reported to have appeared at the séances of Mr. Charles Williams) nor with features imperfectly modelled. None the less, she seems to have alleged, as a reason for her always showing herself with bare feet, that she thus economized the material (ectoplasm?) which would otherwise have been used up in providing her with boots and stockings.⁴² Curiously enough, no suggestion was ever made — at any rate none is mentioned — by Sir William Crookes or any of the other observers that the most conclusive proof which Katie could give of her spirit origin would have been an imperfect materialization. If she had occasionally appeared without an eye, with a half-formed ear, with only one arm, or even preferably with three, nothing could have demonstrated more satisfactorily that she was not Miss Cook or identical with any mundane impersonator of "Katie." There is, however, some evidence that in Miss Showers' mediumship, the materialized form was not always physically perfect. Mr. Charles Blackburn, a wealthy spiritualist from Manchester, gives an account of

⁴²*The Spiritualist*, March 1, 1873, p. 119.

a séance at which he was present in the medium's home at Teignmouth. This location was so far unsatisfactory inasmuch as it suggests the possibility of confederacy or apparatus, but the nature of the phenomena seems to negative any use of trickery. One of the earrings which the medium wore was removed and a thread was passed through the hole and both ends were secured outside the cabinet in a place visible to all. After Miss Showers had lain down inside the cabinet and had fallen into a trance, a solid form, "Lenore," came out and was examined by those present. Mr. Blackburn writes:

"We all felt her ears, she had no boring whatever through her ears, and the lobes were very thin and far smaller than Miss Shower's. She had only one large toe to each foot; the other four toes were ossifications, and not toes at all. We all examined her very small feet with our hands and eyes; nor were we in the slightest mistaken. She told us her feet would have been perfected had there been more power. When this figure retired, we all went into the cabinet with faint light and awoke Miss Showers. She had the thread through her ear just as when she first lay down on the couch. We cut the thread close to her ear and traced it direct to the nail, without a knot or piercing in it. Miss Shower's feet, I need hardly say, are perfect, and were examined."⁴⁸

Miss Showers, the daughter of a General Showers, was not a professional medium; and certainly Mr. Charles Blackburn, whose name often figures among the psychic investigators of the period, could have no discreditable motive for giving false testimony. Curiously enough the other personality, "Florence Maples," who was also said to materialize under Miss Shower's mediumship, showed herself not infrequently with some similar physical defects. Mr. Stainton Moses, himself a medium, but a tutor at University College, London, and a man universally respected, gives an account of

⁴⁸*The Spiritualist*, August 21, 1874, pp. 87-88.

a séance with Miss Showers at Mrs. Gregory's house in Green Street, Grosvenor Square. The description of "Florence's" materialized form is too long to quote entire, but one or two points may be noticed. Mr. Moses speaks of "a cold clammy claw, rather than hand, which was stiffly jerked from the side." At first it was "unlike human flesh" but "it gradually acquired vital heat." Then he continues:

"Although the hands and arms are naturally formed and the body correctly shaped, the face never assumed a natural look, and during a part at least of the evening I believe that feet were wanting. I passed my foot under the figure which seemed to be off the floor and found no obstacle. I believe that no feet were there. The face presented throughout the evening a completely abnormal appearance. The complexion was pasty and like bad wax-work; the lips compressed so as to give an appearance of pain, and the glassy eyes, with their perpetual stare, gave the face a most unnatural look. I tried all in my power to make the eyes blink, but in vain. The whites were unnaturally large, and no eyelids were perceptible. The face was inhuman throughout the night, though at other times I have seen it look natural and pretty."⁴⁴

The account here given by Stainton Moses supplies rather an interesting illustration of the danger of drawing inferences from what is not explicitly stated. Almost inevitably one would conclude from the long description, of which I have quoted only a paragraph, that this figure, unlike "Katie," did not converse. He tells us that during the whole evening the form was in immediate contiguity to him. "I could touch it," he says, "at will." It sat down in a most peculiar way. "It simply *doubled up*, as if someone had touched a spring which caused it to bend." Not one word does the narrator record, as having been spoken by the figure. But it was certainly not an automaton, for Stainton Moses goes on to say:

"I felt the breath from the mouth, and I saw the chest rise and fall

⁴⁴*The Spiritualist*, April 3, 1874, pp. 162-163.

as breath was drawn. Moreover, as the figure stood touching me, by my side, I could feel the beating of the heart. There was apparently a fully organized body."

Fourteen people were present, including, I believe, Lord Rayleigh, F.R.S. Not all are named, but among those who are was the Rev. C. Maurice Davies, D.D., who contributed to the *Daily Telegraph* certain well-known articles on "Orthodox" and "Unorthodox London." His career is sketched in one of the Supplements to the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Another of the guests, Mr. T. Herbert Noyes, has also written some account of the séance. He agrees with the former narrator regarding the peculiar glazed appearance of the eyes and also in saying that the figure was some inches taller than the medium, while resembling her in feature. But Mr. Noyes tells us how "in answer to Col. Steuart's enquiries," the materialized figure told them that her parents' names were Joseph and Margaret Maples of Blackburn Street, Inverness, and that consumption had carried her off six years ago, also that "she wished a message to be sent to her parents relating to her deathbed scene."⁴⁵ She must, in fact, have talked a good deal.

Mr. Stainton Moses states: "I do not propose to offer any theory to account for the facts I have recorded. I have none; and I must see much before I care to frame one." Though more than half a century has passed since these words were written, the same attitude of reserve seems still to impose itself. The problem is only complicated by the unsatisfactory phenomena of Marthe Béraud (Eva C.) and others in more recent times. No sober critic can remain indifferent to the consideration which has been forcibly urged by Graf von Klinckowstroem in the *Dreimännerbuch*, and by others, that

⁴⁵*The Spiritualist*, March 27, 1874, p. 151; and cf. Col. Steuart's account in *The Medium*, April 3, 1874, pp. 214-215.

whereas in the seventies mediums abounded who were alleged to produce full-form materializations that spoke and could be handled, such phenomena are at present practically unheard of.⁴⁶ On the other hand, it may be contended with some plausibility that the tests now imposed of rigorous searching, medical examination, reclotting, etc., create an atmosphere of suspicion which inhibits the development of that form of mediumship. In a passage quoted above, Sir William Crookes wrote: "I notice that with every new medium one or two séances only leave suspicion on the mind."⁴⁷ May not the explanation very probably be that the mediums who produce such astounding phenomena are exceptionally sensitive. Even with Home, a sudden cry, a change of place, or some small excitement, was sufficient to bring the manifestation to an abrupt conclusion. In the *Proceedings of the S.P.R.* (Vol. IX, p. 310) Mrs. Crookes records how in the middle of a materialization she gave a frightened scream. "The figure immediately seemed to sink into the floor," and Mr. Serjeant Cox turned upon her with the words, "Mrs. Crookes, you have spoilt the finest manifestation we have ever had." Several similar examples could be quoted. If, then, the most remarkable phenomena seem always to be associated with occasions when all present are friendly and convinced and no control at all is exercised, there is at least the possibility of a legitimate explanation. It may be, of course, that at such times the unscrupulous impostor can fake his results unimpeded, but it may also be that in these conditions the medium's mind being absolutely tranquil, the spiritual influences which *ex hypothesi* control him have the fullest play. Automatists are agreed in declaring that they get the best results in their automatic script when they are

⁴⁶Gulat-Wellenburg, *Der physikalische Mediumismus*, pp. 94-5 and 147.

⁴⁷*The Spiritualist*, June 19, 1874, p. 296.

quietly engaged in conversation about some entirely different matter or at any rate are not attending to the script.

I cannot resist the temptation to insert here an experience of Sir William Barrett, first because I greatly sympathize with his point of view, when for instance he writes: "All psychical researchers need to bear in mind that every sensitive or medium is a *suggestible subject*; if you go expecting fraud you may possibly create the very fraud you suspect. If you make preparations beforehand to lay a trap for the medium, it is probable that both medium and experimenter will fall into the trap." But, secondly, the manifestations observed and recorded by such an experienced investigator with a medium of no great repute like Husk are in themselves of great interest. Sir William tells us:

"The only case of materialization witnessed by me, which seemed to be inexplicable by fraud, occurred with the medium, Husk, many years ago. It may be worth while describing this experiment as it has never been published.

"Mr. William de Morgan had kindly lent Myers and myself his studio in Cheyne Row, an almost bare room, furnished with a small deal table about three feet by five feet and a few chairs. After dinner Myers brough Husk to Cheyne Row in a hansom cab and we immediately sat round the table. There were six present including the medium. William de Morgan and his sister (being sceptics), were placed in control of the medium, whose feet were tied to the legs of the table, and his hands were grasped by the sitter on each side. Mrs. de Morgan (their mother) sat facing Myers, and I sat at the other end of the table and had control of the light. After the wrists of all present had been loosely joined together by silk thread, I blew out the candle and phenomena very soon occurred. The medium went into a trance; lights, very like fireflies, were seen darting about above our heads, movement by some objects in the room was heard and a deep guttural voice spoke to us calling himself 'John King.' In reply to our request he said he would try to show himself. A violent convulsion of the medium occurred, and suddenly right in front of me appeared a clothed human figure from the waist upwards — the lower part of

the body might have been concealed by the table. The face was illuminated by a bluish light which seemed to issue from an object held in the hand of the materialized figure. The face was undoubtedly a living one for I saw its eyes open and close and its lips move. I asked who it was and the guttural voice said 'John King.' It was a dark-bearded and rather unpleasant face, quite unlike that of the medium. I exclaimed 'Do you all see this figure? I am going to light the candle,' and immediately risked doing so. The figure vanished the moment the match was struck, and the medium was found in deep trance, lying back in his chair and groaning; when the medium had recovered he was sent home in a cab. On comparing notes each sitter described the face according to the different aspects it presented from his or her position at the table. We found upon experimenting that it was impossible to reproduce the figure by leaning on the table, nor could the medium have put on a mask as his hands were held the whole time and the tying of his legs and wrists was found intact. De Morgan asked Myers and myself to come the next morning and see if we could in any way imitate what we had seen. Though de Morgan remained somewhat sceptical, Myers and I both agreed that it was extremely difficult to explain the phenomena by trickery on the part of the medium, who, moreover, was found deeply entranced a few seconds later."⁴⁸

All those who took part in this experiment were people of marked intellectual distinction. Sir William Barrett, F.R.S., had first been Professor Tyndall's assistant, and then became Professor of Physics for thirty-seven years at the Royal College of Science, Dublin. F. W. H. Myers had won more prizes at the University than almost any other man of his generation. His published poems are as remarkable as his great psychological work on "Human Personality," unfortunately never completed. William de Morgan, the son of Professor Augustus de Morgan, was a famous artist, potter, and inventor before he became known in his declining years as a novelist of the very first rank. His mother was the au-

⁴⁸*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. XXXIV (1924), pp. 287-88

thor of a much-esteemed work *From Matter to Spirit* and his wife's artistic gifts were recognised as being on a level with his own. Professor Barrett and F. W. H. Myers had a wide practical experience in psychic research and were well acquainted with the tricks of fraudulent mediums. I should find it hard to believe that they were imposed upon by a clever piece of imposture.

Let us confess that the whole subject is infinitely puzzling. Having Mr. Feilding's report of the Naples sittings with Eusapia Palladino before our eyes, not to speak of numerous other séances held by Eusapia with her Italian fellow countrymen, it is difficult to maintain that a medium who notoriously cheats is incapable of producing genuine phenomena. For this reason the fact that "Dr." Monck, for example, was detected in flagrant and seemingly premeditated imposture, does not conclusively prove that all the materializations ascribed to him were equally fakes. The number of exposures which were recorded at that period make it hard to believe that any materializing medium was honest or trustworthy; but, on the other hand, the psychological mystery presented by the testimony of such a man as Dr. A. Russel Wallace, who shares with Darwin the repute of having given birth to our modern evolution theories, is not less embarrassing. Wallace, in his book of reminiscences entitled *My Life*, claims on four separate occasions to have witnessed materializations in a form which admitted of no dispute.⁴⁹ One of these experiences he described in some detail before judge and jury when giving evidence on oath in the *Colley v. Maskelyne* case (April, 1907). He stated that in full daylight on a bright sunny afternoon he saw a whitish cloud come out of Monck's side which was gradually built up into a draped

⁴⁹*My Life*, II, pp. 330-331.

female form standing clearly before his eyes, the two being five feet apart. Dr. Monck clapped his hands and the materialized figure also clapped hers, though more faintly. Then the figure drew near Monck again and was slowly reabsorbed into his body, as it had come out. Neither was this story devoid of indirect corroboration. The incident occurred at what were then the offices of a London spiritualist organization in Bloomsbury, for which Dr. Hensleigh Wedgwood, the learned author of the *Etymological Dictionary* made himself responsible. Now Russel Wallace assures us on Wedgwood's authority that in the course of a long investigation with Monck on these premises "they had had far more wonderful results than that just described." Anyone who may read the account given of Wedgwood in the *Dictionary of National Biography* will learn that he was throughout his life conscientious in an extraordinary degree. He resigned a post worth £800 a year because it involved the taking of an oath, and he regarded the taking of oaths as unlawful. But further, Archdeacon Colley, who was mainly instrumental in the exposure of Eglinton, another materializing medium, avers that with Monck he had an experience even more convincing than Dr. Wallace's, though it occurred not in the daytime, but in good lamplight. The Archdeacon and a friend who was with him (the name is given) were permitted to touch the materialized female form which had come, as before, out of Monck's side as a kind of vapour and had gradually solidified. Dr. Monck, still entranced, allowed the form to walk a few steps, supported on either side by the two observers. "Meanwhile," says the Archdeacon, "holding the hand of the spirit arm that rested on mine, I felt the wrist, palm, fingers and finger nails; yielding to pressure, having natural weight and substance and all things pertaining to humanity, but it was

damp and stone cold." The letter containing this statement was printed in *The Medium and Daybreak* for October 5, 1877 (pp. 625-6), and it purports to have been written on September 25, 1877, the very night of the occurrence. If this was an illusion it was an illusion of the most stupendous kind. Colley was a comparatively young man at the time and he was not then archdeacon — this title, in fact, was derived from South Africa — but his friends proclaim that he was incapable of deceit in such a matter.

Without pretending to reach any positive conclusion regarding the problem of alleged full-form materializations, I leave these statements for the consideration of the reader. They belong, it seems to me, to a quite different category to the evidence which attests the accordion phenomena of D. D. Home. But they serve, at any rate, to illustrate the uncertainty which besets even the best and most scientific investigations of the subject. Much curiosity is aroused, endless time is wasted, but in the end we are left no wiser than before.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRUTH OF TELEPATHY

It is pleasant to pass from the atmosphere of controversy to a subject regarding which, among Catholics at least, there exists pretty general agreement. Dr. Liljencrants and Father de Heredia, while combating strenuously the genuineness of the more striking physical phenomena of Spiritualism, make no difficulty in accepting the possibility of the transmission of thought from mind to mind independently of the recognized channels of sense. Telepathy is a truth which experimental psychology may now be said to have demonstrated upon reliable evidence. For pure materialists the recognition of any such faculty has been a very bitter pill. They have contested every inch of the ground and among the extreme representatives of the school one can discern as yet no sign of surrender. But, speaking generally, the tone even of resolute sceptics has grown less defiant. No such violent outburst has occurred of late as was caused a few years ago by the publication of Sir Oliver Lodge's profession of faith in his book entitled *Raymond*. The incident, as a revelation of one aspect of the scientific temper, was really curious.

There is a widespread impression that the unamiable moral disorder which passes by the name of *odium theologicum*, is a microbe peculiarly characteristic of the clerical profession. This, it may safely be affirmed, is not the case. Both the rationalist and the agnostic, though they claim to speak on behalf of "Science," and hold the very name of dogma in abhorrence, are apt to be just as rabid in defence

of their negations as the most intolerant of theologians. Witness the tone of the various critics who in letters to the Press, in magazine articles, and in more or less bulky volumes fell tooth and nail upon the author of the book above referred to and tore him metaphorically limb from limb. No doubt, controversy is not now conducted with the same grossness of language which lent pungency to the writings of Dr. Martin Luther and his contemporaries. Dr. Mercier and Mr. Clodd did not go quite so far as to describe our psychical researchers in set terms as swine, liars, blockheads, and devils incarnate, but they allowed themselves a very considerable liberty of expression, and, behind all the restraint which decorum imposed, the fact that they had badly lost their tempers becomes patent to the most unobservant reader. Is it unconscious telepathy perchance which led both Dr. Mercier and Mr. Clodd independently to fancy themselves in the rôle of Old Bailey counsel browbeating a shiftily criminal? Surely it must be a long time since Science has found her cause championed by advocates so deplorably lacking in dignity and good taste. Take the following imaginary cross-examination, for example, as a specimen of Dr. Mercier's polemic:

"I ask you, Sir Oliver Lodge, as a scientific man whether it is possible to alter the nature of a thing by altering its name? How do you say? Aye or No? If you mean a ghost, why do you not call it a ghost? If you mean supernatural and a miracle, why do you not say supernatural and a miracle? If it is because you are ashamed to use the familiar words, why are you ashamed to use them? If that is not the reason, what is the reason? No, Sir, it is of no avail to answer me as you answered Dr. Tuckett. It will not serve you to call me unfair, to say . . . that you wish I was better informed, and so on, and so forth; you will be pleased to answer my questions or to admit that you cannot answer them. You are silent? You may go down, Sir."¹

¹C. H. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, p. 119.

Even more extraordinary perhaps is such a passage as the following:

"Such an exhibition of credulity has not been seen since Moses Primrose returned from the market in proud possession of a gross of spectacles with silver rims and shagreen cases. Really when I read his naïve and innocent account of his own simplicity, I wonder if Lady Lodge ever allows him to go out in the street without a nurse to see that he does not bring home a gross of sentry boxes, or chimney pots, or left-hand gloves, or something equally profitable."²

If Dr. Mercier thinks that he excels in the bluster of cross-examination, Mr. Clodd apparently ambitions the tragic rôle of Cicero against Catiline and perorates upon this note:

"You, Sir Oliver, knowing as you must have known, the taint which permeates the early history of Spiritualism, its inception in fraud, etc., . . . have proved yourself on your own admission, incompetent. . . . What is more serious your maleficent influence gives impetus to the recrudescence of superstition which is so deplorable a feature of these days. . . . The sellers of thousands of mascots — credulity in which as life-preservers and luck-bringers is genuine — the palmists and all other professors of the cult, have in you their unacknowledged patron. Thus you, who have achieved high rank as a physicist, descend to the plane of the savage animist, surrendering the substance for the shadow. Surely the mysteries which in your physical researches meet you at every turn, baffling your skill to penetrate, should make you pause ere you accept these specious solutions of the momentous problems which lie on the threshold of the Unknown Hereafter."³

Dr. Henry Armstrong, F.R.S., an emeritus professor of chemistry, who contributes a postscript to Mr. Clodd's book, describes Raymond as "obscurantism run riot," and regrets that "the fair name of Science should be sullied by the publication of this 'nauseating drivel' as Mr. Clodd properly terms it."⁴ It would be easy to quote a score of similar illustrations of the tone adopted by a certain group of rationalists,

²*Op. cit.*, p. 85.

³Clodd, *The Question: If a man die shall he live again?* p. 298.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 302.

but I forbear. If only one could be sure that all this *sæva indignatio* was prompted by horror of the evils of Spiritualism, and that Sir Oliver's lack of reverence for the "Unknown Hereafter" was the real gravamen, one might feel that there was much excuse for the violence displayed. Many deplorable results have undoubtedly followed from the promiscuous reading of *Raymond* by persons wholly unable to sort and appraise its data, or even to grasp the author's own point of view. But I am convinced that the secret of the frantic denunciations which Sir Oliver Lodge's attitude provoked among prominent rationalists was not the pretext which they themselves put forward. They were up in arms because they saw clearly enough that the recognition thus accorded to psychical research was a menace to materialistic science, the science which finds the final test of truth in the scalpel, the balance, and the microscope alone. All that lies beyond and outside is to them the land of miracle, and when Sir Oliver has the audacity to maintain that demonstrated truth may exist there, they hold him to be a traitor to the sacred cause of Science and consequently a person to whom no quarter should be given. This, if I mistake not, is the real significance of the violence shown in the controversies which centred round the publication of *Raymond*. In any case it is extremely instructive to note on what lines the battle was fought. The primary question at issue was not so much the possibility of communication with the departed, or even survival after death, but simply the fact of telepathy. The denial of this forms the first line of defence in which the Dichards of the Haeckelian tradition, the Ray Lankesters, the Crichton Brownes, the Donkins, the Clodds, the Armstrongs, the Merciers, the Tucketts, *et id genus omne*, have resolutely entrenched themselves and are prepared to hold

out to the last gasp. It has infuriated them that of recent years the current of educated opinion has steadily set in favour of telepathy. This is a shrewd blow to the materialistic concept of the universe, but the movement is undeniable. In illustration of the change that has come about, let me quote a casual utterance of Dr. J. H. Skrine which appeared about the same time in the *Hibbert Journal*. Even if the statement be thought exaggerated, I am convinced that thirty years ago it would never have found admittance in such a *milieu*.

"This present age," wrote Dr. Skrine, "has brought us such a fresh discovery. The intercourse between one human consciousness and another by some manner of communication which is not conveyed by any known action of the senses, such as language or physical signalling, has become an ascertained law of nature. It may be possible to find men of respected judgment who will not yet admit this, for I have myself encountered such denial. But so did eminent intellectuals in the days of Galileo deny that the earth was round."⁵

It is the complaint of Sir Oliver Lodge that what he calls orthodox Science is so hidebound in its prejudice against the supranormal that even the discussion of telepathy is banned in scientific journals. "The beginning of the proof is telepathy," he wrote to the *Times* in November, 1914, "but the whole subject is taboo."⁶ Sir H. B. Donkin replied that "all the evidence produced in support of telepathy is valueless, not only to scientists but also to men of ordinary common sense."⁷ Similarly, Sir Ray Lankester described telepathy as "simply a boldly invented word for a supposed phenomenon which has never been demonstrated,"⁸ and Mr. Clodd spoke

⁵*The Hibbert Journal*, October, 1917, p. 133.

⁶*The Times*, November 28, 1914.

⁷*Ibid.*, December 1, 1914; and see also the controversy in *Bedrock*, 1912 and 1913.

⁸Quoted by Clodd, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

in the same context of "invoking the unknown to explain the non-existent," the non-existent being telepathy.⁹

The Church, so far as I am aware, has never delivered any pronouncement, either directly or indirectly, upon the question now before us. The philosophy of Aristotle and the schoolmen, upon which she has set her seal, has not, of course, felt the need of any such argument to establish the possibility of the existence of "consciousness apart from the brain."¹⁰ The separate existence and the spirituality of the soul can be demonstrated, we hold, on quite other grounds. Still just as Catholic psychology, although always with a certain prudent distrust of morbid and abnormal mental conditions, has accepted hypnotism as a phenomenon of psychic experience which does not necessarily suppose the intervention of any diabolic or evil influence; so it would seem that when adequate proof is forthcoming, she will see no intrinsic impossibility in the alleged discovery that mind can act upon mind independently of the organs of sense. Père Lucien Roure, S.J., in his volume *Le Merveilleux Spirite*¹¹ seems clearly to incline to an acceptance of the reality of certain telepathic phenomena, though on the other hand, no one could be more convinced than he of the fraudulent character of the vast bulk of the spiritistic manifestations obtained through the intervention of the ordinary paid mediums.

Probably no extrinsic testimony to the truth of telepathy will have higher weight with the discerning reader than the attitude of the late Mr. Frank Podmore, who devoted the greater part of his life to these researches and who was

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁰This phrase, borrowed from Sir Oliver Lodge, is used by Sir Ray Lankester in the title of one of his articles in *Bedrock*, January, 1913, p. 488.

¹¹*Le Merveilleux Spirite* (1917), pp. 283 and 288.

applauded even by such rationalists as Mr. Clodd and Dr. Tuckett as one of the keenest and most sceptical of critics.¹² Now, Mr. Podmore, in 1894, published a bulky work under the title *Apparitions and Thought Transference — an examination of the evidence for Telepathy*, in the forefront of which he announces that “the thesis which the following pages are designed to illustrate and support is briefly: *that communication is possible between mind and mind otherwise than through the known channels of the senses*” (the italics are Mr. Podmore’s). Towards the close of his life a new edition was called for, in the preface to which he writes:

“In the first instance I felt considerable reluctance to approach the task of preparing a new edition of the present work. The comparative lack of recent evidence of the strongest kind, and an increasing scepticism as to the value of human testimony fostered by prolonged study of the history of Spiritualism, produced distrust of my own earlier judgment; and I feared lest, when I came to weigh the evidence again, I might find myself compelled either to withdraw the book or to reissue it as an old brief, prefaced with an apology from counsel for having in the interval gone over to the other side.

“I am glad to be able to say that my fears were exaggerated, and that I find little to revise in my original estimate of the strength and weakness of the evidence.”¹³

Now such a pronouncement, however much enforced by the intensely sceptical spirit of the writer and by his long-continued study of the evidence, could not count for much if anything like a consensus of opinion among modern psychologists were ranged on the other side. But this is far from being the case. Men like the late Professor William James, of Harvard, the Italians Morselli and Lombroso, Professors Flournoy and Pierre Janet, of Paris, Dr. Richet, and

¹²See, for example, Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, pp. 33, 307, 359.

¹³F. Podmore, *Apparitions and Thought Transference — an examination of the evidence for Telepathy* (1915), Preface.

many more that might be quoted, are all in agreement as to the fact of telepathy, however much they may vary in their explanations. Some years ago it was my privilege to be present when Professor Henri Bergson delivered his inaugural address as President of the Society for Psychical Research. His theme was Telepathy, and I propose later on to quote one or two brief passages from his discourse, but for the moment I am only concerned with the fact that his conviction of the reality of thought transference independently of the senses was expressed unhesitatingly. Moreover, Mr. Arthur J. Balfour, formerly Prime Minister and later created Earl Balfour, who acted as chairman, showed in his concluding remarks that he was in full agreement with the general drift of what had been said. Now, it would be ridiculous to treat such men as Mr. Balfour and Professor Bergson as if they were likely to be carried off their feet by the first speculative novelty which presented itself. If they admitted the fact of telepathy, it was because they had studied the evidence and had been convinced by it. Neither can any sane critic, familiar with the note of bluster and intolerance almost always perceptible in the rationalistic pronouncements of Sir Ray Lankester, Mr. Clodd, and Dr. Mercier, feel any doubt as to which side was the more likely to study the data patiently, and to weigh with an unprejudiced mind the conclusions to be deduced from them.

It is unnecessary to attempt to give any detailed indication of the very varied types of phenomena which point with more or less preciseness to the reality of thought transference by means other than the ordinary channels of sense. The strength of the case for telepathy by no means rests upon such experiments as those which Sir Oliver Lodge carried out at Liverpool in 1883 or at Portsach am See in 1892, experiments which Dr. Mercier in particular fastened upon

and sought to overwhelm with ridicule. Still less is any reliable conclusion to be drawn from the feats of public entertainers like the Zancigs. In all such cases we have no satisfactory guarantee against collusion and the use of some ingenious code of signalling. But it is important to notice not only that we have many instances of thought transference where, regard being had to the well-known character of the parties concerned, the use of conscious deception is unthinkable,¹⁴ but also that there are a great number of quite different lines of argument arising out of apparitions at the point of death, hypnotic phenomena — especially hypnotization at a distance — cases of so-called multiplex personality, automatic writing, crystal visions, dreams, etc., which all seem to point in the same direction.¹⁵ By way of illustration I will content myself for the present with appealing to some very remarkable results obtained personally by Dr. Gilbert Murray, since 1908 Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, in co-operation with his daughter, Mrs. Arnold Toynbee. These results were made public by him in his presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research, July, 1915, and have since been printed with evidential records in the 29th volume of the *Proceedings of the Society*, while further experiments are recorded in Vol. XXXIV of the same collection. The account of the procedure given by Professor Murray himself in his humorous and convincing speech runs thus:

"The method followed is this: I go out of the room and of course out of earshot. Someone in the room, generally my eldest daughter (Mrs. Toynbee), thinks of a scene or an accident or anything she likes,

¹⁴I refer especially to the experiments carried on between Miss Miles and Miss Ramsden recorded in Vol. XXI of the *Proceedings of S.P.R.*, as well as to others more recent. See, e.g., Vol. XXVII of the same collection.

¹⁵A fuller discussion of the evidence will be found in Podmore's *Apparitions and Thought Transference*, 2nd ed. (1915), and in N. W. Thomas's volume of *Thought Transference* (1905).

and says it aloud. It is written down and I am called. I come in, usually take my daughter's hand, and then if I have luck, describe in detail what she has thought of. The least disturbance of our customary method, change of time or place, presence of strangers, controversy and especially noise, is apt to make things go wrong. I become myself somewhat over-sensitive and irritable, though not, I believe, to a noticeable degree."¹⁶

Here is a remarkable example of one such successful experiment:

"A rather instructive case, and one in which I do think I was rather clever, referred to a scene in a book I had not read. I give it more at length:

"Subject set. A scene in a story by Strindberg. A man and woman in a lighthouse, the man lying fallen on the floor, and the woman bending over him, looking at him and hoping he is dead.

"My guess. A horrid atmosphere, full of hatred and discomfort. A book not real life. A book I have not read. Not Russian, not Italian but foreign. I cannot get it. . . . There is a round tower, a man and woman in a round tower; but it is not Maeterlinck. Not like him. I should guess it was Strindberg. The woman is bending over the man and hating him, hoping he is dead."¹⁷

No doubt this represents the high-water mark, but the number of really remarkable successes seems to have been considerable. Four or five people were often present, but, as Professor Murray notes, strange surroundings, noise, or a contentious atmosphere notably interfered with the results obtained. When, as far back as 1883, Sir James Crichton Browne was invited by Mr. F. W. Myers to attend an exhibition of thought-reading, the performance broke down, and Mr. Myers, it seems, declared with some vexation, "It must be allowed that this demonstration has been a total failure, and I attribute that to the offensive incredulity of Dr. Crichton Browne." Dr. Mercier, who tells the story, loudly commends Dr. Crichton Browne for imposing his own tests,

¹⁶Prof. Gilbert Murray in *S.P.R. Proceedings*, XXIX, 58.

¹⁷*S.P.R. Proceedings*, XXIX, 60.

and records with gusto what he considers to have been the sceptic's very effective retort: "I hope," said Sir James, "I shall always show offensive incredulity when I find myself in the presence of patent imposture."¹⁸ It would seem, however, that Professor Gilbert Murray would have been likely to fail egregiously under precisely similar circumstances, and unless "patent imposture" be also laid at the door of Professor Murray, Mrs. A. W. Verrall, Mrs. Arnold Toynbee, Lord Balfour with his sister Mrs. Sidgwick, not to speak of other ladies and gentlemen associated in the experiments, the breakdown of the thought-reader—and I should be inclined to say the same even *a fortiori* of mediums—under tense and agitating conditions is nothing to be surprised at. That Professor Murray should occasionally fail is thus only to be expected; the wonder is that he should ever succeed. Everything points to the fact that the concentration of mind entailed by such experiments must always be something of an effort. Professor Murray says: "I find the whole business rather unpleasant. It does not make me ill or exhaust me in any noticeable way, but I rather dislike it and would sooner do something else." No apology will be needed for giving one or two further illustrations to show that the example already quoted, though striking, was not unique. Professor Murray says:

"Another Strindberg case, also from a book I had not read, raises a rather interesting point. The subject set was an old, cross, poor, disappointed schoolmaster eating crabs for lunch at a restaurant, and insisting on having female crabs. I got the atmosphere, the man, the lunch in the restaurant on crabs, and thought I had finished, when my daughter said, 'What kind of crabs?' I felt rather impatient and said: 'Oh, Lord, I don't know: Female crabs.' That is, the response to the question came automatically with no preparation, while I thought I could not give it. I may add that I had never before heard of there

¹⁸Mercier, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

being any inequality between the sexes among crabs regarded as food."¹⁹

Can such astonishing response of percipient to agent be explained in any other way than by telepathy? The hypothesis of collusion in a man so eminent as Prof. Murray, conspicuous among his contemporaries for his outspokenness and independence of judgment, must be excluded at once. Of course in most of these experiments there seems to have been physical contact between himself and his daughter, and it is just conceivable that, as suggested in certain analogous cases by Mr. N. W. Thomas, if the hand of an automatist can write at the dictation of the subliminal self without the writer being conscious of the fact, Mrs. Toynbee's hand may without her knowledge have been animated by slight muscular movements which her father equally without reflex consciousness had learned to interpret as words and ideas. Still this seems a very extreme supposition and there were apparently cases, though less generally successful, in which there was no contact. Again, the possibility of hyperæsthesia, i.e., an abnormally developed but unconscious sense of hearing has been thought of as a solution. What favours this theory is the fact that all the experiments in which the subject was not decided upon and spoken orally, but merely written down and shown in silence to the sitters, turned out to be failures. But as against this, Prof. Murray's description often included details which though true and present to the agent's mind had never been spoken aloud. Here is an extract or two from the contemporary record:

"May 18, 1913 (Mrs. Toynbee, agent). *Subject*: 'Belgian Baron getting out of train at Savanarilla with us, and walking across the sandy track, and seeing the new train come in.'

¹⁹*Proceedings*, XXIX, 61.

"Prof. Murray, response. 'Man getting out of a train and looking for something. I don't know whether he is looking for another train to come in. I think it is a dry, hot sort of place. I get him with a faint impression of waxed moustaches — a sort of foreign person, but I can't get more.'

"The 'Belgian Baron,' never seen by Mr. Murray, had a waxed moustache, 'not mentioned' by Mrs. Toynbee, as is noted in the contemporary report."²⁰

One or two examples of later date may be added to these, for instance this, which occurred on December 26, 1921.

"Miss Agnes Murray (agent): 'I think of John Bright going to speak in Birmingham on free trade — so frightened he fell off his chair.'

"Professor Murray. 'This is somebody all of a tremble — It's somebody with a sort of stage fright, who is going to make a big speech — I think he falls down — Does he fall off his chair? Oh, I'm merely guessing — but I should think it's John Bright — oh, well — the rest I can guess. I suppose he was making a speech on free trade at Birmingham.'

Here is another experiment, not completely successful, which was tried on December 6, 1924.

Subject (chosen by Lord Balfour):²¹ "I'm thinking of Robert Walpole talking Latin to George I."

Professor Murray (speaking as he enters the room). "Something eighteenth century" (here Lord Balfour nodded assent), "I don't think I shall quite get it exactly. Doctor Johnson meeting George III in the King's Library; but I'm sure he's talking Latin to him — which he didn't do. I don't think I shall get it. Wait. I've nearly got it. Eighteenth century. Somebody talking Latin to a king."

One might go on quoting such examples indefinitely, but two further specimens will suffice. They occurred in 1916.

Subject (Mrs. Arnold Toynbee, agent): "I think of a scene in 'The Birth of a Nation,' where a girl is running away from a negro, jumping over a rock."

²⁰S.P.R. *Proceedings*, XXIX, p. 81.

²¹This is the statesman and former Prime Minister. Lord Balfour was a member of the S.P.R. from the beginning.

Prof. Murray. "This is a thing you have never done before. It is a cinema. The girl running away from somebody and jumping over a rock. Oh, it's America. It's a negro chasing a white girl. It must be 'The Birth of a Nation.'"

Again:

Subject (Miss Agnes Murray, agent): "Mr. Gladstone visiting Lloyd George at 10 Downing Street, and trying to point out to him the indiscretion of his Paris speech."

Prof. Murray. "It is a dignified person severely reproving somebody — giving them an awful dressing down. I should think it was Mr. Gladstone: it's something political. Can't think whom Mr. Gladstone would be likely to rebuke. Oh, he's rebuking Lloyd George."

In a careful study of the complete record of these experiments Mrs. H. Sidgwick arrived at the estimate that about 36 per cent of Professor Murray's attempts were successful, about 40 per cent complete failures and the remaining 24 per cent partial successes. It must, however, be obvious from these figures, that the successes enormously exceed any results which could be accounted for by mere coincidence. It is very natural that such a delicate faculty as Prof. Murray possesses may easily be hampered by conditions of health, weather, fatigue, etc., which cannot always be rightly understood. But that the faculty exists is proved to demonstration.

Shortly after the English Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882 a good deal of experimental work was done with a view to determine the possibilities of thought transference between two people at a distance. The most usual method of experiment was for the agent, having some rudely drawn outline before him, or a playing card, or some concrete object, to endeavour to transmit a mental picture of this to his friend who was warned to be ready to receive the impression at a specified hour. Although not entirely satisfactory the successes and partial successes obtained in this way have all along seemed to exceed the estimate arrived at by a calculation of the probabilities of mere chance

coincidence. Among the most conclusive and interesting of these trials ought to be mentioned those recorded by Mr. Upton Sinclair in his book entitled *Mental Radio* (1930). The percipient in this case was his wife, the agents being himself and other family friends. It would not be possible without the aid of a long series of illustrations to do justice to the results obtained, in which the partial successes are often not less convincing than the cases in which the object drawn is accurately reproduced. As an example of the kind of evidence presented I may take the case to which the author refers at the outset of his volume. He tells us that his brother-in-law at eleven-thirty in the morning of July 13, 1928, sat gazing at an object he had drawn, concentrating his entire attention upon it for a period of fifteen to twenty minutes, according to previous agreement. The drawing was simply a table fork, and a facsimile of the sketch, dated and signed, is furnished in the volume. Then Mr. Sinclair continues:

"At the same agreed hour, eleven-thirty in the morning of July 13, 1928, my wife was lying on the couch in her study, in our home in Long Beach, forty miles away by the road. She was in semi-darkness, with her eyes closed; employing a system of mental concentration which she had been practising off and on for several years, and mentally suggesting to her sub-conscious mind to bring her whatever was in the mind of her brother-in-law. Having become satisfied that the image which came to her mind was the correct one — because it persisted and came back again and again — she sat up and took pencil and paper and wrote the date and six words as follows: 'July 13, 1928. See a table fork. Nothing else.'"

This also is produced in facsimile. That the experiences registered in Mr. Sinclair's volume are serious and of very considerable value may be inferred from the fact that Dr. William McDougall, Professor of Psychology and a former President of the Society for Psychical Research, has contributed an introduction to it. The author tells us that of the

290 drawings experimented with, the total of successes was 65, which is roughly 23 per cent. The total of partial successes was 155, which is 53 per cent. The total of failures was 70, which is 24 per cent. No one who examines the extremely varied and often rather complicated subjects drawn, can fail to admit that mere guess or coincidence must count for practically nothing in such an investigation. Dr. Walter Franklin Prince in "Bulletin xvi" of the Boston Society for Psychical Research has since made a careful study of the Sinclair data and endorses Professor McDougall's favourable verdict.²²

Similar experiments with encouraging results have been undertaken over vastly longer distances. In the transactions of the International Congress for Psychical Research held at Athens in 1930, Dr. K. Konstantinides read a report concerning the attempts made by a group in Athens to impress telepathically other groups in Paris, Warsaw, and Vienna. That some notable successes were obtained is shown by the pictures reproduced, but the data supplied are not sufficient to enable one to form a judgment as to their relative frequency.²³

To come back, then, to the more general question of the possibility of thought transference independently of sense perceptions, there is nothing to urge against the existence of some rudimentary telepathic faculty except the fact that it has not hitherto been recognised as one of man's natural endowments. But this lack of recognition is for many reasons explicable, just as the non-recognition, or at best the imperfect recognition, for long ages of the force of electricity is quite explicable. If telepathy is, so to speak, found in a

²²I may take this opportunity of thanking Dr. Walter F. Prince for sending me a copy of his brilliant and most painstaking essay.

²³*Telepathische Experimente zwischen Athen, Paris, Warschau und Wien*, pp. 251-259.

free state in nature, it is found only in a very low intensity, save in extremely exceptional cases. Still, if Mr. Andrew Lang is to be believed, there is some considerable recognition of it among savage races, while in more cultured circles the opinion is very prevalent that many people, by concentrating their thought upon a person at a distance, can induce him to look round, and *vice versa* that others, when they are being looked at intently by any Peeping Tom in ambush, have an assured knowledge of the fact, this being especially the case when some sexual element enters into the problem. I remember in particular being told this by a man of very sober judgment who had lived much in equatorial Africa, where in the case of the natives of both sexes clothing was dispensed with. The woman, he declared, who met the regard of all honest men unabashed, always knew what manner of evil glances were being directed at her, however stealthily this might be done.

Probably examples of telepathy are of much more frequent occurrence than is commonly supposed, especially in the case of individuals who under certain conditions of which we as yet understand nothing are peculiarly sensitive to this influence. Let me quote one slight illustration of the kind which depend entirely for their evidential value upon a knowledge of the character of the witness concerned.

Some twenty years ago I accidentally made the acquaintance of a young lady whom I may call "Nellie Rogers." She was in need of some little help and counsel and I introduced her to a friend of mine, Miss X., who for a week or ten days showed her much kindness. Her difficulties being arranged, Nellie Rogers left England for ten years or more, living for part of the time in the Far East. I had almost forgotten her existence when one fine day she turned up in London and came to call on me. An hour or two later I

chanced to meet Miss X., as happened almost daily, and in course of conversation I remarked: "Who do you think came to see me today?" never expecting any reply. To my intense surprise she answered instantly "Nellie Rogers." For a moment I was quite taken aback, but then I said: "Oh, you must have seen her or heard about her somewhere." "No," she replied, "I don't suppose that she has been once in my thoughts in the last half-dozen years, but when you spoke, the name 'Nellie Rogers' suddenly popped into my head." I can only say that of my friend's sincerity I am absolutely assured. No doubt this might easily be accounted a mere coincidence, and one *would* reckon it such, were it not that I have had many other proofs at different times of Miss X.'s curious intuitions.

Or to take another entirely different illustration, some of my readers may possibly recall the name of a London priest to whose confessional some few years since many people repaired because, as they declared, he always knew what they had to say before they said it. I myself have met more than one of his casual penitents who were deeply impressed by his inexplicable knowledge of secrets which they believed to be hidden from all the world. No doubt this power was considered by many to be evidence of extraordinary holiness, but, good and earnest priest as he was, the gift appeared to many of his most intimate friends to be of a natural rather than supernatural origin.

And here it seems worth while to call attention to the remarkable statement made by Professor Henri Bergson in his "Presidential Address" of 1913, in which he declared among other things that he had the same kind of certainty regarding the fact of telepathy which he had of the destruction of the Spanish Armada.

"The more we become accustomed," he said, "to this idea of a

consciousness which overflows the organism, the more natural and probable we find the hypothesis that the soul survives the body. Were, indeed, the mental moulded exactly on the cerebral, were there nothing more in human consciousness than what could be read in a human brain, we might have to admit that consciousness must share the fate of the body and die with it. But if the facts, studied without any prepossessions, lead us on the contrary to regard the mental life as much more vast than the cerebral life, survival becomes so probable that the burden of proof comes to lie on him who denies it rather than on him who affirms it; for, as I have said elsewhere, 'the one and only reason we can have for believing in an extinction of consciousness after death is that we see the body become disorganized; and this reason has no longer any value, if the independence, however partial, of consciousness in regard to the body is also a fact of experience.'"²⁴

It is the more or less clear-sighted recognition of the validity of this kind of argument which supplies an explanation of the hostile attitude of "Science," i.e., of rationalism, towards the phenomena of telepathy. As M. Bergson says again; it is the function of science to measure, and its tendency is to ignore all those aspects of life which are not capable of being measured. On the other hand, "it is of the essence of mental things that they do not lend themselves to measurement." Telepathy runs counter to the favourite scientific hypothesis that there is a strict parallelism between the cerebral and the mental, and consequently science will have none of it. To develop the point further is here unnecessary, but it would be, I venture to urge, a fatal mistake, if the spiritualistic extravagances of some prominent psychical researchers led us to ignore the much more solid fact of telepathy, and blinded us to the excellent arguments against current materialism which may be deduced from its recognition.

No doubt it might be urged with some show of reason that

²⁴Bergson, "Presidential Address," authorized English translation, in *Proceedings S.P.R.*, Vol. XXVII, p. 171.

telepathy has nothing to do with Spiritualism and that any discussion of the subject is out of place in this book. Still it will be admitted that the action of mind on mind in this world is likely to be closely akin to that action of discarnate spirits from beyond the veil which is the main postulate of Spiritualism. Moreover, telepathy is constantly invoked to explain, at least in part, the communications alleged to be received by entranced mediums and other psychics. But what I am most anxious to impress upon my readers is the fact that the time is not yet ripe for conclusions in this obscure subject. We have to collect data before we can pronounce. Hence it seems desirable to lay stress upon the general recognition in our day of a natural faculty, the very idea of which, less than a century ago, would have been scouted by psychologists, as a delusion, if not an absurdity.

CHAPTER XII

CLAIRVOYANCE

It is not easy to draw a hard-and-fast line between telepathy and clairvoyance; but in the former it is convenient to recognize a more or less conscious effort on the part of both agent and percipient, whereas in the latter the effort is unilateral or may be altogether absent. The clairvoyant sees things without necessarily meaning to see them. The veils of sense are to a large extent withdrawn. His gaze penetrates beneath the surface of material objects, travels even to localities far remote, in which he seems to enjoy the full freedom of bodily vision, and is at the same time sensitive to the presence of spiritual agencies, reading also the feelings and thoughts of the fellow beings whom he encounters in these mental flights. It is not, of course, every believer in telepathy who is prepared to believe in clairvoyance, but, as I have just remarked, the one faculty shades into the other, and if a man is sensitive to the mental radiations of those who are not immediately and locally present, there is no very obvious reason why we should limit his powers to the discernment of what other people may intend to communicate or to the bare perception of the outward physical envelope which ordinarily affects our senses.

In the section of the *Rituale Romanum* which is entitled *De Exorcizandis Obsessis a Dæmonio*, the priest is cautioned against a too ready disposition to believe that those who behave extravagantly or strangely are necessarily possessed by the devil. He is bidden to acquaint himself with the criteria which distinguish cases of true possession from those of an

"atrabilious" temperament or of disease, and among the most sure tests of the former condition it is laid down that the action of the evil spirit may safely be assumed when the suspected energumen speaks or understands languages he has never learned or "betrays a knowledge of distant and hidden things." It thus seems to be intimated that a knowledge of distant and hidden things lies beyond man's natural powers. We are left to understand that if any reputed seer is able without the aid of mechanical contrivances to tell what is going on a hundred miles away, he must either have had a supernatural revelation from God or must be in some sense acting under diabolic influence. Although it is not easy to find this proposition explicitly laid down anywhere in precise terms, the impression resulting from a perusal of the relevant passages in Pope Benedict XIV's great work on Beatification and Canonization is that the writer judges of all abnormal knowledge in accordance with this canon. To know and disclose events happening at a distance, as St. Pius V is said to have been aware of the naval victory over the Turks at Lepanto at the very hour when it took place, is accounted a form of prophecy and is treated in reputed servants of God as a miraculous confirmation of their sanctity. I cannot find in any of the early Catholic writers on mysticism or on psychology a recognition that there may be such a thing as natural clairvoyance, even acting rarely and intermittently. On the other hand, there seems to me to be a distinct tendency among more recent authorities of the strictest orthodoxy to recognise that our understanding of these matters can by no means be accounted adequate and still less final. Perhaps a passage from Cardinal Mercier's *Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy* will serve as well as a dozen similar utterances, which might be quoted from other sources, to illustrate this change of attitude.

"A similar explanation [i.e., of cerebral action capable of some sort of transmission from the brain of the operator] may possibly account for telepathy, which etymologically means sensation at a distance. Of this phenomenon examples are by no means rare. A typical instance is the case of a young man who went bathing and was drowned; his sister, who was several miles away, was at the same moment overcome with emotion and saw the whole tragedy enacted in a small pool close to where she was sitting. It would be difficult to ascribe all cases of telepathy to deceit or to hallucination, and yet its explanation is baffling. It has this much in common with mental suggestion, that the communication between agent and patient takes place without the aid of the sense-organs, and that the agent puts forth a good deal of energy whilst the patient is in a state of excessive nervous excitability. The distance, however, which is sometimes very considerable between the two people, as well as the very diverse forms the phenomena may assume, do not allow us to identify telepathy with simple mental suggestion. It may be that certain natural factors in the events have not yet been disclosed. It may even be that all or part of the effect is due to some preternatural agencies. The solution of the problem remains for the future."¹

Cardinal Mercier seems here himself to recognize that the difficulty is complicated by "the very diverse forms which the phenomena may assume," and certainly among the recorded instances of the knowledge of things occurring at a distance there are many in which it would be hard to suppose the operation of any agent brain employed in the work of transmission. Taking for granted the authenticity of the Lepanto example or that of St. Theresa's vision of the martyrdom of Blessed Ignatius Azevedo and Companions, one cannot easily admit the possibility of any cerebral influence emanating from the participators in these scenes should a purely psychic explanation be attempted. Even more difficult of explanation on these lines is the famous case of Swedenborg, thus recounted in a letter of the philosopher Kant.

¹*Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy* (Eng. trans., with special letter from Cardinal Mercier to the translators, dated June 10, 1916), Vol. I, p. 290.

"But the following occurrence appears to me to have the greatest weight of proof and to set the assertion respecting Swedenborg's extraordinary gift beyond all possibility of doubt. In the year 1756 when Swedenborg, towards the end of September on Saturday at 4 p.m., arrived at Gothenburg from England, Mr. W. Castel invited him to his house, together with a party of fifteen persons. About 6 o'clock Swedenborg went out, and after a short interval returned to the company, quite pale and alarmed: He said that a dangerous fire had just broken out in Stockholm, at the Sudermalm (Gothenburg is about 50 miles² from Stockholm), and that it was spreading very fast. He was restless and went out often. He said that the house of one of his friends, whom he named, was already in ashes, and that his own was in danger. At 8 o'clock, after he had been out again, he joyfully exclaimed: 'Thank God! the fire is extinguished, the third door from my house.' The news occasioned great commotion through the whole city and particularly among the company in which he was. It was announced to the Governor, who questioned him concerning the disaster. Swedenborg described the fire precisely. . . . On the Monday evening a messenger arrived in Gothenburg who had been despatched during the time of the fire. In the letters brought by him the fire was described precisely in the manner stated by Swedenborg. On the Tuesday morning the royal courier arrived at the Governor's with intelligence of the fire, the loss it had occasioned, and of the houses it had damaged and ruined, not in the least differing from that which Swedenborg had given immediately it had ceased; for the fire was extinguished at 8 o'clock.

"What can be brought forward against the authenticity of this occurrence? My friend who wrote this to me, has not only examined the circumstances of this extraordinary case at Stockholm, but also, about two months ago, at Gothenburg where he is acquainted with the most respectable houses, and where he could obtain the most authentic and complete information, as the greater part of the inhabitants, who are still alive, were witnesses to the memorable occurrence."⁸

²Kant means German miles. An inspection of the map shows that Gothenburg, on the south-west coast of Sweden, is 300 English miles distant, as the crow flies, from Stockholm, which is on the east coast.

³J. F. Tafel, *Documents concerning Swedenborg*. Trans. by I. H. Smithson, Manchester, 1841, letter to Mme. de Knoblock, afterwards Klingsporn.

Some difficulty has been raised regarding the value of this testimony owing to the disputed date of the letter in which it occurs, and owing also to the tone adopted towards Swedenborg in Kant's *Träume eines Geistersehers*. The matter cannot be discussed here, but it seems to me that F. Sewall has been successful in demonstrating that sceptical as Kant was regarding supernormal occurrences, it is the letter which more correctly represents his attitude to the incident related.

Does there, then, exist such a thing as natural — by which word I do not mean normal, but natural as opposed to diabolic or supernatural — clairvoyance? I am strongly inclined to think so, though it must be confessed that we know absolutely nothing of the conditions which call it into play. For years, as I have noted above, there was persistent tendency among certain Catholic theologians to regard all the phenomena of hypnotism as diabolical in origin. The book *L'Ipnatismo tornato di moda*, of Padre Pio Franco, S.J., may be taken as representative of the more extreme conclusions of this school. It was answered very effectively, as I hold, by various other students of the subject, notably by Père M. T. Coconnier, O.P., in his *Hypnotisme Franc*, and at the present time the lawfulness, under due safeguards, of experimenting in hypnotic phenomena and of employing hypnotism remedially in the treatment of certain neuroses is not disputed in any of the more recent textbooks of moral theology. As Père Coconnier points out, a considerable part of the prejudice which had been aroused against the use of hypnotism was due to its association in the early books (produced in the days when the subject was new and was then usually spoken of as mesmerism or animal magnetism) with the phenomena of "clairvoyance," which often, so it was claimed, included cases of prevision of the future and very marvellous descriptions of diseased internal organs, or of events taking

place at a distance. There seems a general tendency at the present time to treat this clairvoyant faculty which was once supposed to be developed in the mesmeric trance as apocryphal.* Père Coconnier himself, writing as long ago as 1897, adopts this attitude, and it may be admitted that the more scientific treatises on hypnotism, the work for the most part of men whose tendencies are strongly rationalistic and opposed even to that modicum of recognition of the supersensible which is involved in psychic research, say practically nothing of the possibility of abnormal knowledge in their hypnotized subjects. In this, as in all such investigations depending upon human testimony which cannot now be subjected to cross-examination, and which is undoubtedly liable to many errors arising from mal-observation, lapse of memory, preconceptions, etc., it is necessary to step very warily, but I must confess that I should find it hard to reject altogether the statements made by serious observers of some scientific standing, unless one is also prepared to throw overboard the testimony of precisely the same character made in regard of Catholic miracles by witnesses whose evidence is relied upon in the canonization processes of the Catholic Church. Let me give a few examples, the first of which I take from the *Letters to a Candid Inquirer on Animal Magnetism*, by William Gregory, M.D., F.R.S.E., who was then (1851) Professor of Chemistry in the University of Edinburgh.

"At the house of Dr. Schmitz, Rector of the High School here, I saw a little boy, of about nine years of age, put into the magnetic sleep by a young man of seventeen. As the boy was said to be clairvoyant, I requested him through his magnetizer, whom alone he heard, to visit, mentally, my house, which was nearly a mile off, and perfectly unknown to him. He said he would, and soon, when asked,

*Dr. Albert Moll, for example, in the 5th edition (1924) of his standard work *Der Hypnotismus* pronounces against the existence of any sort of clairvoyance; see pp. 660-68.

began to describe the back drawing-room, in which he saw a side-board with glasses, and on the side-board a singular apparatus, which he described. In fact this room, though I had not told him so, is used as a dining-room, and has a side-board, on which stood at that moment glasses, and an apparatus for preparing soda-water, which I had brought from Germany, and which was then quite new in Edinburgh. I then requested him, after he had mentioned some other details, to look at the front room, in which he described two small portraits, most of the furniture, mirrors, ornamental glasses, and the position of the pianoforte, which is very unusual. Being asked whom he saw in the room, he replied, only a lady, whose dress he described, and a boy. This I ascertained to be correct at that time. As it was just possible that this might have been done by thought-reading, although I could detect no trace of any sympathy with me, I then requested Dr. Schmitz to go into another room, and there to do whatever he pleased, while we should try whether the boy could see what he did. Dr. S. took with him his son, and when the sleeper was asked to look into the other room, he began to laugh, and said that Theodore (Dr. S.'s son) was a funny boy, and was gesticulating in a particular way with his arms, while Dr. S. stood looking on. He said that Theodore had left the room, and after a while that he had returned; then that Theodore was jumping about; and being asked about Dr. S., declined more than once to say, not liking to tell, as he said, but at last told us that he also was jumping about. Lastly, he said Dr. S. was beating his son, not with a stick, though he saw a stick in the room, but with a roll of paper. All this did not occupy more than seven or eight minutes, and when Dr. S. returned, I at once gave him the above account of his proceedings, which he, much astonished, declared to be correct in every particular."⁵

I must confess that all this coming upon the authority of a University Professor of Science as a personal experience makes upon me a very favourable impression, so far as regards the accuracy of the statements therein contained. One certainly cannot suspect the narrator of any deliberate misrepresentation, and the detail of the boy not liking to tell when he saw Dr. Schmitz behaving ridiculously strikes one

⁵Gregory, *Letters on Animal Magnetism*, pp. 423-424.

as true to life. On the other hand, it would seem a very violent hypothesis to suppose that this young child, by allowing himself to be hypnotized, had put himself in the power of the devil and had really only become the mouthpiece of the evil one.

Again we may notice that, by naming Dr. Schmitz, Professor Gregory supplies an indirect, but by no means unimportant, guarantee of his own credibility. As we may learn from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Dr. Leonhard Schmitz, who became Rector of the Edinburgh High School in 1845, was a very distinguished scholar. In 1859 the Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VII, "came to Edinburgh to receive instruction from him as a private student," and the Duke of Edinburgh, another son of Queen Victoria, was his pupil in 1862-63, while many people will be able to recall the fact that at a still later date he was for two periods classical examiner in the University of London.⁶ The same notice in the *D.N.B.* refers to the boy Carl Theodore, here spoken of, who was his eldest son. It is tolerably plain that the description of such a scene, which took place in Dr. Schmitz's own house, could hardly have been printed with full names without that gentleman's sanction.

In a single chapter like the present it is not easy to give an idea of the cumulative force of the evidence which may be adduced to prove the existence of a faculty of clairvoyance in the hypnotic trance. Unless details are supplied, a bald statement of what is claimed for the clairvoyant's powers is quite unconvincing, and details cannot be furnished without a considerable expenditure of space. I must, therefore, be content with a relatively small selection of illustrations, while

⁶Those who, like myself, presented themselves for examination before the University of London in the period 1874-1878 will remember that Dr. Leonhard Schmitz often presided in the examination room, then at Burlington Gardens.

begging the reader to believe that many more could be furnished which are not less impressive than those here cited. Let me, then, take from the same book of Professor Gregory an extract from a letter written to him by the Rev. A. Gilmour, whom he describes as "a highly respected clergyman, residing at Greenock, and well known to be a very able and accomplished gentleman." Mr. Gilmour was interested in mesmerism and had been experimenting with one of his servants, V.R., a girl of eighteen, who proved to be a remarkably susceptible subject. Here are one or two of the experiences he records:

"On March 8, 1844, one of our most intelligent physicians, his sister, two ladies, and one of our magistrates, dined with me and we had a mesmeric séance. We requested her (V.R.) to visit (clairvoyantly) the house of Mrs. P., one of the ladies present. This house was in Greenock, distant from my cottage about a mile and a quarter. She saw her servant in the kitchen, but said that another woman was with her. On being pressed to look earnestly at the woman, she said it was C—M—. This Mrs. P. declared to be true. We then asked her if any person was in Mrs. P.'s parlour, when she said that Miss Laing was there, a young lady from Edinburgh who was boarding with Mrs. P. at the time; that she was sitting on the sofa; that she was crying, and that a letter was in her hand. On the party breaking up, I walked into Greenock with the ladies and gentlemen, in order to see if she was right about Miss L. It was true. Miss L. had received a letter by that evening's post from her father in Edinburgh, stating that her mother was not expected to live, and requesting her to come home by the first train in the morning."

It may readily be confessed that evidence of this sort is far from conclusive. Mr. Gilmour may quite possibly have been one of that class of people who, having strong preconceptions, find in everything that happens a confirmation of their pet theories and seem utterly incapable of allowing for, or even taking note of, any facts which tell the other way. I am

¹Gregory, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

bound to say that I see no indication of this mentality in Mr. Gilmour's letter. On the contrary he mentions some details regarding the sympathetic relation between himself and his clairvoyant which are remarkably in accord with facts observed elsewhere at a much later date. For example, he writes of this clairvoyant, V.R.: "She is able to tell what I taste, such as soda, salt, sugar, milk, water, etc., though not in the same room with me. When my foot is pricked, or my hair pulled, or any part of my person pinched, she feels it and describes it unerringly."⁸ All this is in close accord with the observations which Col. de Rochas recorded many years afterwards in his book, *L'Extériorisation de la Sensibilité*, and many analogous features seem to be discernible in the *rapport* which has existed between certain mystics and their directors, or between Anne Catherine Emmerich and her amanuensis, Clement Brentano. But the point I wish to stress is that this evidence is, on the face of it, just as reliable as that adduced for the strange knowledge and behaviour of energumens when confronted with the exorcisms of the Church. There is a comparatively recent case reported from the Vicariate of Natal in South Africa, where two native girls were exorcised in 1907. The account, furnished by Bishop Delalle himself, attracted a good deal of attention and was many times reprinted as a palmary example by itself of the phenomena of diabolical possession which could not be gainsaid.⁹ Now while I have not the least thought of seeking to discredit the narrative of facts there presented, it seems reasonable to point out that for the independent critic there was

⁸Gregory, *Letters*, p. 453. Sir William Barrett in *Proceedings S.P.R.*, describes a precisely similar case which he personally observed and repeatedly tested. See Vol. I, pp. 240-244 and Vol. XXXIV, p. 282.

⁹See, for example, Father G. H. Joyce, S.J., *The Question of Miracles*, pp. 125-29; H. V. O'Neill in the *Irish Eccles. Record*, April, 1922, pp. 377-381; *Catholic Medical Guardian*, October, 1926, pp. 148-150.

on the face of things nothing which rendered the Bishop's statement more evidential than that of Mr. Gilmour. We have in each case the account given by the principal actor in the scene, but no confirmatory testimony was then adduced. We knew nothing in either instance regarding the possible bias, credulity or prepossessions of the relator.

But let me turn to another remarkable clairvoyant, the servant girl Emma, of whom Dr. J. W. Haddock has written so copiously in his *Somnolism and Psycheism* [sic], published, like Professor Gregory's book, in 1851. Emma was absolutely illiterate, being unable to read or write, and so far as the printed details would indicate, she seems to have been a rather religiously minded girl, with no evil or degenerate instincts. Though the following extract is long, it will be well to quote Dr. Haddock's words without abridgment, as they afford the best authorized account available of her extraordinary mental journeys.

"Emma," he writes, "has frequently been directed to find persons in distant parts of the globe, and, whenever it could be done, the handwriting, or something else belonging to these individuals, was given her to form the medium of connection. The reason of my using the handwriting for this purpose is as follows. On the 4th of August, 1848, a gentleman of Bolton brought a letter written by a lady, the wife of a physician in Gloucestershire. This lady had heard of other clairvoyants describing the diseases of distant people, by using their handwriting as a means of connection; and she was desirous of ascertaining whether Emma could see and describe her state. Emma put the letter over her head as she used to do with the pictures,¹⁰ and

¹⁰In the hypnotic trance Emma saw nothing with her eyes. The lids were shut, and if they are forcibly raised the pupil of the eye was found turned right upwards, so that only the whites showed. To exclude, however, all possibility of deception, she was sometimes, in addition, most effectively blindfolded. In this condition pictures were given her, which she never put before her face, but held over the top of her head, and in the same position described what they represented. Sir William Barrett's Irish subject similarly put the cards or object she was asked to describe to the side of her head behind her ear. *Proceedings S.P.R.*, Vol. I, pp. 242-3.

carefully felt it with her right fingers, and then said 'it was a lady's up-and-down strokes'—her phrase at that period for writing. She described the lady, as to her personal appearance, accurately; even to a small blemish occasioned by an accident; the internal organs of the body; an affection of the spine under which she was labouring; the situation and appearance of the place where she was residing, and many more particulars. The accuracy of her descriptions was admitted by the doctor, and subsequently I had an opportunity personally to verify some of her statements. The envelope was directed by the doctor; and him she had described correctly, both as to his personal character, general pursuits and literary tendencies. This was an entirely new experiment, and finding the result so unexpected and striking, it led to many more, some of which were more remarkable. Once some ladies from Manchester gave her the handwriting of a clergyman at Archangel in Russia. She described the individual correctly, as to his personal appearance and little peculiarities, and her remarks as to the climate and season were correct. The writing was taken from her, and the writing of another gentleman in Australia was given her; she was soon mentally there, described the climate and season, and expressed her surprise at finding the seasons reversed, when compared with England, having no knowledge of the effect of latitude and longitude in altering season and time. She appeared to have got to a great sheep farm, and her remarks were very homely but very graphic. Nothing was said to her of the localities or employments of the writers. At another time a letter written by a gentleman at Cairo was put into her hand. She soon said it was written by a gentleman (which she had no means of knowing by her normal knowledge), and she described him, as to the condition of his health and the place where he was residing, together with the climate, and appearance of the people there, even to the peculiar veil worn by the Egyptian ladies, at which she expressed great surprise. The correctness of her statement as to the gentleman's health, that is of a severe illness under which he had been labouring, was ascertained from a subsequent letter, and further particulars on the gentleman's arrival in England."¹¹

It was not only Dr. Haddock and Professor Gregory who were interested in Emma's phenomena. A distinguished sci-

¹¹Haddock, *Somnolism and Psycheism*, pp. 130-131.

entist and Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan,¹² seems also to have taken part in the experiments made to test her gift of clairvoyance. From the secretary of the Royal Geographical Society he obtained three specimens of handwriting from persons unknown to him (Sir Walter), and without their names, and these were submitted to Emma with the following results:

"1. She soon discovered No. 1, and described his person, as well as the city in which he was and the surrounding country. When asked the hour there, she looked, but she could not tell. It appeared on subsequent inquiry that No. 1 was in Rome, and that E.'s description of him, as well as of the city, etc., was exact. As she generally finds the hour by looking at some clock or watch, it would appear that she had been puzzled by the clocks of Rome which have 24 hours instead of 12.

"2. In the case of No. 2, E. soon discovered where he was, and gave the hour there; but it is remarkable that she could not see the person himself. She described the country, and spoke of crops of large yellow corn then standing (late in October). The longitude, calculated from the hour she gave, corresponded to that of a part of Tuscany; and on inquiry it was found that No. 2 resided in Florence, but was in the habit of travelling about the country. The corn appears to have been the second crop of maize, which was then standing in Tuscany.

"3. In the case of No. 3, E. found and described him, and said he was in a street which she described in a large city; the time she gave differed from that of Bolton by $2\frac{1}{2}$ or 3 minutes only, and indicated the longitude of London. On inquiry it appeared, that when the writing was sent, No. 3, whose person was accurately described, was supposed to be at a much greater distance than the other, but that before E. saw his handwriting, he had unexpectedly returned and was then in London.

"In these experiments, which were communicated to me by Sir W. Trevelyan, thought-reading was out of the question, for Sir W. T. did not even know the names of the persons, and if he had known

¹²A notice of Sir Walter C. Trevelyan will be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

all about them, he was not at Bolton but in Edinburgh. Dr. Haddock had no knowledge whatever of the persons whose writing was sent."¹³

One curious feature which attended many of these mental excursions was the extraordinary state of physical exhaustion which was observed in Emma when she came back from them. Those who are familiar with the phenomena recorded by the biographers of Anne Catherine Emmerick will remember that analogous symptoms of distress and fatigue were often manifested by her when she, as she believed, had been employed upon some corporal or spiritual work of mercy in far-off lands during her ecstasies. "At this time," writes Dr. Haddock, "whenever Emma was sent on these distant excursions, she exhibited great signs of fatigue and excitement, panting for breath, and suffering from violent action of the heart. When asked why she panted so, she would say: 'I've gone so fast,' and, 'It is *such* a way.'" Much more might be added on this topic, but I must content myself with one final example of Emma's strange powers of clairvoyance, which seems from the mention of letters written at the time to depend upon better evidence than a vague personal memory.

"Sir Walter Trevelyan, having received a letter from a lady in London, in which the loss of a gold watch, supposed to have been stolen, was mentioned, sent the letter to Dr. Haddock to see whether E. could trace the watch. She very soon saw the lady, and described her accurately. She also described intimately the house and furniture and said she saw the 'marks' of the watch (the phrase she employs for the traces left by persons or things, probably luminous to her) on a certain table. It had, she said, a gold dial-plate, gold figures, and a gold chain with square links; in the letter it was simply called a gold watch, without any description. She said it had been taken by a young woman, not an habitual thief, who felt alarmed at what she had done, but still thought her mistress would not suspect her. She added that she would be able to point out the writing of the thief. On this occasion, as is almost always the case with E., she spoke to the person

¹³Gregory, *op. cit.*, pp. 407-408.

seen, as if conversing with her, and was very angry with her. Sir W. Trevelyan sent this information, and requested the writing of all the servants in the house to be sent. In answer, the lady stated, that E.'s description exactly applied to one of her two maids, but that her suspicions rested on the other. She also sent several pieces of writing, including that of both maids. E. instantly selected that of the girl she had described, became very angry, and said: 'You are thinking of pretending to find the watch, and restoring it, but you took it; you know you did.' Before Sir W. Trevelyan's letter containing this information had reached the lady, he received another letter, in which he was informed, that the girl indicated as the thief by E. had brought back the watch saying she had found it. In this case Sir W. T. was at a great distance from Bolton, and even had he been present, he knew nothing of the house or the persons concerned, except the lady, so that even had he been in Bolton, and beside the clairvoyant, thought-reading was out of the question. I have seen, in the possession of Sir Walter, all the letters which passed, and I consider the case as demonstrating the existence of sympathetic clairvoyance at a great distance."¹⁴

Although the striking cases just cited are remote in date, it must not be supposed that the clairvoyant faculty exhibited by Dr. Gregory's boy subject or by Dr. Haddock's Emma is without modern parallel. Not very long before his death, the well-known psychic investigator Dr. Gustave Geley of Paris, published a substantial volume entitled *L'Ectoplasmie et la Clairvoyance*,¹⁵ a great part of which is devoted to an account of experiments carried out with a Mr. Stephan Ossowiecki. It is perhaps worth while to note that although more than half a dozen years have elapsed since the book was published, I have heard of no accusation of fraud being made in connexion either with the author of the book or with the sensitive who figures so prominently in his pages. The photographic reproductions with which the volume is illustrated add considerably to its interest and help to carry conviction

¹⁴Gregory, *op. cit.*, pp. 405-406.

¹⁵It has been translated into English by Mr. Stanley de Brath, under the title of *Clairvoyance and Materialization* (1927).

of the genuineness of the incidents recorded, but they are happily in no way necessary to an understanding of what took place.

We are told that Stephan Ossowiecki, born of Polish parents in 1877, entered a great Russian technical school at what was then St. Petersburg, in 1894. It is said that even at that age his clairvoyant faculty was remarkable, and that he could see "auras." Not understanding this latter experience, he consulted an eminent oculist who pronounced that he was in imminent danger of losing his sight and prescribed drastic remedies. Some little time after this, however, he came across an old Jew who had a great reputation as a seer. This man reassured him as to the condition of his eyes, and explained that the mistake had arisen from the fact that his psychic gifts were altogether out of the common. The acquaintance is alleged to have led to a vision by the Jew, in which he foretold Ossowiecki that he saw him spending months in prison, condemned to death but saved at the last moment. He added that after a struggle with poverty he would secure a good position, would marry a woman whose first name would be Anna, and that between his forty-fifth and forty-eighth year his name would become famous throughout Europe. So, certainly, it happened. He was imprisoned at Moscow in 1918 under the Bolshevik régime because he had had relations with certain officers of the French military mission who were suspected of anti-Soviet propaganda. He was confined for six months in a filthy dungeon, having only one salt fish and a glass of water for his daily food. Much of his time was spent compulsorily in digging graves for his fellow prisoners who were shot. Eventually his own turn came, and with a number of others he was led out to the place of execution before a firing party. At the last moment the intervention of a high official who had been a fellow stu-

dent with him in the engineering school saved his life, but he remained for some time after his imprisonment physically a wreck. Since then, it seems, he has regained vigorous health, has married a lady named Anna, is a prosperous business man, and his name, through his feats of clairvoyance, is now known far and wide.

It may possibly be remembered that in discussing above the feats of Dr. Haddock's Emma, mention was made of the recovery of a lost watch which a servant had been suspected of stealing, and which Emma upon contact with the letter announcing the loss had been able to describe and to trace. As a first illustration of Mr. Ossowiecki's powers I take a somewhat similar incident of the loss of a piece of jewellery. The story is told in a letter from the lady — she is the wife of a judge of the supreme court in Poland — who had lost the brooch in question, and her account bears the date July 22, 1922.

"I lost my brooch on Monday morning, June 6. In the afternoon of the same day I visited the wife of General Krieger, Mr. Ossowiecki's mother, with my brother, M. de Bondy, engineer, who was a witness of what occurred.

"Mr. Ossowiecki came in, my brother introduced me to his friend, and I said I was delighted to make acquaintance with one so gifted. . . . He told us many interesting things. . . . Then in a moment of silence I said to him: 'I have lost my brooch today. Could you tell me anything about it?' . . . 'The brooch, Madame, is at your house in a box; it is a metal brooch, round, with a stone in the middle. You wore it three days ago and you value it.' 'No,' I said, 'not that one.' (He had given a good description of a brooch kept in the same box with the one I had lost.) Then he said: 'I am sorry not to have guessed aright. . . . I am rather tired but will try to concentrate. I should like to have some material thing that the brooch has been connected with.' . . . 'Sir, the brooch was fastened here, on this dress.' He placed his fingers on the spot indicated, and after a few seconds said: 'Yes, I see it well. It is oval, or gold, very light, an antique which is dear to you as a family souvenir; I could draw it, so clearly

do I see it. It has "ears," as it were, and is in two parts, interpenetrating, like fingers clasped together.' . . . 'What you say sir, is most extraordinary. It could not be better described.' . . . He went on: 'You lost it a long way from here' (this was actually about two and a half miles). 'Yes, in Mokotowska Street, at Koszykowa corner.' 'Yes,' I said, 'I went there today.' 'Then,' he said, 'a poorly-dressed man with a black moustache stoops down and picks it up. It will be very difficult to get it back. Try an advertisement in the papers.'"

The astounding conclusion may be told in fewer words than are used by the writer of the letter. It appears that the very next day Mr. Ossowiecki met in the street a man whom he recognized as the one he had mentally seen picking up the brooch. He went up to him and said to him gently: "Sir, yesterday you found a brooch at the corner of Mokotowska and Koszykowa Streets." "Yes," replied the man, who turned pale when his questioner gave details of the incident; but he eventually surrendered the trinket and declared that he had intended to advertise its finding.

From an evidential point of view, no doubt, this story leaves much to be desired, but there is no possible reason to suspect the accuracy of the facts, in view of the many other examples given of Ossowiecki's extraordinary perceptions under the strictest test of conditions. Perhaps no incident is more likely to bring conviction to English readers than the experiment for which Mr. Dingwall, who attended the International Congress held at Warsaw in 1923 as the representative of the (British) Society for Psychical Research, was personally responsible. His own narrative of this feat of clairvoyance has been more than once printed. It is given by Dr. Geley, but it is also to be found in the Official Report of the Congress as well as in *The Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. Mr. Dingwall explains that before leaving England he wrote in French upon the upper part of a single

sheet of notepaper the words: "The vineyards of the Rhine, of the Moselle and of Burgundy yield excellent wine"; lower down he drew a bottle very roughly, with an oblong as a sort of frame surrounding it, and the date in another corner. The paper was then folded so that the bottle with the date were on one side and the French writing on the other. The sheet thus folded was then enclosed in an opaque red-paper envelope fitting tightly; the red envelope in turn was put inside a dull black one, and this again into a brown one and the flap of the last of these three was gummed down and sealed. For additional precaution, in order to make it impossible for anyone to open the envelope hurriedly and replace all the contents as they were before without detection, a tiny hole was pierced through the packet with a fine needle in four places. Of the contents of the packet Mr. Dingwall said not a word to anyone. He took it to Warsaw and there gave it into the hands of Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, himself refraining from being present at the experiment for fear that Mr. Ossowiecki's attempt to visualize the contents might be helped by some unconscious betrayal on his part of the knowledge concerning them which he (Dingwall) alone possessed. The same evening the packet and two other sealed letters were given to Ossowiecki. The account of the latter's successful divination is somewhat complicated by details which concern only the two other letters, but it was the Dingwall packet which the psychic held tightly in his hands under the eyes of all in full light. He spoke by snatches. I copy only what concerns Mr. Dingwall's test.

"The letter I am holding has several envelopes. . . . It is a letter and yet it is not a letter. . . . I see something greenish in cardboard (*en carton*). . . . The letter that I am holding has been prepared for me . . . I cannot understand . . . I see . . . something red . . . colours . . . a lady on one side. . . . (Long pause.) I do not know why I see a little bottle. . . . There is a drawing made by a man who is not an artist . . . something red with this bottle. . . . There is

without any doubt a second red envelope. . . . There is a square drawn at the corner of the paper. The bottle is very badly drawn. I see it! I see it! (Upon a slip of paper he sketches a bottle, encloses it by drawing an oblong round it, and afterwards writes 19 — 23 at the opposite side low down.) . . . There is something else; something white and in the middle . . . I see, before the year, there is a date or the name of a town. . . . It is rather a feminine than a masculine hand."

Baron von Schrenck then enquired what language it was written in. "In French," Mr. Ossowiecki replied, and he added:

"The bottle is a little inclined to one side. It has no cork. It is made up of several fine lines. There is first a brown envelope outside, then a greenish envelope, and then a red envelope. Inside a piece of white paper folded in two with the drawing inside. It is written on a single sheet."

It would require facsimiles of the paper originally prepared by Mr. Dingwall and of Ossowiecki's visualized reproduction, to give an adequate idea of the remarkable success of this experiment.¹⁶ There are, of course, many imperfections in Ossowiecki's description. He made no attempt to read the words written in French. He speaks of the second envelope as "greenish," whereas Dingwall calls it "dull black." He has not reproduced the date quite correctly. None the less the copy of the bottle, the oblong drawn round it, and the relative position of both to that of the date written below, are marvellously good and utterly put out of court any attempt to explain the sketch as a mere lucky guess. The packet was returned to Mr. Dingwall still unopened, and the verification only took place next morning at a meeting of the Congress. On that occasion the English investigator explained to the company the precautions he had taken, and in his account subsequently printed for the S.P.R. he adds:

¹⁶The report of the Warsaw International Congress of 1923, published under the title *L'État actuel des Recherches Psychiques* (Paris: 1924), prints these facsimiles (needleholes included) in the exact size of the originals; pp. 202-203.

"The envelope appeared to be wholly intact and no evidence whatever was discernable that the packet had been opened. I have no doubt that the test was valid and that the knowledge of the contents had been ascertained by Mr. Ossowiecki through channels not generally recognized. The opening of the packet created a sensation. Mr. Ossowiecki received an ovation and fell on the necks of the observers with tears in his eyes. . . . The supernormal character of the incident seems to me quite clear and decisive."¹⁷

It is noteworthy that in Mr. Ossowiecki's attempts to describe the contents of sealed envelopes, etc., he constantly furnishes details regarding the character of the writer or the circumstances under which they were written. Here is a case in point, which I reproduce in Dr. Geley's own words:

"I gave the medium (i.e., Mr. O.) the closed letter left with me by Prof. Richet.¹⁸ His words, taken down verbatim, were as follows, spoken quickly and without hesitation: 'It speaks of a lady named Berger. A man aged about 50 has written this letter, which is an answer to one by Prof. Richet. The letter does not come from Paris, but from somewhere near the sea, and deals with divers matters. It is an invitation. There is something about a Mrs. Berger. This lady is 33 and married. I cannot read it. It is written very quickly, without order and is disjointed. The man who wrote it is musical.' In this monologue there is only one error — 'a place near the sea' (the letter came from Berlin) — all the rest is accurate. It was an invitation to confer [*sic*] in the name of several societies of divers titles. It said: 'You will be the honoured guest of Mme. Berger'; it was written 'in all haste'; it was badly written and somewhat incoherent. The age and characteristics of Mr. and Mrs. Berger are correct."

Among other letters similarly experimented with at Warsaw was one which Dr. Geley had asked his wife to address to him for this purpose from their home in Paris. He had no idea what she would write, and had not opened the envelope. In point of fact, Mme. Geley had put nothing inside

¹⁷*Journal of the S.P.R.*, May, 1924, p. 263.

¹⁸The letter was enclosed in another envelope and showed nothing of the address, etc.

the envelope but a complimentary epistle to the psychic himself, who was apparently unknown to her, beginning: "Monsieur Ossowiecki — Sir, I congratulate you on your marvellous gifts, etc." Taking the letter into his hands, the Polish clairvoyant spoke of it as follows:

"A lady aged . . . (here Mme. Geley's exact age) has written this letter. It is addressed to me. It is a kindly message. Her ideas of admiration and good wishes. . . . One of her daughters was by her side when writing. This was written on the second story. The lady looks tired. She wrote in a little room where the chairs are upholstered in dark leather. The letter was written on August 22. This lady admires me and will be happy to make my acquaintance and hopes to see me soon. The letter was written between 4 and 5 p.m."

The epistle itself, of course, contained no details as to the circumstances under which it was written. On the description Dr. Geley comments that it was all quite correct, "except that the leather-covered chairs are in the next room, in which Mme. Geley had passed the greater part of the day. All the rest is quite accurate as to place, time, and date. Mme. Geley was very tired that afternoon."

In connexion with another closed letter which was submitted to Mr. Ossowiecki, the psychic remarked that the sender had written it about six or seven in the evening while sitting at a table with a woman beside him. On being asked to describe the man and the woman whom he saw, Ossowiecki said:

"It is on the second floor. He is clean-shaven except for a small moustache. He is a man of 38 to 40, slender, very acute. He is not bald, has a parting in his hair. She is stout but not tall; not blonde. She suggested this test (according to subsequent enquiries this is not correct). They have two children, a son and a daughter. I say this is all true, but only one child is born; the lady appears stout because she is close on her confinement. Mr. Ossowiecki exclaimed quickly: 'It is a boy, I am certain; you can write so to them.' Three days later Mme. Sudre's son was born. She received my letter posted on Sept. 26 (1921), the day after her delivery."

Perhaps the most curious of all the experiments made with this Polish psychic was one in which the document to be deciphered was enclosed in a leaden tube more than an inch thick. The communication was written by a lady who left Warsaw the same day and told no one what she had written. The paper was rolled up, slipped into the tube and the orifice was at once soldered down. In this state it was given to Ossowiecki who, after declaring it was written by a woman, announced vaguely that "it concerns Nature, in relation with man and sentiment," but he was evidently dissatisfied, and, refusing to allow the tube to be cut open, said he would try again. Two days later he made a second attempt, this time more successfully. In the presence of a small company of well-known people:

"With much difficulty at first and then more easily, Mr. Ossowiecki said 'Creation . . . great creation . . . Nature.' (A long silence.) And then 'This has to do with a powerful man. . . . There is a popular feeling that he is one of the great men of the century. . . . I cannot understand. I see two things: there is something written, by a woman, and there is a drawing. The drawing represents a man with heavy moustaches and heavy eyebrows, no nose. . . . He is in uniform. . . . It is like Pildzuski. The writing is in French — *Cet homme il n'a peur de rien*, neither in politics, nor any other kind of ideas, *comme un chevalier*.'"

Dr. Geley then goes on to describe how the tube was sawn open and they took out a paper which when unfolded revealed a sort of shadow portrait of Marshal Pildzuski with military cap and uniform, heavy moustache and eyebrows, but no nose indicated, while underneath was written the phrase *Le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*. It would seem probable, though of this we have no evidence, that when the clairvoyant emphasized the ideas of "creation, Nature," he was in some vague way groping for the sentiment under the influence of which the lady had written, identifying her hero

Pildzuski with the resurrection of Poland. But while this is uncertain, there can be no question as to the accuracy of the material description. A photographic reproduction of the document is given in Dr. Geley's volume.

In spite of the full detail with which Dr. Geley records these and other experiments made to investigate the nature of the clairvoyant faculty, it is extraordinarily difficult, not to say impossible to frame any sort of coherent theory as to the process by which this strange form of knowledge is arrived at. Prof. Richet favours the hypothesis of tactile hyperæsthesia, and it is undoubtedly true that Mr. Ossowiecki presses the objects given him strongly with his hands, even so far as to crumple up in some cases the letter he is asked to read. It may be remembered that Dr. Haddock's Emma fingered the pictures or letters given her and usually placed them in contact with the top of her head. As Mr. Ossowiecki is an educated man it is interesting to have his own account of his impressions. He believes that there may be something in the nature of hyperæsthesia in the process, but he is convinced that this alone is not sufficient to account for the lucidity which subsequently develops. He tells us that in these experiments he stops all reasoning and concentrates upon the perception of spiritual sensation, having an "unshakable faith in the spiritual unity of all humanity." He considers that he passes into a special state in which he "sees and hears, outside time and space." But what follows is more definite.

"Whether I am reading a sealed letter, or finding a lost object or psychometrizing, the sensations are nearly the same. I seem to lose some energy; my temperature becomes febrile and the heart-beats unequal. I am confirmed in this supposition because as soon as I cease from reasoning, something like electricity flows through my extremities for a few seconds. This lasts a moment only, and then lucidity takes possession of me, pictures arise, usually of the past.

I see the man who wrote the letter, and I know what he wrote. I see the object at the moment of its loss, with the details of the event; or again I perceive or feel the history of the thing I am holding in my hands. The vision is misty and needs great tension. Considerable effort is required to perceive some details and conditions of the scenes presented.

"The lucid state sometimes arises in a few minutes, and sometimes it takes hours of waiting. This depends largely on the surroundings. Scepticism, incredulity, or even attention too much concentrated on my person, paralyses quick success in reading or sensation."¹⁹

There is much in this which reminds one of Prof. Gilbert Murray's account of his own difficulties when telepathic experiments were in progress. "The least disturbance of our customary method," he declares, "change of time or place, presence of strangers, controversy, and especially noise, is apt to make things go wrong. I become myself somewhat oversensitive and irritable, though not, I believe, to a noticeable degree." Of course, we must recognise that in Prof. Murray's case there was a distinct effort on the part of those present to concentrate upon a particular incident or scene and to impress him with the same idea; whereas Mr. Ossowiecki's divinations were nearly always concerned with matters of which the whole company were completely ignorant. Yet even so there seems to be a striking resemblance in the manner of approach to a successful intuition. The percipient first gets the locality or atmosphere and then is able to fill in the personages concerned and other details. But the whole process is supremely mysterious, and I cannot feel that the theories of Dr. Eugène Osty in his *Lucidité et Intuition* and *La Connaissance Supranormale*, or those again of Dr. Oesterreich or Dr. Baerwald help us forward in the least degree. For the present, and probably for a century or more to come, the only thing possible in this and several other fields of research

¹⁹Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialisation*, pp. 67-68.

is to keep an open mind as to possibilities previously undreamed of, and to collect evidence, leaving to future generations the task of classifying the results and formulating laws from what has been observed.

CHAPTER XIII

"THE GATE OF REMEMBRANCE"

IT HAS already been pointed out that the alleged communications from beyond the grave, which come to us through mediumistic channels, are strangely contradictory. No doubt, they may seem in some individual cases to be useful in affording comfort to bereaved survivors who are led to suppose that they are still in touch with those whom they have lost and that these dear ones are happy in a better world than this. But even here the evidence for the identity of the communicators — which is, of course, the vital point — can never, as I hope to show in the next chapter, be adequate or convincing. On the other hand, so far as mankind at large is concerned, the information imparted through automatic writing or entranced mediums has in no single instance been shown to serve any purpose of genuine utility. Portfolios by the hundred have been filled with automatic script; a vast amount of this has been printed *in extenso*, not a little in facsimile. And yet we seem to have obtained nothing but a portentous mass of figments and futilities which are of no possible profit to anyone. The output is in truth "such stuff as dreams are made on." It tells us nothing which adds to the sum of human knowledge, or, if it professes to impart information, the incoherences or inconsistencies with other records, are so manifest as to forfeit all confidence. Even such convinced champions of the cause as Sir Oliver Lodge obviously feel the force of this objection and their best energies are concentrated on the task of framing some fairly

acceptable answer. For the most part they have to fall back upon the plea that the movement is as yet only in its beginnings and that better results will come as fuller experience is gained. Certainly he would be a courageous advocate who ventured to appeal to the "Imperator" records of Mrs. Piper, as valuable adjuncts to our historical sources for the study of the Old Testament.¹ So again the theological pronouncements of Mr. Stainton Moses which both Sir Oliver and Sir A. C. Doyle highly commend, are at almost every point in flat contradiction with the equally respectable and authoritative disclosures of Judge Edmonds and other early automatists.

The diversity of teaching upon the question of reincarnation, that is to say whether the individual soul has one earthly existence or many existences, has already been touched upon. One could hardly imagine a point more fundamental or of deeper interest to mankind, and yet the illustrious dead who imparted the *Doctrine Spirite* to Allan Kardec give one answer, and the controls of D. D. Home and Stainton Moses an answer in a directly opposite sense.

But apart from what may be called eschatological teaching, we should at any rate expect that the spirits of the dead, if they really communicate, would be able to tell us much about the past history of the world as it was when they lived in it. To go no further than the domain of archæology and philology, there must be a thousand matters about which we are legitimately curious and as to which the dead could give us information which is still verifiable; but down to the present moment there has not been a single well-attested example of a problem which has been solved by this means in all the eighty years during which our mediums profess to

¹See *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 480 seq.

have been in communication with the spirits of the departed.

It was, therefore, with considerable interest that in the year 1918 I turned to examine the contents of a book which the publishers on its outer wrapper described as "a record of remarkable archæological discoveries directed by means of a method of automatic writing scientifically applied." The work itself, to quote its full title was called "*The Gate of Remembrance — The Story of a Psychological Experiment which resulted in the discovery of the Edgar Chapel at Glastonbury*," by Frederick Bligh Bond, F.R.I.B.A., Director of Excavations at Glastonbury Abbey.² From an advertisement on the cover one learned that besides his archæological work Mr. Bond was the writer of *A Preliminary Investigation of the Cabala contained in the Coptic Gnostic Books and of a similar Gematria in the Greek of the New Testament*, which afforded an indication that the author's interests must for some time have centred in occultism; but that, of course, did not render him in any way less competent as an architect or an antiquary. The story of the discovery, in brief, is this. Some few years ago the site of Glastonbury Abbey, with the ruins still found there, passed out of private hands "into the custody of a body of trustees, acting on behalf of the National Church." In these circumstances it was deemed possible and desirable to make excavations on a scale which Sir W. H. St. John Hope in an earlier exploration (1904) had not ventured to attempt. For more than twelve months before May, 1908, when the new investigation began, Mr. F. B. Bond in view of his anticipated appointment as director of excavations, together with his friend J. A.,³ who, when the volume first appeared, was only indicated

²B. H. Blackwell, Broad St., Oxford, 1918. I quote throughout from his first edition.

³It has now been disclosed that "J. A." or "John Alleyne" was a Mr. J. Allen Bartlett, who at one period of his varied career was working in Mr. Bond's own office.

by his initials, had saturated themselves with the literature of the subject. As it happened, J. A. was an automatist and Mr. Bond was keenly interested in psychical research. It was accordingly agreed between them that they should make some experiments, to ascertain how far automatic writing might help them in their proposed Glastonbury explorations. The account given of the inception of these experiments runs as follows:

"It was on the 7th of November, 1907 that F.B.B. and J.A. had their first sitting for the purpose of furthering the Glastonbury research. This took place at 4.30 p.m. in F.B.B.'s office. J.A. held a pencil, F.B.B. provided foolscap paper, which he steadied with his left hand, while placing his right lightly on the back of J.A.'s, so that his fingers lay evenly across its surface. F.B.B. started by asking the question, as though addressed to some other person:

"'Can you tell us anything about Glastonbury?'" J.A.'s fingers began to move, and one or two lines of small irregular writing were traced on the paper. He did not see what was written, nor did F.B.B. decipher it until complete. The agreed method was to remain passive, avoid concentration of mind on the subject of the writing, and to talk casually of other and indifferent matters, and this was done."

J. A., in a signed statement, independently confirms this account of the procedure followed. He states positively—and indeed this seems to be the common experience in cases of automatism—that though the writings were produced by his hand he had no knowledge of their nature or purport. He adds also that his normal attention was diverted to other matters and that promiscuous conversation at these times was the rule.

As for the script itself, after a few vague generalities the first result of moment was the drawing by J. A.'s unconscious hand, of several rough outlines. One of these which was clearly intended for a plan of the Abbey Church enclosed the signature "Gulielmus Monachus." But it exhibited one very striking feature. At the east end, beyond the choir

and high altar, it showed a chapel of large size, almost as long as the choir itself. Of this chapel no trace existed above ground and the excavations of 1904 had revealed nothing. Professor Willis and one or two earlier historians of the Abbey had conjectured that there was a central chapel here with others on each side but they had imagined nothing on a scale comparable at all to that now unexpectedly suggested. During the ensuing sittings in the winter of 1907-1908, further details were given in the script, partly in ungrammatical Latin, partly in English — the communicators purporting to be for the most part monks of the ancient Abbey. The information was given that the chapel was the *capella Beati Edgari*, that it had been built by Abbot Beere (c. 1509) and extended by the last abbot, the martyr, Richard Whiting. The dimensions were more or less clearly indicated, it was stated to have been built in four bays, and the vaulting and glazing were described with some minuteness. In May, 1908, the excavations began, and when these were persevered with, foundations were disclosed at the east end of the choir corresponding in all respects to the indications of the script. This is the sum and substance of Mr. Bond's volume, though he has supplemented this particular piece of research with some other psychic communications of interest, connected with Glastonbury, which were obtained through the same channel. These last are concerned mainly with the Loreto chapel, built by Abbot Beere somewhere about the year 1520, and with the personal history and character of a certain monk Johannes. Johannes, we may note incidentally, though one of the most copious of the supposed communicators, is described as still in Purgatory, "My punishment is past," the monk Gulielmus informs us, "but Johannes is yet in pain."

As may be inferred from what has already been said, not

a few of the communications written down by the hand of J. A., profess to emanate from some member of the Glastonbury community. Sometimes they are signed with a name, sometimes the authorship is suggested by the script itself. Thus we have, for example, what purports to be the Abbot Beere's own account of the marvellous escape from death which led him while travelling in Italy to bind himself by vow to build a chapel to Our Lady of Loreto on his return. Perhaps this incident will serve as well as any other to give an idea of the language in which most of the communications are made.

"Question: What was your vow?"

"Answer: Know ye not that wee were borne downe by rude men in foreign parts, and the mule which bore me fell, for I was a grete and heavy man. And being like to fall down a steepe place or be trampled by ye mule, I called on Our Lady and shee heard me, soe that my cloke catching on a thorne I was prevented, and then said I: 'Lo when I return I will build a chapel to Our Lady of the Loreto,' and soe instant was I in my vowe that the brethren were grieved, for it was arranged in Chapitre that wee shold build a Chapel to our Edgare before I went in ye shyppe. Therefore builded I hym first, for it was a public vowe, but mine owne vowe I fulfilled afterer, and soe all was well — Yt is given."

Despite the very personal and sometimes characteristic form in which these and other communications are made, F. B. B. and J. A. do not ascribe the authorship to particular disembodied spirits. We are expressly told that neither of the experimenters, to use their own words and italics:

"favoured the ordinary spiritualistic hypothesis which would see in these phenomena *the action of discarnate intelligence from the outside upon the physical or nervous organization of the sitters*. They would regard such a view as something like a reversal or turning inside out of the truth. But that the embodied consciousness of every individual is but a part, and a fragmentary part, of a transcendent whole, and that within the mind of each there is a door through which Reality may enter as Idea — Idea presupposing a greater, even

a cosmic Memory, conscious or unconscious, active or latent, and embracing not only all individual experience and revivifying forgotten pages of life, but also Idea involving yet wider fields, transcending the ordinary limits of time, space and personality — this would be a better description of the mental attitude of the two friends.”⁴

It seems right to quote this out of justice to Mr. Bond and his fellow researcher, though the theory, to my thinking, is at best very nebulous and obscure, involving, so far as I can understand it, an entirely pantheistic conception of the Universe. The main point, however, which calls for discussion here is not the problem of automatism in general, but the very plain and practical issue which is raised by the Glastonbury experiments. Is it a fact that the script written down automatically by J. A. in 1907 contained information of a complex character regarding the Abbey church, which could not then have been known to either of the sitters and which was subsequently verified by the excavations of 1908 and the following years?

Let us do Mr. Bond the justice to suppose that in answering this question in the affirmative he has done his best to state the facts clearly and honestly. It must be confessed that on close scrutiny his conclusions seem to me quite unconvincing, but that he has made out some *prima facie* case is beyond dispute, and the summary statement, given in tabular form on pages 70–78, of the points on which he lays most stress, is clear and fairly helpful. One would like to reproduce the whole document as it stands, but considerations of space render that impossible. It may suffice here to say that, according to the claim made, the script clearly indicated the following features:

1. The existence of a large rectangular chapel at the east end of the Abbey Church.

⁴*The Gate of Remembrance*, pp. 19–20; cf. p. 82.

2. That there was an entrance door at the extreme east of this chapel some five paces behind the altar.

3. That by this new construction the old church was extended eastwards for a distance of thirty yards (*virgæ*).

4. That the windows were filled with glass of azure blue (*vitrea azurea*).

5. That the chapel was vaulted in the new style of tracery.

6. That the chapel terminated eastwards in a polygonal apse (added to the Edgar chapel after Beere's death by Abbot Whiting).

7. That there had been an older polygonal chapel at the east end of the church, the foundations of which may still be traced.

8. That there was a stairway with a small crypt under it, which led from the east end of the church up to the Edgar chapel, and that the stairway was divided down the middle by a stone handrail.

9. That the Edgar chapel as planned and constructed by Abbot Beere was 72 feet in length, built in four bays, also that the inside width was 27 feet and the outside 34 feet.

These are the main points which have been extracted from the data of the script (I omit a few minor and more obscure details) and it is contended that with regard to all these features the automatic writing of J. A. has been proved veridical by the excavations subsequently carried out. Furthermore, the reader is given to understand that practically no materials were in existence before May, 1908, which would naturally point to any such conclusions; whence we are left to infer that the information is in some strange way automatically derived from an intelligence outside of this world, whether we do or do not attach credence to the profession made in the script that the communicators are the spirits of the old monks of Glastonbury.

Now it is here that I feel bound to tax Mr. Bligh Bond

with giving, unintentionally no doubt, a distinctly wrong impression. It is true he does not suppress any fact. He mentions (p. 12), though without giving it the emphasis which such a circumstance seems to claim, that in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the length of the old Glastonbury church was set down by the best authorities either at 594 feet or at 580 feet. Furthermore, he supplies a plan to scale (p. 148) from which anyone who takes the trouble can easily calculate that without the newly discovered Edgar chapel at the east end the total length of the church would only be 515 feet or rather less.⁵ But the ordinary reader does not take the trouble to make such calculations and I am satisfied that in at least nine cases out of ten those who peruse this book will go away with the impression that until J. A. and F. B. B. in 1907 made their experiments in automatic writing and asked questions about the Abbey church there was absolutely nothing to suggest the existence of a *large* chapel at the east end. Mr. Bond gives the fullest prominence to the fact that Sir W. H. St. John Hope's excavations in 1904 negatived the supposition of any eastern extension, he reproduces Willis's plan, which suggests a twenty-foot chapel in that position, he mentions Phelps's conjecture of a small semicircular apse, but he practically ignores the vital point that anyone who accepted the measurements of the church set down in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (when clear traces and traditions existed which have now disappeared) must inevitably conclude that seventy or eighty feet of the total assigned length remained unaccounted for. But there is more than this. It is admitted that Mr. Bond and J. A., in the course of 1907, diligently read up the literature of the subject. Browne Willis, Hearne, Phelps, and Warner

⁵This may also be gathered from a footnote on page 68, but only very vaguely and indirectly.

are expressly mentioned among the works which they studied. Now Browne Willis and Hearne both inform us, I quote the words of the latter:

"To be short the length of the church with St. Joseph's chapel extended itself 200 paces or 580 feet, which was a greater length, we are told by Mr. Willis, than any cathedral in England excepting (old) St. Paul's."⁶

Again both Warner (1826) and Phelps (1836) print a document in the possession of the Bishop of Bath and Wells which was drawn up only some fifty years after Henry VIII seized Glastonbury Abbey. In this we find it explicitly stated that "the greate church in ye abbey was in length 594, as followith:

The chapter house in length	90 foott
Quier in length	159 (in breadth 75 foott)
The bodie of ye church in length	228 foott
Joseph's chapel in length	117 foott
	—
	594
	—

That these measurements are fairly accurate may be learned from an inspection of Mr. Bond's own plan, drawn to scale. He divides it into squares of 74 feet, 74 feet being the interior width of the nave and choir. The sixteenth-century document calls the width 75 feet. Surely this is near enough. Seeing the order in which these items are given, who can possibly doubt that in the sixteenth century when these measurements were recorded, there existed at the east end, beyond the choir and continuous with the church, a building some 90 feet long here called the "chapter house." Even then the building was probably demolished and it is easily conceivable that the author of the record may have

⁶Hearne, *History and Antiquities of Glastonbury*, p. 57. Without the Edgar chapel this would be quite untrue, as Winchester Cathedral is 548 feet long.

misunderstood its real character. But such a building must have existed, and it can have been no other than what we now know to be the Edgar Chapel, built by Abbot Beere, as Leland expressly tells us, at the east end of the church. But as if this were not enough, Warner drives the conclusion home in the clearest terms. He was undoubtedly quite mistaken in suggesting that this 90 feet eastern chapel can have dated from the time of Abbot Adam, but he at least saw plainly that the "chapter house" must have been a chapel. His words are:

"We may reasonably suppose that he (Abbot Adam de Sodbury, c. 1330) might add to these evidences of his respect for the holy Patroness of the abbey, by building and dedicating to her *that noble chapel of 90 feet in length, which previously to the desecration of the sacred pile terminated to the east the great church of Glaston Abbey.*"¹

These words occur in a book expressly named by Mr. Bond as one which he and J. A. had carefully studied. By a process of conscious or subconscious inference, they or one of them rightly draws the conclusion that this building was not a Lady chapel erected by Abbot Adam, but the Edgar chapel of Abbot Beere. Then, on November 7, 1907, they sit down to their experiment in automatism and profess to be tremendously surprised when in answer to the formal request, "Can you tell us anything about Glastonbury?" J. A.'s hand draws a rough outline of the abbey church with a large chapel stretching out from the eastern end of the choir. Upon application for "a more careful" drawing, a second sketch was produced, by no means corresponding with the conditions afterwards revealed by the excavations, but quite in accord with the ideas then likely to exist in Mr. Bond's subconscious mind, for the oblong Edgar chapel, is

¹R. Warner, *History of the Abbey of Glason* (1826), p. lxxxvii.

shown with two others on the north side almost *on a level with it*, much as in Willis's conjectural plan, save that the Edgar chapel is made much larger. To this was added some rude Latin script not easily decipherable, in which among other things we read:

et capella extensit 30 virgas ad orientem et (viginti?) in latitudine et fenestrae (cum) lapide horizontali quod vocatur transome et vitrea azurea, et fecit altarium ornatum cum auro et argento et . . . et tumba ante altarium gloriosa aedificavit ad memoriam Sancti Edgar . . .

"and the chapel extended 30 yards (i.e., 90 feet) to the east and (?20) in width, and there were windows with a horizontal stone which is called a transome in windows of azure blue, and he made an altar adorned with gold and silver and . . . and he built a glorious tomb before the altar to the memory of St. Edgar."

Here we find exactly reproduced the (somewhat inaccurate) estimate of 90 feet, standing in Warner and Phelps. Moreover the mention of Edgar's tomb and altar recalls the extract, printed by Phelps on the very same page, from "An Inventory of the Chambers, Offices, etc., (at Glastonbury) taken about the time of the Reformation."

"in the new chapel a very ffaire toomb of King Edgar, copper gilt. The altar being set with images all gilt."⁸

So far, therefore, as regards the simple fact of the discovery of the Edgar chapel, I can see no reason for invoking the action of any supermundane intelligence. Mr. Bond and J. A., being duly impressed with the fact that the present ruins of the Abbey Church are some 80 or 90 feet short of the length assigned to the building in the sixteenth century, drew the inference, consciously or subconsciously, just as Warner had drawn it before them, that there must formerly have been at the east end a big chapel of which no trace now

⁸The whole is printed in Phelps, *History of Somersetshire* (1836) I, p. 549; cf. also Collinson and Dugdale.

remains above ground. Small wonder that in their automatic script this impression reveals itself, and is further decorated, through what for want of a better word one may call "the dream faculty," with the more or less fantastic embellishments usual in such cases. Their inference is perfectly sound, indeed obvious. They dig and the foundations are discovered as anticipated. What is more, the foundations brought to light fit in fairly well with the imaginative details given in the script. If there had been acute divergence the public would never have heard a word about the matter. As, however, they can be made to harmonize, a great claim is put forward for those automatic communications as messages from another world.

I should like to undertake a minute discussion of the whole list of alleged correspondences between the script and the results of excavation, which Mr. Bond sets down under so many heads, but there is no room for that here. My general answer must be, that beyond the central fact of the discovery of the foundations of a chapel some 80 or 90 feet in length, and of proportionate width, hardly any of the details set down rest upon reliable evidence. The script says there was a door at the east end, and Mr. Bond accordingly professes to have found traces of a door, but the only evidence for it is a gap in the foundations near the extremity of the apse. Such a conclusion is highly uncertain. It would be ridiculous to suppose that at every point in a ruined building where foundations cannot be traced there was formerly a means of egress, and on the other hand, Mr. Bond's own plans of the western portion of the same abbey church show that in the earlier work the footings were continued under the entrance archway, the west cloister door, etc.⁹ Similarly,

⁹See the coloured plate in *Somersetshire Archaeological Soc. Proceedings* for 1912, p. 33.

there is no adequate evidence to show that the Edgar chapel was adorned with windows of azure blue. Mr. Bond states that this is "proved by the discovery of numerous fragments of blue glass in the trenches" (p. 72). But first of all the azure glass discovered in the trenches was thirteenth-century glass in the foundations of a sixteenth-century chapel, so that Mr. Bond has to assume that "this glass was probably refitted from the windows of the earlier work altered or removed by successive abbots," a very gratuitous supposition. Again, the account he gives of this glass in the *Proceedings* (1909, p. 109) hardly accords with the statement just quoted. In 1909, speaking of one particular point at the extremity of the apse, he says that "a few small remains of encaustic tile and glass were gleaned from the mass—but nothing considerable. Some of the glass was of a different nature to that which had previously been encountered being much thicker and of a beautiful azure-blue colour." Now when this was written, Mr. Bond had already carefully explored all the foundations and trenches of the Edgar chapel. Hence, we are compelled to infer that a very small proportion of this blue glass was found in comparison with the remnants of ordinary glass. Moreover, he himself suggests that this particular spot at the extremity of the apse had been dug up and rifled about 1813 in the time of the antiquary Kerrich. This alone would account for the disappearance of the foundations at that spot without any theory of an eastern doorway.¹⁰ And once again Mr. Bond, writing in 1917, agrees very ill with what he said in 1909 in the matter of the polygonal apse. In 1909 he declared that before the eastern extremity of the chapel had been excavated, he conjecturally sketched a polygonal apse rather than a round one because "the former shape was more consonant with the sixteenth-century prac-

¹⁰*Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society* (1909), p. 109.

tice in building."¹¹ But in 1917, when he wants to impress his readers with the supernormal quality of the automatic script, he assures them that there was no data existing "from which the probability of a polygonal ending could be inferred."¹² These two statements, I submit, cannot possibly hang together. Further, there is another piece of evidence to be considered which bears upon the question of the apse. From a late eighteenth-century map recently found among the papers of Col. W. Long, it appears that some tradition or sketch existed at that time which showed the Edgar chapel, expressly recognised it as such, gave approximately its correct length (87 feet) and indicated roughly its polygonal apse. This plan seems to have been drafted in connexion with some sale of property and it is certainly later than 1751.¹³ It is true that Mr. Bond and J. A. declare that they knew nothing of the plan in question until 1910, long after the automatic script had been written down, but can they be quite sure that no other similar sketch had ever come to the knowledge of one or other of them and been photographed upon the subconscious memory, though normally all recollection of the circumstance had perished? To be brief, I can see nothing in all these details of the script which Mr. Bond claims to be veridical, e.g., the four bays, the approximately correct width, the fan vaulting, the polygonal apse, etc., but a series of fairly lucky conjectures which any expert in architectural history might easily make, given the primary fact that a chapel some 90 feet in length had been constructed by Abbots Beere and Whiting in that particular situation.

It will be understood that I in no way impugn the good

¹¹*Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological Soc.* (1909), p. 105.

¹²*Gate of Remembrance*, p. 72.

¹³It is reproduced in the *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological Soc.* (1916), pp. 113-15.

faith of either of the sitters, but I may admit that two circumstances impel me to scrutinize very closely the logical basis of the claims they have put forward. The first is the fact that Mr. Bligh Bond stands confessed as a believer in all sorts of cabalistic imaginings connected with the numerical equivalents of Greek and Aramaic words. He holds that profound mysteries underlie the fact that the letters of St. Peter's name, Cephass ($\kappa\eta\phi\alpha\varsigma$, i.e., $\kappa = 20$, $\eta = 8$, $\phi = 500$, $\alpha = 1$, $\sigma = 200$), give us the number 729 — $9 \times 9 \times 9$, the perfect cube — and by treating a number of other prominent New Testament words in the same way, inserting an article here, changing a spelling there, or modifying an inflexion somewhere else, he shows that one can arrive at the most wonderful parallelisms and correspondences. I must confess that after a serious attempt to make acquaintance with his book, the whole system appears to me just as crazy and perverse as anything I have ever read in the supposed Bacon-Shakespeare ciphers, or in the attempts to date the coming of Armageddon and Antichrist. Yet Mr. Bond can discourse to would-be disciples as follows:

"The discovery in the Gematria of the Greek Scriptures of indubitable traces of a coherent and consistent teaching in harmony with the exoteric expression of the Christian dogma and forming a definite circle between the theology of the Sacred Books and that wonderful scheme of imagery and symbolism of an architectural or geometrical nature with which the Gnostic Books abound, and which is so evident in Scriptures, gives point to that outstanding fact in the story of the life of Jesus that He was trained as a Carpenter or Builder (Tekton) and suggests that behind this natural and outward fact there lies a mystery, viz., that He in His Divine Personality was the builder of the Æons (Heb. i. 2), and that the knowledge which He gave His Church was the knowledge of those principles by which the worlds were made." (Heb. xi. 3.)¹⁴

¹⁴Bond and Lea, *A Preliminary Investigation of the Cabala*, pp. 3, 4. As might be expected, there are obvious traces of this "gematria" nonsense in the script; see, e.g., *The Gate of Remembrance*, p. 147.

Secondly, I must confess that the pseudo-archaic English in which most of the script is written puts me quite out of sympathy with the supposed communicators and their living intermediaries. It is English which no generation of men dwelling in these islands ever spoke, but it is the sort of English that I can imagine a very careless and ill-trained student of our early literature using in his dreams, if he believed he was called upon to address Henry VIII or Thomas Cromwell in the language current at that period. We have impossible forms like *I ybuilded* and numberless past participles with the *y* prefix like *ybuttressed* or *yvaulted* quite out of date in Tudor England. Then over and over again we find talk about "fanne-tracery" and "fannes"; yet the New English Dictionary gives no example of this architectural use of the words older than the first part of the nineteenth century. Certainly in all the documents cited by Sir W. St. John Hope in connexion with the vaulting of St. George's chapel in his great work on Windsor Castle the term does not occur. But most noticeable of all, the language of the monks about the domestic concerns of the community and particularly about their *paternosters* is quite impossible. For example: "I didde *paternosters* for that which wasne my sinne," or "Ye pulpitte was silent — not homilies, but the brethren did list to songs of prowess and pleasure instead of *paternosters*." Medieval monks did not "listen to" *paternosters*. In fine, whatever the intelligence may be which professes to communicate, it can hardly expect to gain credence for revelations couched in language which is itself an obvious sham.

If I have reprinted this criticism, which appeared originally in *The Month* (London, March, 1918), it is because Mr. Bligh Bond's book has had a great vogue among those who would persuade us that valuable information concern-

ing history may be communicated by the spirits through automatic writing. *The Gate of Remembrance* has gone through several editions and has been acclaimed as a surprising revelation of facts inaccessible to ordinary methods of research. I submit, on the other hand, that there is not one verifiable item contained in the volume which was not ascertainable from the written and published materials already within reach, especially when conjoined with the fragments of wrought masonry belonging to the old minster which the authors had carefully studied. Enthusiasts have fallen in love with the character, as revealed in the script, of that "child of nature" Brother Johannes. Such people, however, can hardly be familiar with the best achievements of modern automatism. Johannes, with his fantastic forms of speech, is simply a dream personality, not so artistic and by no means so convincing a creation as, for example, the Hope Trueblood of *Patience Worth*.¹⁵

It would only weary the reader to devote more space to the shallow pretensions of the Bligh Bond script. It has been backed up by other still more extravagant scripts under the same editorship which deal with St. Joseph of Arimathea and other Glastonbury fictions. My criticism of *The Gate of Remembrance* which is reproduced above, was written only a few weeks after the book was sent for review. But after a protracted investigation, the Rev. H. J. Wilkins, D.D., an expert antiquary, possessing the necessary local knowledge, published a much more thorough refutation of Mr. Bond's assumption of preternatural guidance. It is entitled *False Psychical Claims in "The Gate of Remembrance" concerning Glastonbury Abbey*. It was brought out by Arrowsmiths of

¹⁵See on Patience Worth the important volume of Dr. W. Franklin Prince *The Case of Patience Worth — A Critical Study of Certain Unusual Phenomena* (2nd ed.) published by the Boston Society for Psychical Research.

Bristol in 1922, and a second and enlarged edition appeared in 1923. From this latter I borrow one significant passage which with the author's own italics is printed under the heading "Conclusion."

"In my opinion there is absolutely nothing supermundane in the whole of the script, and no room for 'cosmic memory' (whatever may be the definition of that vague postulate), or for discarnate monks or other discarnate entities. There is no message from 'within the veil.' All that is true in the script could be gathered from historical data or reasonably conjectured by intelligent observation of existing facts and conditions and reproduced in automatic script by the subconscious mind."

It will be known to some of my readers that a schism took place a few years since in the American Society for Psychical Research. The more critical members of that body broke away and formed the Boston Society for Psychical Research. Mr. Bligh Bond, who has apparently made a sacrifice of his career as architect in England, now acts as "editor" to the New York organisation and conducts their periodical, which appears under the name of *Psychic Research*.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SCRIPT OF OSCAR WILDE

WHEN Fénelon, before he became Archbishop of Cambrai, wrote his *Dialogues des Morts* for the instruction of his royal pupil, he assuredly had no suspicion that in the course of a century or two the shades of the nether world would need no one to interpret their thoughts for them, but would claim to be able to communicate direct with the friends who were still living on earth. Rightly or wrongly, however, this is the claim which has been advanced by spiritualists for now something more than eighty years. The earliest printed script which is extant dates from the close of 1851: but for my own part I believe that, though not recognised as such, automatic writing is older than the time of Fénelon himself. There is, for example, much to suggest that the collection of revelations known as the *Mistica Ciudad de Dios*, by the Spanish Abbess, Maria Coronel de Agreda, were produced in this way.

This question, however, is beside our present purpose. I will only mention that since 1852 there have been literally hundreds of books published which purport to embody communications received from spirits in the other world either through automatic writing, planchette, or the ouija board. Such publications have multiplied enormously, of course, in recent years; but from the very first they formed a type of literature which is in an extraordinary degree tedious and futile. Between the Scylla of dreary platitude and the Charybdis of flippant puerilities no way seems to have been

left open to the unfortunate spirit which desires to communicate from the *au delà*. Some rather striking messages have been received through living-voice mediums, for the most part not long after the death of those who purported to speak; but when great names in the literary world have attempted to rival their earth achievements the results have been deplorable. Mr. Stainton Moses, who is regarded by many spiritualists (Sir A. Conan Doyle among the rest) as an inspired teacher, many years ago protested against "the prevalence of illiterate Shakespeares and twaddling Swedenborgs," declaring that the use of such names afforded strong presumptive evidence that "the intelligent operator at the other end of the line is not in all cases the person he pretends to be."¹ I have spoken in an earlier chapter of the complete oblivion into which the mediumistic writings have fallen which purported to come from the spirits of Ariosto and Charles Dickens. Years ago Horace Greeley, who was very intimately connected with the early developments of the spiritualist movement in the United States, laid it down as an axiom of experience and as a serious argument against the authenticity of such communications, that "those who claim through the mediums to be Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, etc., and try to prove it by writing poetry, invariably come to grief. I cannot recall a line of 'spiritual' poetry that is not weak, if not execrable"; and he goes on to anticipate that "Martin Farquhar Tupper, appalling as the prospect is, will be dribbling worse rhymes upon us after death than even *he* perpetrated while on earth."²

And now, after so many years of frustrated expectation, there comes at last some script which has a distinct literary

¹*Spirit Identity*, p. 41. It is a curious fact that the control who was Stainton Moses's special guide and who purported to communicate many hundred pages of script, claimed to be no less a person than the Prophet Malachy.

²Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life*, p. 240.

quality and which appears to be not unworthy of the brilliant writer from whom it purports to emanate.³ A gentleman who was at first known only as Mr. V. had for some time wished to develop the power of automatic writing. He was advised to seek the help of Mrs. Travers Smith who had had a large experience in this branch of psychic research. At first Mr. V. made little progress, but when Mrs. Travers Smith laid her hand on his while he held the pencil, the pencil began to write intelligent messages. But I will leave Mrs. Travers Smith herself tell the story of what happened on the afternoon of June 8, 1923:

"As we sat down to write, Mr. V. said that he would like to keep his eyes closed, if that made no difference. I was pleased at the suggestion, as on several occasions I had found that this desire to work blindfold or with closed eyes had produced remarkable results. Almost immediately the pencil began to tap on the paper, then to move quite vigorously. The writing came in detached words as in normal handwriting. . . . A few sentences were written by the same communicator who had spoken on the last occasion. The message referred to his daughter Lily. When her name was written I was sensible of a change, a sudden interruption; the pace became quicker, the pencil wrote: 'No, the lily is mine, not his'; and I asked 'Who is speaking?' 'Oscar Wilde' was written immediately. As this message continued I looked at Mr. V., his eyes were closed and he seemed quite unconscious of what he was doing. I took my hand off his for a few moments; the writing ceased at once, the pencil tapping on the paper impatiently. I put my hand on again, and the message continued. It was written so rapidly that it was entirely impossible for me to follow it, and the hand of Mr. V. was so firmly controlled that I found it very difficult to move it, from the end of one line to the beginning of the next.⁴

³"Patience Worth's" communications were earlier in date than the Oscar Wilde script, and I have no thought of denying their literary distinction, but they did not purport to emanate from a personality already famous as a writer of recognized merit. We know nothing of Patience Worth.

⁴*Psychic Science* (the Quarterly Transactions of the British College of Psychic Science), Vol. II, p. 205.

What the hand wrote was this:

Lily, my little Lily — No, the lily was mine — a crystal thread — a silver reed that made music in the morning. Pity Oscar Wilde — one who in the world was a thing of life. Bound to Ixion's wheel of thought, I must complete for ever the circle of my experience. Long ago I wrote that there was twilight in my cell and twilight in my heart; but this is the last twilight of the soul. In eternal twilight I move, but I know that in the world there is day and night, seedtime and harvest, and red sunset must follow apple-green dawn. Every year spring throws her green veil over the world and anon the red autumn glory comes to mock the yellow moon.⁵

There are a good many more flashes of vivid description in the same manner, which is characteristically Wilde's. We are told how: "Soon the chestnuts will light their white candles and the foxgloves flaunt their dappled dropping bells." The communicator insists that few now "can hear the flute voice of beauty calling on the hills, or mark where her white feet brush the dew from the cowslips in the morning"; while he boasts at the same time that "there was not a blood stripe on a tulip, or a curve on a shell, or a tone on the sea but had for me its meaning and its mystery and its appeal to the imagination."

As Mrs. Travers Smith pointed out, the words "twilight in my cell and twilight in my heart" are an actual quotation from *De Profundis*, and in the same work we read: "There is not a single colour hidden away in the chalice of a flower or the curve of a shell to which, by some subtle sympathy with the soul of things, my nature does not answer."

I think it will be admitted by those who are familiar with Wilde's descriptive prose, apt at times to be rather flamboyant and overornate, that this is, to say the least, a remarkably good parody. Moreover, the startling impression thus made was reinforced by another surprising circumstance —

⁵See *The Occult Review*, August, 1923, p. 79.

the handwriting though rapid and intense, closely resembled Wilde's. There are several facsimiles of the script given in the articles which appeared in *Psychic Science*, and by the kindness of Mrs. Travers Smith I was allowed to inspect at her house several specimens of the script itself. On the other hand, the British Museum possesses the original manuscripts of some of Wilde's plays and poems.⁶ I have also consulted these and there can be no possible question as to the close resemblance between the two, or indeed of the fact that the script aims at reproducing Wilde's handwriting. He had a curious trick of substituting a Greek *alpha* for the ordinary small English *a*. This feature appears and is almost exaggerated in the script. Even more striking perhaps is the general character of the hand and the way in which letters belonging to the same word are separated from one another.

But let us turn to another specimen of the communications received, this being obtained on June 18, 1923, in the presence of Mr. Dingwall, at that time research officer of the Society for Psychical Research, a gentleman well known to me:

"Being dead is the most boring experience in life. That is if one excepts being married or dining with a schoolmaster. Do you doubt my identity? I am not surprised, since sometimes I doubt it myself. I might retaliate by doubting yours. I have always admired the Society for Psychical Research. They are the most magnificent doubters in the world. They are never happy until they have explained away their species, and one suspects a genuine ghost would make them exquisitely uncomfortable. I have sometimes thought of founding an academy of celestial doubters . . . which might be a sort of Society for Psychical Research among the living. No one under sixty would be admitted, and we should call ourselves the Society of Superannuated Shades. Our first object might well be to insist on investigating at once into the reality of (say) Mr. Dingwall. Mr. Dingwall — is he romance or reality? Is he fact or fiction? If it should be decided that he is fact, then of course we should strenuously doubt it. For-

⁶MSS. Additional 37942 to 37948.

unately there are no facts over here. On earth we could hardly escape them. Their dead carcasses were strewn everywhere on the rose path of life. One could not pick up a newspaper without learning something useful. In it were some sordid statistics of crime or disgusting details relating to the consumption of pork that met the eyes, or we were told with a precision that was perfectly appalling and totally unnecessary . . . what time the moon had decided to be jealous and eclipse the sun."

Those who have read Oscar Wilde's most amusing story called the *Canterville Ghost* can hardly fail to be reminded of the attitude of mind in which the writer approaches the subject. He looks upon the situation mainly from the point of view of the ghost, whose feelings are outraged by the American family who have bought his ancestral mansion. He is dreadfully upset when his carefully prepared and many times rehearsed effects fail to come off. He clanks his chains in the corridor at 1 a.m. and the American, Mr. Otis, comes out to present him with a small bottle of "Tammany's Champion Lubricator," remarking politely: "My dear Sir, I really must insist upon your oiling those chains with this excellent preparation"; and above all he is frightened out of his wits when he encounters in a dark corner the bogey, constructed by the children out of a night light, a hollow turnip, a sheet, and a broomstick, which proves upon further inspection to bear the label, "Ye onlie true and original Otis spook."

There are many brilliant flashes in the Wilde script which are quite in the tone of cynical paradox which runs through such an essay as "The Decay of Lying." Take, for instance, the following, which was obtained by Mr. V. when working with another medium, a Mrs. L., who, I understand, is *not* identical with the famous Mrs. Osborn Leonard:

"Mrs. L., much excited, remarks to 'Mr. V.': 'You know I am not guiding your hand! I am perfectly honest.' The hand wrote immediately:

¹*Occult Review*, August, 1923, p. 81.

"'Honesty, madam, may be the best policy for the grocer, but it is the very worst for a woman with a past.'

"Mrs. L.: 'Oscar Wilde! How dare you! What can you know of my life?'

"'Pray don't be angry. . . . Charming women always have a past, and plain women never have a future.'

"Mrs. L.: 'Thanks for the compliment, but I assure you I have been very moderate in my follies, very moderate indeed.'

"'. . . 'Ah! moderation! We do in moderation the things we don't like, and in excess . . . the things other people don't like us to do. That is all.'"

On the other hand, there is a great deal in the Wilde script which is of more serious nature, though it largely takes the form of extravagant self-pity and of lamentations over his present helpless condition. He declares that: "like Achilles in Homer, I would sooner be the poorest ploughman on earth than lord of all the astral realms."⁸ "When we come to you," he tells his automatists, "it is as poor stowaways, uninvited guests, who must perforce wait in the back room while the rightful owner makes merry in the lighted halls." Or again: "We strum out our mean music on borrowed, broken lyres."⁹ His language at times suggests a condition of things like that of the "unclean spirit that is gone out of man and which walketh through places without water seeking rest" (Luke xi. 24). It almost loses its own individuality in passing from one shelter to another. "We become a sort of mental snowball, rolling through eternity and ever gathering fresh accretions from the brains through which we travel. Our minds become coloured as moorland streams are by the beds of peat or porcelain clay over which they pass."

Certain it is that the messages of the supposed Oscar Wilde are perceptibly influenced by the range of knowledge and

⁸*Occult Review*, November, 1932, p. 275.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 271.

interests of the mediums concerned. With Mr. V. who is a mathematical and scientific lecturer, we get many allusions to astronomical and botanical names and facts. When Mrs. Travers Smith received communications from Wilde unassisted, through the ouija board, all these disappeared and we were in a more directly literary atmosphere. When Mrs. Travers Smith's daughter, who is an artist, intervened, we get a tirade against Whistler. When another medium, Miss MacGregor, collaborated with Mr. V., we note a strong theosophical colouring and such strange psychology as the following: "The soul is no indivisible unity, no solitary shadow seated in its house of sin. It is a thing highly complex, built up layer upon layer, shell within shell, even as the little brown bulb of the hyacinth that thrusts out green shoots from the darkness." Everyone who has any acquaintance with Madame Blavatsky's "Isis Unveiled" will remember how frequently she comes back to this notion of shells. A large infusion of extremely vivid imagery seems to be common to all the scripts independently of the particular mediums employed. Here is a passage which would not be out of place in a mission sermon descriptive of the worm of conscience as it prays upon the imagination of the lost:

A stage is set, and to the hollow music of the drums of doom, masked puppets, in horrible mimicry, play before us the drama of our lives. Missed Opportunities press their mocking faces close to us. Half forgotten long-dead things crawl from their graves and gibber at us — slow-creeping things, trailing dreadful slimy shrouds. Desire stoops over her ashes and with scorched hands seeks to fan up the old flame. Death and Old Time look on and mock her with blackened grinning skulls. When she sees them she creeps wearily away. Remorse, a gaunt vulture, red-eyed and leprous winged, watches from the air.¹⁰

Some part of the script has an evidential character, notably

¹⁰*Occult Review*, November, p. 272.

a communication, the original of which I have seen, and which, if I mistake not, came through Mrs. Travers Smith's daughter working with Mr. V.¹¹ The supposed Oscar was asked to recall early memories, and the hand wrote down among other things:

"McCree, Cree, no, that's not the name. Glencree, where we stayed with Willie and Iso, and there was a good old man who used to look after our lessons a priest, Father Prid, Prideau."

It seems certain that no one present knew anything of Oscar's sister Isola, who died as a child, and there was nothing whatever to suggest any connexion between the Wilde family and Glencree; but strangely enough, as Mr. V.'s brother has since pointed out, the priest referred to, Father L. C. Prideaux Fox, O.M.I., contributed an article to *Donahoe's Magazine* for May, 1905, in which he mentions that Lady Wilde and her children used to stay at Glencree, that she asked Father Prideaux Fox to instruct the three children (whose names, however, are not given) and that he baptised all three of them.¹² It is also interesting, though certainly not evidential, to find the communicator replying in answer to a question about his mother in the world of shades: "Yes, I have seen her. She has not really improved in the process of dying. She is less comely now than when 'Speranza' used to lead the Intelligentsia in Dublin in those days when we had still the relics of civilization among us." At the same time, when, on another occasion, a disparaging remark was made about Lady Wilde as "a half crazy old woman who thought she could write

¹¹It is a curious fact that when Mrs. Travers Smith's daughter replaced her mother in laying her hand on that of Mr. V., the writing which resulted was the same in character, but enormously magnified.

¹²See *Psychic Science*, Vol. II, January, p. 322. This seems to be a mistake. An Irish friend took the trouble to examine the registers of the neighbouring churches but could find no trace of these baptisms.

poetry" the hand at once scrawled: "Please do not insult my mother; I loved and honoured her."

But the reader will probably ask, may not the whole thing be a fake, a practical joke? Would it not have been easy for Mr. V. to write or to procure some clever parodies of Oscar Wilde's dithyrambs and inverted aphorisms, to learn them by heart, to study and carefully practise his handwriting, and then, after a pretence of unsuccessful experiments in automatism, to invoke the assistance of Mrs. Travers Smith, and at the psychological moment to pour them out at lightning speed for the mystification of the credulous? One point that might seem to favour this conclusion is the fact that though Mr. V. has given to those who have met him the impression of being quite unliterary, he really possesses a remarkable capacity for just that sort of pictorial description which is conspicuous in the script. His brother prints a letter of his, written from camp during the War, which might quite well have emanated from Oscar Wilde himself, and which actually contains a half sentence almost identical with one reproduced above (p. —), I italicise the phrase in question:

"Here *is no ruddy autumn glory to mock the yellow moon*, but great empty spaces and windy skies filled at sunset with slate and smouldering crimson."¹³

Seeing that we did not at first even know Mr. V.'s name, one felt bound to face the hypothesis that he might be playing a trick, and that when he professed ignorance of Wilde's life and writings, he was not quite sincere. If a clever man

¹³*Psychic Science*, January, 1924, p. 315. Mr. V.'s brother further states that Mr. V., took every prize in literature at school and on leaving school hesitated whether to read for honours in English or in Mathematics (p. 313). It is now no secret that Mr. V., was the pseudonym chosen by Mr. S. G. Soal, M.A. and B.Sc., who as a Science Master in a public institution thought it more prudent to conceal his identity. A very remarkable paper of his appears in *Proceedings S.P.R.*, Vol. XXXV, pp. 471-594.

set himself to the task, it would have been very easy to get up beforehand a few details and such names as Glencree, Prideaux, and that of Oscar's little sister.

However, I must confess that such an elaborate mystification seems to me on the whole, improbable; first, because in view of the amount of script obtained through Mr. V. and the rapidity with which it came, the effort of memory would have been a very astounding feat; secondly, because when questions were asked it would have been difficult to foresee them and provide Wildian answers beforehand; but thirdly, and more particularly, because Mrs. Travers Smith, unassisted, obtained script through the ouija board which equally purported to come from Oscar Wilde and which was said to be not inferior in quality.¹⁴ Of Mrs. Travers Smith's honesty I can entertain no doubt. She makes no exaggerated claims for the script, and I have heard Sir William Barrett and others who knew her intimately speak of her with much respect.

The script, then, seems to be authentic in the sense that it was produced without any conscious deception on the part of the mediums concerned. Whether it has for its author the disembodied spirit of Oscar Wilde is quite a different question. Space fails me to discuss the problem as fully as might be desirable, but one or two considerations may be outlined which strongly point to a negative answer.

And to begin with, the burden of proof in all such cases must rest entirely with the claimant. It has hitherto been

¹⁴I have not seen a sufficient number of specimens to form any judgment myself as to its literary value. Much of this ouija script came at a prodigious rate — 3,000 words in an hour. Many of the supposed Oscar Wilde criticisms upon contemporaries, notably upon Mr. George Moore and, what is more surprising, upon Mr. G. K. Chesterton, were of such a character that wholesale expurgation was necessary as legal opinion pronounced them libellous. Besides these causeries, the same communicator produced a play, but, if I am not mistaken, no theatrical manager has ventured to put it on the stage.

the belief of educated mankind that the dead return no more, at any rate that they do not come back to pay off old scores by libelling those against whom they may cherish a grudge. A rather terrible prospect would open out if a different economy prevailed. Also one cannot help feeling that there must be many millions on the other side who would have a good deal to say about the things they disapprove of in this world, if by any possibility they could make their voice heard and get people to listen to them.

Assuming, then, that we are justified in refusing to recognize the identity of the communicator, unless his claim is convincingly made out, it is to be noted that the special interest of the Wilde case lies in this, that the evidence is public and can be tested by everyone for himself. If I am told that there is good evidence for the identity of the American known as "George Pelham" or the English lady "Blanche Abercrombie," who communicated years ago through Mrs. Piper and Mr. Stainton Moses, respectively,¹⁵ this may be true, but I have to take other people's word for it. I know nothing about either of them personally; I do not even know their real names. But when it is a question of Oscar Wilde, I can read the script and consult his works and his life, and also I can study his handwriting and compare it with that produced by Mr. V. If this resemblance settled the matter, I should have no choice but to say that the script probably did come from Oscar Wilde. But does it settle the matter?

For those who accept ordinary Catholic teaching I am inclined to urge that no amount of evidence can bring conviction of the identity of any purporting communicator. In the penny Catechism which I learned in my childhood

¹⁵Both these cases are quite fully stated in Sir Oliver Lodge's *The Survival of Man* and in F. W. Myers' *Human Personality*.

the question is asked: "How can we show that the angels and saints know what passes on earth?" In answer to which, reference is made to the text in St. Luke: "There shall be joy before the angels of God on one sinner doing penance." Obviously there would be no purpose in praying to angels or saints if they did not know that we *were* praying or did not know what it is we ask. Many — I think most — devout Catholics believe that this knowledge is shared by the souls in purgatory; indeed, for all we know, it may be the common and necessary attribute of all disembodied spirits, including the souls of the lost, that they possess a telepathic and clairvoyant knowledge of distant occurrences — of everything, in fact, to which their attention is turned. What I am anxious to insist on is that while the belief that disembodied spirits know what passes on earth is perfectly familiar to Catholics, it impresses the non-Catholic public as a new discovery or a rash hypothesis. If a man seals up a ring, a coin, and a letter in a packet and dies without ever revealing the secret of the contents to any living person, such people are apt to assume that when through a medium or by any other means a correct description of the objects in the packet is given before it is opened, such information must necessarily come from the spirit of the dead man himself.¹⁶ On the other hand, any normally instructed Catholic child would find no difficulty in believing that myriads of intelligences in the other world may know what the packet contains and what is written in the letter, just as well as the person who affixed the seals. While I do not say that this can be proved to the satisfaction of the sceptic, I do emphatically say that it is impossible to prove the contrary.

Now, once admit that all that we do or say can be known

¹⁶This case is definitely propounded in Mr. E. F. Benson's sketch entitled *Up and Down* (1919).

to intelligences not trammelled by the conditions of existence in the flesh, then it seems to me necessarily to follow that no quite conclusive proof of identity can ever be given by a disembodied spirit. Every fact that it recalls concerning its own previous existence may be equally matter of knowledge to other intelligences, some, it may be, good and friendly, some malicious, some freakish. There can be no secret in those worlds beyond the grave regarding anything which has happened in the soul's past life. The possession by some purporting communicator of what may seem knowledge of a most private and exclusive kind belonging to him alone is no guarantee at all that he is really the person he pretends to be. If during his earth life he hid away an important paper in a secret drawer and never disclosed the fact to anyone, there may be numberless spirits in the other world, both good and evil, who either observed the occurrence when it happened, or have been able to learn of it since from the minds of those who did. If they, for any motive, think well to personate the deceased, there is no limit to the amount of correct information they may give concerning his past — supposing always that they choose to "get up" the case as a lawyer gets up his brief.

Again, the imitation of the handwriting tells us nothing, startling as the fact must appear at first blush. It is not the dead man's fingers that hold the pen, nor *his* muscles which are working according to the habit which they have acquired through years of sitting at the desk. The whole process is, of necessity, a simulation, whatever may be the agency that is responsible for it. The same is true with regard to the voice, accent, and phraseology of the dead which are reproduced in the hearing of a bereaved father or wife. The vocal chords cannot be the vocal chords of him they have lost. These, alas, are being resolved into dust in the bosom of

mother earth. The sounds they hear have their origin in the throat of the medium, or if you like, they come from an ectoplasmic reproduction of the organs of the dead located near the medium or in some mechanical trumpet standing hard by. In any case what is heard is not the voice of the dead but a *simulation* of that voice. Supposing the facts to be as believers state, they only go to prove that certain denizens of the next world possess a, to us, inexplicable power of mimicry. And why should that power of mimicry not extend to the reproduction of style and thought, as well as to the physical accidents of voice or handwriting?

If we could assume with certainty that it was impossible for disembodied spirits to possess any other knowledge of the earth plane than that which they carry with them, and if again it could be shown that there never had been any indications given by such communicators of a wish to deceive, we might be pardoned for accepting their claims more readily. But it is just in these two vital points that the case breaks down. Accepting the data presented in such volumes as those of the late Lady Glenconner (afterwards Lady Grey of Falloden), and Mr. Drayton Thomas on Book Tests, we have conclusive evidence that those on the other side follow all that is going on here among the friends whom they have quitted. For example, two at least of the books to which Lady Glenconner's son "Bim" purported to give references were published *after* his death. *War Poems*, by X., referred to as the second book on the shelf in a room in the Glenconner's house at Queen Anne's Gate, was certainly not there in "Bim's" lifetime, because he was killed in September, 1916, and the book *War Poems* was only published in the October of that year. Another volume, *Ardours and Endurances*, was not printed until 1917, a whole year after his death; and yet "Bim" is supposed to have described the exact

position it had been given in a bookshelf at Glen. Moreover, he wished his family to be told that "he takes an interest in all they do, that he knows all about their movements, that he can be with them in all they are doing." But if "Bim" himself could obtain all this information, there is no assignable reason why we should not suppose that other disembodied spirits were equally privileged. Neither is it easy to see why such knowledge should not be communicated from one spirit to another and be used for purposes of deception.

Again, there might be serious objection to admitting the possibility of personation from the other side if no evidence were forthcoming that such attempts had ever been made. But, on the contrary, the most accredited exponents of Spiritualism everywhere assure us that there are whole troops of spirits whose one desire appears to be to deceive and impose upon those who are willing to hold intercourse with them. As we have already seen, the classical exponent of Spiritualism as a religious movement, Mr. Stainton Moses, repeats almost *ad nauseam* the most emphatic warnings against the danger of impersonation. The evidence of this propensity in the spirits who purport to communicate is overwhelming, but the point cannot be further developed here.

Meanwhile, there are other considerations which would tend to put us on our guard against personating spirits whether the means they employ to establish their identity be similarity of handwriting, imitation of style and mannerisms, or, in the case of direct speech, the pitch and intonation of the voice in which the sitters are addressed. To take this last point first, we have in the case of the poltergeist of Mâcon a striking example of deliberate and successful mimicry on the part of the spirit which purported to com-

municate.¹⁷ In a mocking mood, the spook, we are told, began to counterfeit the voice of the mother of Michael Repay, a boy who was present; and so perfect was the imitation that the lad at once said, laughing, to his father: "Father, truly he speaks just like my mother." Moreover in a number of similarly well-attested poltergeist disturbances, sounds are heard which reproduce such noises as the drawing of corks, the sawing of wood, the smashing of crockery, the crowing of cocks, the squealing of pigs, the rattling of chains, the barking of a dog, or the crunching of wheels on the gravel. In many instances it was quite impossible that anything of the sort could physically have occurred in the neighbourhood. But the agency which produced such sounds may reasonably be believed to have been equally capable of imitating the intonation of any particular human voice.

The author of a recently published work, who seems, in a sober way, to have taken a great deal of interest in psychic manifestations, gives an account of a séance held with a non-professional medium, an Austrian lady of title. One or two of those present expressed a strong desire to witness a materialisation, but the control replied:

"You are still very foolish. You know that I am a spirit and therefore I have no body of my own. Of course I could assume a form if you insist on seeing something. How would you like me to appear? As a child, or as an old man, or as a dog?"¹⁸

The request was not persisted in, but taking the statement for what it is worth, it goes to show that what people see and hear on such occasions are *simulacra* contrived for the occa-

¹⁷I have told the story in some detail in the Irish quarterly, *Studies* for June, 1928. This imitation of voices is not confined to *poltergeister*. Many such manifestations occurred with the Goligher circle in 1915-16. See W. J. Crawford, *The Reality of Psychic Phenomena* (1916), pp. 28-32.

¹⁸Nora Putrscher-Wydenbruck, *An Austrian Background* (1932), p. 127.

sion, not realities. As an incidental illustration of the unhealthy aspects of these practices, I may also note a circumstance which is recorded of the same control. We are told that the baroness who acted as medium was sternly forbidden by the control "ever to use the mediumistic power again and was warned that she would lose her reason if she did."

Another, but different point of interest is the deterioration which seems to me to be often perceptible in those few automatic scripts which at first view give evidence of literary merit. No doubt those who report these things are prone to put the big strawberries at the top of the basket. There are certainly indications that the later communications from Oscar Wilde were not on a level with the brilliant utterances recorded above. It is as if the communicator had grown weary or bored. One gets the impression that the effort of maintaining the impersonation had proved too exhausting. Even with Patience Worth, anyone who perseveres in reading right through the novel *Hope Trueblood* will find that towards the end the threads all seem to grow confused and tangled. The individual sentences are grammatical, but we wonder what has become of the story as a story. The conclusion of the tale is almost incoherent.

Again the handwriting test of identity on closer scrutiny does not satisfy. The script handwriting in its general effect looks very like Oscar Wilde's, and many of his peculiarities have been reproduced, but there are consistent, even if minute points of difference. The script has the appearance of being the work of a clever penman who was imitating a style of writing of which he had only a fairly accurate mental picture.

Strange things are possible in this matter of handwriting. Father Fernando M. Palmés, S.J., Professor of Psychology at Barcelona, in his recent book *Metapsiquica y Espiritismo*

(1932) describes an experiment conducted in his presence at a reformatory school in Spain. One of the inmates, a boy of about nine years of age, was called up by the Medical Superintendent and hypnotised. Another medical man, Dr. P., who had come as a visitor, was asked to write down his name and surnames (*apellidos*) — it will be remembered that a Spaniard generally has two or three — and the paper was then given to the boy (who probably, says Fr. Palmés, did not know how to read and write) with an order to look at it steadily and then at once to make an exact copy. The boy paying no heed to his surroundings, concentrated his gaze upon the signature and then, taking the same stylographic pen which Dr. P. had used, without looking again at the writing or even at the piece of paper on which he made the copy, but keeping his head down and his gaze averted, dashed off unhesitatingly and with decision the name and the surnames in question. The resemblance of this reproduction to the original was, we are told, surprisingly exact.¹⁹ One gathers from this and other similar experiences that in a condition of trance or somnambulance, faculties often develop for which normal psychology can find no explanation. But it was certainly not the spirit of Dr. P., who was there standing by his side, which controlled the boy's hand to produce a facsimile of his signature.

In connexion with Oscar Wilde it may be interesting to note in passing a statement made by the late Mrs. Bellamy Storer, the widow of a former American Ambassador of that name. In a letter I received from her some time before her death, she writes:

"About 15 or 16 years ago, when we had a house at Versailles, Father Benson [she refers, of course, to Msgr. Hugh Benson, the convert son of a former Archbishop of Canterbury and himself well

¹⁹Palmés's, *Metapsíquica y Espiritismo* (1932), pp. 384-5.

known as a preacher and novelist] paid us a visit, and his friend Père Clérissac (the famous Dominican) came several times to see him. I happened to speak of Oscar Wilde. There had been a newspaper hint that he was not really dead but had retired to a monastery to hide himself from the world. The Père Clérissac, to our great surprise, said: 'Madame, I can assure you that Oscar Wilde is dead — for it was I who heard his last confession on his deathbed. He died a Catholic, a repentant sinner.' Père Clérissac himself died in 1914, only about two or three weeks after his friend Father Benson."

I can only give this upon Mrs. Bellamy Storer's authority; I have had no opportunity of verifying it.

To return, however, from this digression; there are undoubtedly mysteries in the whole field of automatic writing which our psychology has not yet fathomed. That the subconscious mind of the medium or mediums is responsible for a great deal, both as to the form and matter of what is written, cannot, I think, be questioned. At the same time no theory of cryptæsthesia or extended telepathy seems to me adequate to explain all the data. I cannot persuade myself that any theory is admissible which does not postulate the interference of some outside intelligence, of a spirit or spirits in fact, influencing powerfully the mind of the medium. From this undoubtedly it would follow that in exceptional cases the phenomena of automatic writing establish the existence of something outside and beyond this material world. But if we appeal to them as a proof of survival after death, it seems to me that the case breaks down; for survival can only be demonstrated by such means when the identity of the communicator is established. We must turn for our proof of a future life to other arguments, more metaphysical it may be, but better founded in sound logic.

CHAPTER XV

SOME MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

ALTHOUGH it is not the purpose of this book to furnish a survey of the whole field of psychic research, still a few words should be said upon certain recent experiences which, in my view, greatly strengthen the case of those who maintain the reality of the physical phenomena. Foremost among these I should be inclined to rank the "direct voice" manifestations to which of late years so much prominence has been given. It must not, of course, be supposed that these are a complete novelty. Even as far back as 1852, Adin Ballou in his little book *Spirit Manifestations*, when speaking of the knockings, tickings, etc., produced by a spiritual agency with indications of more or less intelligence, adds to the list "imitations of many sounds known in the different vicissitudes of human life, musical intonations, and, in rare instances, articulate speech."¹ Of course it is a common thing for an entranced medium with his or her own vocal organs to give utterance to words which purport to be those of the spirit controlling — "the familiar spirit" — but Ballou must clearly mean that the "articulate speech" was produced, like the rappings and musical intonations, by no perceptible human agency.

Such "direct voice," or "independent voice" mediums often make use of a trumpet through which the communicating spirit is believed to speak. As these séances are for the most part conducted in absolute darkness, and without any strict control of the medium's person or hands, it is extremely

¹Boston edition (1852), p. 7.

difficult to be sure that he is not himself speaking through the trumpet, for the luminous stripes attached to the instrument form a very inefficient means of locating it, and it is almost impossible to know whether the medium is still sitting where he is supposed to be sitting. He may, with the dexterity acquired by long practise, be carrying the trumpet round, touching the sitters or waving it in the air, while he is believed to remain motionless and entranced in his own seat. Still, the strength of the "direct voice" evidence, seems to me to lie, not in the movements of the trumpet nor in the whisperings heard through it when it is pointed at a particular individual among the sitters, but rather in the quality of the voices, in the fact that more than one voice is sometimes alleged to be heard at the same moment, and in the languages, unknown to the medium, which these voices speak with perfect correctness.

Thanks to the two books of Mr. H. Dennis Bradley, *Towards the Stars* and *The Wisdom of the Gods*, which have gone through several large editions and have been translated into four or five European languages, the most widely known direct-voice phenomena at the present day are those of the medium George Valiantine. I am quite aware that in 1924 the committee appointed by the *Scientific American* turned Valiantine down, on the ground of some extremely suspicious incidents connected with his manifestations. More recently, both at Berlin and at Genoa, he was accused, though it would be too much to say that he was convicted, of producing fraudulent phenomena. But near London in 1931 in the house of the same Mr. H. Dennis Bradley who had so strongly championed his claim to unrivalled pre-eminence in the matter of the direct voice, Valiantine was detected beyond all question in an outrageous piece of imposture. Pretending to have obtained an ectoplasmic imprint

of one of the fingers of the late Lord Dewar, it was proved by expert authority which could not be gainsaid, that the medium had left upon the prepared paper an impression of his own big toe. In spite of this highly unsatisfactory record, I do not think that the evidence for the direct-voice phenomena in Valiantine's case is seriously affected. It is admitted that Eusapia Palladino was guilty of shameless trickery whenever the opportunity was given her, yet many of her severest critics, though fully aware of this, have found it impossible to resist the evidence for the genuineness of her manifestations on other occasions. So let us consider the case of Valiantine a little more in detail.

George Valiantine, according to the testimony of all who have had any relations with him, is an uneducated man who knows no language but that which is common to all citizens of the United States, and who in adult manhood was conducting a small business as a razor-hone manufacturer in an inconsiderable American town. He had no interest in literature and had never traveled until he came to England in 1924. He possessed, however, remarkable mediumistic gifts and in particular it was discovered that at his séances personalities, purporting to belong to the world beyond, spoke, either through trumpets or from space, in voices certainly very different from the medium's natural tones, and sometimes, it was maintained, recognisable as the voices of the deceased relatives of those who were present. Whether this was beyond the powers of a clever ventriloquist might be doubted except for two circumstances. It is alleged that more than one voice not infrequently spoke at the same time and also that the voices continued to be heard at the very moment that Valiantine himself was conversing audibly with his neighbours at the séance. This, I may readily admit, would be difficult to establish quite satisfactorily by the evi-

dence of members of the circle. People, even though we may assume them to be in perfect good faith, get worked up by anything which impresses them. They are excited by a certain confusion of sounds and their subsequent memory is far from exact. Still, a considerable number of those who have assisted at Valiantine's best séances affirm most positively that the voices overlapped, and that this occurred under conditions in which it is impossible to suppose the intervention of any confederate. But what is much more satisfactory from an evidential point of view is the fact that these voices, not once, but many times, spoke in foreign languages, and indeed on certain occasions in fantastically strange languages. Professor Neville Whyment, who is recognized as an expert in Chinese, having published a book on *Colloquial Chinese* (1922) and a *Mongolian Grammar* (1926) besides possessing a considerable acquaintance with many other out-of-the-way tongues, was invited, in October, 1926, to attend certain séances with Valiantine in New York, of which he has recently published an account.² He declares on the first page of this booklet:

"I am not a spiritualist. I am not in any way connected with psychic research societies. . . . My position is one of extreme simplicity; having no theory to expound, no scheme to foster, my memory is untrammelled in its backward groping, and my vision is unimpaired by any preconceived notions."

Dr. Whyment's impressions of the medium himself seem also to be worth quoting. He says:

"Before the sitting began, I had a talk with Valiantine, who struck me as a typical example of the simpler kind of country American citizen. His speech was far from polished, he seemed to lack imagination, his interests were of a very commonplace order, and he seemed as much puzzled as proud of the queer happenings which appeared

²*Psychic Adventures in New York* (London: Morley and Mitchell Kennerley, 1931).

to have their centre in him. . . . He was almost untravelled, and exhibited no desire to see or know anything of countries other than his own. Occasionally he made amusing (and obviously unrehearsed) blunders in speech and misconception, and above all he seemed to be always natural."³

With regard to the séances Dr. Whymant's statement is quite positive. There was a voice speaking archaic Chinese with which he carried on a long conversation, and this not on one day only but on several days. Professing to be a linguist with a wide knowledge of Eastern tongues, he testifies to the fact that he heard also Persian, Sanskrit, Yiddish, German, Portuguese, and modern Greek. He had been invited to the sittings expressly that he might give some account of the strange sounds which none of those who formed the study circle could interpret. While declaring that he had no knowledge of the terminology of Spiritualism and that he was not interested in the discussions of the subject which took place among those present, he adds:

"What did worry me was my inability to find any satisfactory *normal* explanation of the phenomena. Even if the medium had been a first-class linguist, it was manifestly impossible for him to be speaking in Chinese and American English at one and the same time, and yet all the sitters had heard Valiantine carrying on a conversation with his neighbour while other voices (two or three at one time) were speaking foreign languages fluently."⁴

This is Dr. Whymant's statement, and it is perhaps the more persuasive because it does not include any laboured protestations of the writer's good faith. I am aware that his pretensions as a linguist are not universally admitted, but I cannot conceive that he is altogether a charlatan. The explanation of the matter on normal lines would require us to believe either that Dr. Whymant was lying or that the

³*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴This overlapping of the voices is attested not only by Dr. Whymant but by many other observers.

hostess, Mrs. Cannon, a lady of assured standing in New York society, was party to an elaborate series of mystifications which involved the admission into her drawing-room of two or more accomplished confederates. People who speak Basque and Sanskrit and Persian are not easily picked up in the streets even of New York. Moreover, Dr. Whymant introduces us to another voice from space which is of especial interest because his description exactly accords with the accounts given of the same personality who figures often in séances held in Italy 4,000 miles away. He says:

"Presently there sounded a very strong voice like that of an Italian singer. 'Cristo d'Angelo' was roared at full lung force! The voice in this instance seemed to soar up to the ceiling and hover there. . . . Speaking at first in pure and clear Italian, the voice soon dropped into a Sicilian dialect of which I knew nothing. Before leaving the circle, however, Cristo d'Angelo was prevailed upon to sing a Sicilian ballad."⁵

Now we have a detailed account of séances held at Venice in May, 1929, in the house of Dr. Piero Bon — he is referred to often also as Count Bon — with Valiantine for medium. Dr. Bon tells us that he was himself brought up in Sicily and is thoroughly acquainted with the dialect. His description⁶ tallies in every respect with that of Dr. Whymant. He describes how Cristo d'Angelo's exceptionally powerful voice seems to come from the ceiling, and how all the sitters instinctively threw their heads back and looked upwards while he was singing, whereas when another control, "Honey," sang a little English ditty in rather quavering tones, the voice was apparently at the level of their knees and they all bent downwards in their chairs in the effort to hear more distinctly. Here, also, d'Angelo sang both in Italian and in the Sicilian dialect. There were other singers as well at those

⁵*Psychic Adventures in New York* (London: Morley and Mitchell Kennerley, 1931), p. 21.

⁶Published in the Italian periodical *Luce e Ombra*, May, 1930, pp. 216-218.

Valiantine séances in Venice. "Pat O'Brien cantó in irlandese," which perhaps only means that he sang with a brogue, but a voice which purported to be that of Sebastian Cabot favoured them with a ballad in archaic Venetian.⁷ It is to me inconceivable that these details, attested by a number of people in good social position, can be purely fictitious, and it is not less incredible that a man of Valiantine's upbringing could have been able by any trick of ventriloquism to impose upon native Italians in their own country which he had never previously visited. That the voice which announced itself as that of Sebastian Cabot was really that of the illustrious explorer no one need be asked to believe. Nothing is more certain than that personation and deception, mingled with much that is veridical, prevails in all these communications. Personally I see no reason to think that adequate proof of identity ever has been given or ever can be given by the agency at the other end of the wire. But that is not for the moment the point. I am only contending here that certain of the phenomena which have taken place under Valiantine's mediumship cannot be accounted for by any hypothesis of trickery, and that we are consequently forced to admit that there are intelligences outside this visible world which, occasionally at least, intervene in human affairs and try to place themselves in communication with the living.

The long conversations carried on with the direct voice of Cristo d'Angelo, Bert Everett, etc. (stenographic notes in some cases being taken at the time, and veridical information imparted which was not always in the consciousness of anyone present), must also be admitted to have great weight. Moreover, though I cannot here go into detail, the fact that precisely similar direct-voice phenomena have occurred with-

⁷The fuller narrative may be found in *Luce e Ombra*, for October and November, 1929.

out Valiantine's assistance at the Castle Millesimo and at Genoa,⁸ the same controls sometimes presenting themselves with the same recognisable voices and the same idiosyncrasies, must be accounted a striking confirmation of the manifestations previously observed.

As mentioned above, Valiantine has been accused of trickery in the séances he gave at Genoa in May, 1929. But the facts adduced in Dr. Piero Bon's contributions to *Luce e Ombra* under the title "Contro l'ipotesi del trucco nelle sedute con G. Valiantine"⁹ are of great weight in all this matter. In the course of the same discussion Dr. Bon points out that when Valiantine gave his sittings at Genoa, he was surrounded by an atmosphere of mistrust, and what was more than mistrust, a distinct anticipation that he was going to be detected in some sort of imposture. This had apparently arisen out of a warning given by the control, Cristo d'Angelo, at the Castle Millesimo, some months previously. The voice had said that when Valiantine came to Italy¹⁰ a mystery would be divulged, and then the same voice, seeming to wish to recall the words, had exacted a promise from each person present that no record should be made of this utterance in the minutes of the séance, and that no one should speak of it. The words of Cristo d'Angelo were, however, remembered, and when Valiantine at a later date was known to have arranged for a visit to Genoa, attempts were made

⁸Professor Bozzano (*Luce e Ombra*, 1931, p. 418), speaking of Cristo d'Angelo, very reasonably, as it seems to me, lays stress upon the power of this voice, upon its inimitable Sicilian accent, and upon the length of the *conversations* which it maintained. See also the book *Modern Psychic Mysteries* (London: 1929) edited by Mrs. Gwendolyn Kelley Hack. On all this matter see also Prof. Bozzano's recent book *Polyglot Mediumship* (London, 1932), an English translation of certain articles of his which are still running in *La Ricerca Psichica*, the periodical now published in Milan.

⁹*Luce e Ombra*, May, June, and July, 1930.

¹⁰It is curious that there was at the time no talk of Valiantine's visiting Italy. The invitation was given to him much later on by Dr. Piero Bon himself.

to ascertain what this disclosure was likely to be. Cristo d'Angelo's living voice was then in abeyance, but the Marquis Centurione Scotto, in trance, announced, seemingly in the person of that control, that Valiantine would be caught speaking into the trumpet and pretending to produce the voice of Dr. Barnett. However it may have happened, this story got about, and the atmosphere of the circle at Genoa, so Dr. Bon assures us, was an atmosphere of suspicion, in which the thought of the majority of those present was concentrated upon the exposure of fraud expected to occur before the close. In these conditions the susceptible mind of the medium, we are told, succumbed to this battery of suggestion and the séance ended in his doing the very thing which they anticipated he was going to do.¹¹

Clearly this way of looking at things supplies a very convenient excuse for psychics detected in imposture. "I did it," such a one will always be able to urge, "because your minds were set upon it and the collective suggestion was so strong that I could not resist." The plea sounds ridiculous enough, but I confess that I am not sure that it ought on that account to be summarily rejected. The power of unspoken suggestion, an influence hardly dreamed of by the neurologists of an earlier age, is now every day coming to be more fully recognized. Charcot's once famous "stigmata" of hysteria have been shown to be mainly due to the unconscious suggestion of the physician himself.¹² The cures of Christian Science healers — and the occurrence of such cures can hardly be denied — are almost certainly attributable to influences of the same nature. That genuine psychics, especially when en-

¹¹There is no satisfactory evidence that Valiantine was actually detected in trickery at Genoa. At best it can only be said that he behaved suspiciously.

¹²See, for example, A. F. Hurst's Croonian Lectures on *The Psychology of the Special Senses*, pp. 2-3, corroborated by the abundant evidence recorded in the rest of the volume.

tranced, are exceptionally suggestible, is at least antecedently probable, for they are in a hypnotic condition, and the prompting to perform certain acts, or to give utterance to certain words, while it seems to come most powerfully from the discarnate agencies by whom they are habitually controlled, is not necessarily confined to these. The mental radiations of those with whom they are in contact in the séance room may also affect these sensitives, and we know so little about the operation of such forces that it is very hard to deny the possibility that in certain conditions the terrene influences may be dominant. Moreover, we have to consider the supposition entertained by many who are familiar with these matters, that the suggestion to produce fraudulent phenomena may come directly from mischievous or malicious agencies on the other side with whom the medium has contracted some relation. Stainton Moses was a psychic who had a large experience in his own person of both mental and physical phenomena, and no one, as I have previously noticed, could speak more strongly than he does, in his *Spirit Teachings* and other books, of the extreme difficulty of detecting impersonators, and of pronouncing upon the integrity or lack of integrity of the controls with whom he found himself in contact.

In the case of Valiantine, what stands out most clearly is the fact that his genuine phenomena were so abundant and his reputation so assured that he had absolutely no need to produce manifestations fraudulently. The medium who depends for his daily bread upon the clients he attracts cannot afford to give them nothing at all in return for the fees they pay him. He soon finds himself deserted and starving, if in sitting after sitting he obtains no positive results. The temptation is great to retrieve the situation by trickery. Valiantine was certainly not in this case. The imprint said to be made by Lord Dewar, but which proved to be an impression of

Valiantine's left big toe, was produced on February 23, 1931, but only on the previous evening Mr. Bradley testifies to the occurrence of living-voice phenomena of the most evidential kind. For example, he says:

"Of the 'guide voices,' Pat O'Brien spoke with us volubly in his usual manner; 'Black Foot' in his deep tones from the centre of the circle, spoke with us on two or three occasions; 'Kokum' in his powerful voice spoke independently from a region somewhere near the ceiling; 'Cristo d'Angelo' spoke to us in Italian, and then upon request sang in that language in vibrant tones, the sound of his voice coming from high up in the room, some twelve feet away from where Valiantine was sitting. The unusual Chinese voice of another guide — 'Chang Wei' — spoke a few words to us in pidgin-English, and then sang a quaint song in his own language."

There were also many others, including Mr. Bradley's father, and Mr. Bradley states:

"The fluency of the voices, which spoke practically without a pause for ninety minutes, was phenomenal. At one time three voices were heard speaking together one across the other, two from high up in the room, and one from the centre of the floor: 'Kokum,' 'Bert Everett,' and 'Black Foot' — all overlapping. 'Kokum' shouting his remarks in a tremendous tone, and the shrill voice of 'Bert Everett' making jocular remarks regarding the other two."

Nevertheless, on the very next evening Valiantine had recourse to the flagrant piece of trickery just referred to, and has certainly forfeited forever the confidence of a good many people who believed in him. Why did he do it? One curious point is that the little company assembled should have been so suspicious as to lay traps for him, taking impressions of the toes of all, and a few days later colouring the plasticine with methylene green. Still more curious is the remark made by Valiantine when Mr. Bradley and his friends, after obtaining convincing evidence by a careful study of the imprints, challenged him point blank to own up to the fraud. The medium, we are told, "collapsed utterly and burst into

a violent fit of sobbing." He lost consciousness, and seemed in danger of a stroke. It was an hour or more before he recovered sufficiently to be able, with the assistance of Mr. Bradley's arm, to go up to his room.

"He thanked me," writes that gentleman, "for helping him, speaking in heart-broken tones, almost like a child. He sat limply on his bed, his eyes looking into space, and, not as if he was addressing me, he said in broken tones: 'Why did they do this to me? Why did they do this to me?' These words were said in a manner difficult to describe. Strange as it may seem, I do not believe that he meant by 'they' to refer to Mr. Jaquin or me or any of us."¹³

It certainly seems highly probable that those whom he blamed as the cause of his disgrace were not the people who had been present at the séance, but the spirit guides in whose hands he had left himself and his reputation. The remark, to my thinking, implies that he had been impelled by these agencies to risk the imposture and that they had let him down. I am strongly inclined to believe that in the repeated cases of fraud and exposure occurring with those who have genuine psychic powers—for example, with Eusapia Palladino, Florence Cook, and many others—the impulse to cheat does come from freakish or malicious spirits in whom they ordinarily trust and that the mediums are only partially responsible. Of course, they suffer, and deserve to suffer, in consequence, and the fact that there is hardly a single physical medium who has not at some time been detected in trickery is only an additional proof of the very undesirable character of the communications to which they devote their lives.

I should not have been led to give so much prominence to the case of Valiantine, were it not for the indirect support it receives from the experiences of other psychics, whose phenomena with the direct voice, not so well advertised as his,

¹³The full account of all this will be found in Mr. Dennis Bradley's book — *And After* (1931).

are less open to suspicion. Foremost among these, I must count Mr. John C. Sloan of Glasgow. Here you have a man who steadily refuses to receive a fee for his services as a medium, who, in a humble position works hard for his living, retains the sincere respect of his employers, is averse to all publicity, and is religiously minded without ostentation. At Sir William Barrett's house some few years ago I met Mr. J. Arthur Findlay, then Vice-President of the Glasgow Society for Psychical Research, and heard him speak with enthusiasm of Sloan, whom he knew intimately. Recently Mr. Findlay has published a book,¹⁴ almost entirely based on the phenomena observed in séances with Sloan and more particularly dealing with the direct voice. Referring to the first occasion on which he had an opportunity of judging of this medium's powers, Mr. Findlay says:

"As the séance went on, I wondered how it would be possible for any man, even if he had accomplices, to carry on such an imposture for over three hours. Thirty separate voices spoke that night, of different tone and accent, they gave their names, their correct earth addresses, and spoke to the right people, were recognised, and referred to intimate family affairs. Never once was a mistake made, and the darkness really increased the evidence in favour of the genuineness of the whole proceedings, as, difficult as it would be to remember everyone's departed friends and relations and their family affairs in the light, it would be doubly so in the dark, because fifteen people were present, and the medium would have to remember exactly where each one was sitting. The voice on every occasion spoke in front of the person who recognised the name, the earth address and the details which were given. It was *all* very mystifying, and the fact that sometimes two or three voices spoke at once did not make it less so."¹⁵

Mr. Findlay goes on to explain that while he was debating with himself whether all this could be due to an organized

¹⁴*On the Edge of the Etheric*, by J. Arthur Findlay. (London: 1931), Rider.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 56.

system of accomplices, he was addressed by his father who gave his full name and "referred to something that only he and one other person ever knew on earth, and that other, like my father, was some years dead." Moreover, that other person also spoke now and referred to the same matter. He adds that he did not give his name when he entered the room, knew no one there, and no one knew him or anything about him. In the course of thirty-nine séances which Mr. Findlay has since had with Sloan, and of which he has preserved careful notes, "eighty-three separate voices have spoken to me or to personal friends I have brought with me." He adds that "at request, any part of the body would be touched (by one of the trumpets) without a mistake, without any fumbling, a clean gentle touch, an impossible feat for any human being to do in pitch darkness, as I have proved on various occasions." He also remarks: "I next decided to take the first opportunity to sit beside the medium, and, when a voice was speaking, to put my ear close to his mouth. I held his hand from the beginning of the séance, and when a voice spoke, I put my ear close to his mouth. I felt his breath, my ear and his lips were just touching, but not a sound was to be heard. This I have done, not once or twice, but many times." Moreover, he declares that the voices which speak are "of all degrees of strength and culture" and that the subjects they discuss are often completely beyond the medium's range of education and interest. "He is no student," says Mr. Findlay, "his range of literature is very limited. He told us once that he had seldom, if ever, read a book in his life owing to poor eyesight. I have never seen a book in his house, though I have been in every room of it, and only once an evening paper. He has not the capacity to carry on a séance, such as I have described, normally, for one-half hour, even if he wished to do so."¹⁶ In view of the high

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 174.

character for independence and disinterestedness which is given to Sloan by those who know him personally, it seems difficult to suppose that his indifference to literature and his homely speech are no more than a piece of calculated deception. Moreover very few impartial critics, I fancy, would feel justified in questioning the supernormal character of the three communications which Mr. Findlay has recounted as "A1" specimens of the veridical matter imparted through Sloan's mediumship. Unfortunately the details of these cases are somewhat too complex to permit of their being recapitulated here.¹⁷

Another medium remarkable for her direct-voice phenomena is Mrs. Etta Wriedt. It is said that in her presence these voices are heard even in good light, that on many occasions more than one voice is audible at the same moment, and further that the spirits communicating through her sometimes speak in languages of which she herself has no knowledge. Some years ago I was invited to meet at luncheon the late Count Chedomille Mijatovich, a diplomatist who had lived a good deal in England as the accredited representative of what was then the Kingdom of Servia. Incidentally he was also the author of the article "Servia" in the eleventh (1911) edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. On the occasion spoken of I heard from his own lips an account of a sitting he had had with Mrs. Wriedt. A friend, who had unexpectedly arrived from the Near East on a day (May 16, 1912) when Mijatovich with great difficulty had secured a sitting with the medium, begged to be allowed to accompany him. There, among other strange happenings, a loud voice suddenly addressed his friend in the Croatian language and in that tongue a lengthy conversation ensued, of which Mijatovich declared that he heard and understood every word. Con-

¹⁷See *On the Edge of the Etheric*, pp. 92-98.

federacy of any sort was impossible, since no one else was present except the medium and their two selves. At a subsequent sitting with Mrs. Wriedt, the same diplomatist avowed that he held a conversation with his mother (deceased) in their native Servian, while, later on, a lady friend who went with him sang a duet in German with a male voice which purported to be the voice of a fellow artist with whom she had formerly practised music. Some account of Count Mijatovich's (and other) experiences with Mrs. Wriedt may also be found in print in the volume which Admiral Usborne Moore has published entitled *The Voices*. It is, of course, possible to reject this testimony, which depends upon the statement of the narrator alone, but I confess that I should find it hard to believe that the very earnest and cultured gentleman whom I met at luncheon was merely romancing.

There can be no occasion to discuss here the claims of other mediums to obtain manifestations with the direct voice. I know too little of the séances held with Mrs. Blake, Mrs. Emily S. French, and Mrs. Blanche Cooper to venture to criticise them; though it is beyond doubt that the lady last named does not always succeed in satisfying her clients as to the supernormal character of the powers she claims. The "Walter" who manifests at "Margery's" (Mrs. Crandon's) séances, has become very famous. If, on the one hand, many critics are not satisfied that the voice is that of the lady's deceased brother, it must be said, on the other hand, that no conclusive evidence of fraud has ever been produced.¹⁸ More-

¹⁸ Although conclusive evidence of fraud in connection with the *voice* of Walter has not been produced, it must be admitted that some extremely damaging facts have lately come to light in relation to the thumb-prints of the same control. They prove to be identical with those of a living man, "Dr. Kirwin," whose real name has not been divulged, but whose former association with the Margery séances is well known. See "Bulletin XVIII" of the Boston Society for Psychical Research. I am much indebted to the kindness of the editor, Dr. Walter Franklin Prince, for the communication of this brochure with its admirable and convincing facsimiles.

over the impersonation, if it be an impersonation, appears to be astonishingly consistent and true to life, while the "voice-cut-out" machine invented by Dr. Richardson purports to provide a quite satisfactory guarantee that the voice is not produced by Mrs. Crandon herself.

Analogous to the direct-voice phenomena and equally inexplicable by natural causes are the specimens of automatic script which certain psychics produce, either written correctly in languages with which they are wholly unacquainted or copied from books chosen at random and held out of sight. Some striking examples of the former class are recorded in the volume entitled *Psychic Experiences of a Musician* (1928) by Mr. Florizel von Reuter, the celebrated violinist. The automatist in this case was the writer's mother, Madame Grace von Reuter. Although mother and son are polyglottic, speaking several languages with more or less facility, they received a number of messages in tongues of which they knew nothing; e.g., Polish, Hungarian, Persian, and Turkish. A curious feature of the case is the fact that purporting communicators frequently spelled the words they communicated in inverted order. To take an English example, Mme. von Reuter, working blindfolded and in entire ignorance of the letters coming in succession from her fingers, evolved the following message, in answer to the question "Who are you?" addressed to a communicator who said he was a Scot.

d e y a l p s e p i p t a t h c e n n u d n e h w y h t t a e r g e m
a d d n a r g s a w n r i a b

Each word separately is written backwards and thus the first six letters received spell simply "played," while the whole message reads:

"played pipes at Dunnecht [*sic*] when thy great-granddame was bairn."

Mr. von Reuter, as he explains, was on one side of his

family of Scottish descent. Many messages in German, Spanish, Italian, etc., though written at lightning speed, came in a form similarly inverted, a fact which of itself presents a considerable problem for those who would explain such communications as simply the product of the automatist's subconscious mind. Dr. Walter Franklin Prince, whose critical attitude in respect of the "Margery" case and in relation with other mediums, is well known, seems to have regarded the von Reuter experiences as of serious interest. Indeed Dr. Prince, if correctly reported, declared that the Turkish messages "fulfilled all the most exacting scientific demands."¹⁸

With regard to the reading of a specified page in a closed book, this faculty has been claimed for W. Stainton Moses. According to his analysis of the process, it was not his own mind which was clairvoyant; but the spirit which controlled him at the time read the page of the book while it still stood in its place on the shelves, and then, through his hand, wrote a transcript upon the paper before him. The fact that Mr. Moses, without moving from his chair, did so copy passages from two books quite unknown to him which stood on the shelves of Dr. Speers' library is accepted by F. W. H. Myers and by Mr. Trethewy.¹⁹ A more recent and better attested example is provided by Judge Dahl in his book, *We are Here, Psychic Experiences*. In this case the medium so gifted was his daughter Ingeborg, and the experiment took place in the presence of six witnesses. Here again the medium did not claim to be able to see or read the page herself, but the spirit of her dead brother, as she alleged, standing before a bookcase in the next room, dictated to her in some manner

¹⁸*Psychical Experiences of a Musician*, p. 256; cf., however, pp. 89, 211, 242, 254.

¹⁹See Myers' *Human Personality*, II, p. 592, where the texts are reproduced; and Trethewy, *Controls of Stainton Moses*, pp. 55, 178, 191-92.

quite inaudible to those present the words which he read in the book selected. An English visitor chose at random "the seventh book from the left in the upper shelf, p. 316." It proved to be a copy of Wordsworth's poems, and Ingeborg seated at her desk in the next room, took down quite correctly, at the spirit's supposed dictation, the lines standing first on that page and occurring in the middle of a sentence:

"But more exalted, with a brighter train:

And shall his bounty be dispersed in vain,

Showered equally," etc.

Two other not less successful tests took place with books similarly selected, one of which proved to be a work of Georg Brandes in Danish, and the other a volume of the Norwegian poet Björnson. All this happened on August 15, 1928; the record was taken down by Judge Ludwig Dahl at the time and facsimiles of the pages in question are given. There was also another convincing experiment of the same kind three days later in which a volume of Shelley's poems figured.²⁰

Still more remarkable perhaps are the automatic script phenomena occurring with the same Norwegian young lady who, it need hardly be said, is not a professional medium and who does not exercise her powers outside her own family circle. Writing, however, in a state of trance, her pencil, without any choice of her own, seems sometimes to be controlled by agents of whose history she knows nothing. As an illustration of what is wont to occur, her father records the following incident:

"On Dec. 19, 1926, my daughter's right and left hands wrote *simultaneously* two separate letters. The one that was written by her left hand was from a deceased young physician, Carsten S—, to his father, who held a distinguished office in one of the southern

²⁰*We Are Here, Psychic Experiences*, by Judge Ludwig Dahl (1931), pp. 228-232.

towns of Norway. The father declared in a letter that the handwriting, which my daughter had never seen, could not have had a closer resemblance to that of his son. My daughter had not even had an idea of the young physician's existence during his earth life. The other letter written by her right hand was from Eva (a little cousin) to her parents. Here there was no opportunity of identifying the handwriting, as Eva had died at the age of three. Her letter was elegantly written in large round letters, widely differing from those of the physician. His writing was of the rapid, slanting type, with a flourish at the signature. While her hands guided the two pencils, my daughter, in trance, conversed smilingly with her two brothers. (Both of them were dead, but she believed she saw them in their astral bodies present in the room.)"²¹

It may also be noticed that on other occasions Ingeborg has written similar letters from dead persons whose handwriting she has never seen. Facsimiles are given in two of these cases, and, as the reader can see for himself, the resemblance to the authentic script of the persons concerned is certainly striking. One of these letters addressed to a girl by her deceased English aunt is written in English. Not only are the handwriting and signature a close imitation, but the letter is quite naturally phrased as an Englishwoman would phrase it, though Ingeborg, as her father tells us, knew only a modicum of English and had never written an English letter in her life.

I do not propose to speak here of another comparatively modern development of psychic research, the paraffin moulds of materialised hands and feet, with which the medium Franck Kluski is primarily identified. The phenomenon, Sir Arthur Keith notwithstanding, is not easily explained away, but it would be difficult, without an abundance of photographic illustrations, to do justice to the real points at issue. Dr. Geley's book, which has been translated into English under the title *Clairvoyance and Materialisation*, offers

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 228.

probably the fullest statement of the subject which is generally accessible.

Spirit photography has been known for more than sixty years, and it may readily be admitted that no form of manifestation offers such opportunities for trickery as the sensitized plate upon which the sitter hopes to find a psychic extra. For many years, and especially after the exposure and full confession of the notorious Buguet in Paris (1875), hardly any investigator who approached the subject in an impartial spirit of enquiry was willing to admit the possibility of such impressions even as a serious hypothesis. But latterly a change of feeling has certainly come about and many students of metapsychics who are by no means uncritical in their general attitude to the supernatural—I might mention the name of Mr. Hereward Carrington as a case in point—confess that the evidence for psychic extras (though not so commonly recognizable faces) cannot lightly be set aside. The curious part of the matter is that the markings which are found upon the plate seem to be primarily due to the direct influence of the thought of the medium or of some other person present upon the sensitized film. The camera and other apparatus of photography are apparently unnecessary. A friend of mine who was a first-class amateur photographer and who spent years in making the subject of psychic photography his special hobby—always in hope of obtaining some portrait of his deceased wife but unfortunately without success—told me what seems a very significant fact. He used during the later period of his researches a stereoscopic camera, the best which money could procure. With this he obtained in the presence of various mediums a great variety of extras, sometimes unrecognizable faces, sometimes clouds, lights, and strange markings. But these appeared invariably upon one only of the two pictures which resulted

from each operation, a fact which seemed to prove that the extra did not attach to the object photographed but was caused by some sort of direct psychic action upon one of the plates. Probably the best evidence upon the subject will be found in the book of the Japanese psychic investigator Dr. T. Fukurai, which in its English edition appears under the rather barbarous title of *Clairvoyance and Thoughtography*. In his pages one may read of experiments with several different mediums, scientifically conducted and attested, in which the medium by concentrating upon a particular picture or Japanese character has imprinted the image of this upon one or more of an *unopened* packet of photographic plates. Astounding as the assertion may be, the evidence seems altogether too strong to be resisted.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CASE OF DOYLE VERSUS HOUDINI

IN THE volume of essays by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle which appeared only a week or two before his death, he affirmed that "the greatest medium-baiter of modern times" was undoubtedly the conjuror Houdini.¹ It is probable that this does not overstate the case, and I should be inclined to go further and to say that, in the United States at any rate, no one has done more than Houdini to bring Spiritualism into dispute. If one may venture to form an opinion at this distance from the scene, the prevalence of deliberate imposture among mediums is notably greater in America than in England. Sir Arthur himself in the volume referred to confesses as much, and while, of course, still maintaining the trustworthiness of such claimants to psychic powers, as the Davenport brothers in the past, or Mrs. Crandon at the present day, his defence of mediumistic honesty is no longer quite so confident as it was in his *History of Spiritualism*. Though nothing but ignorance, as he contends, can suppose that there are no real mediums, "at the same time the States, and in a lesser degree our own people, do need stern supervision." "I ad-

¹*The Edge of the Unknown*, by Arthur Conan Doyle (John Murray), p. 1. The chapter which he entitles "The Riddle of Houdini" occupies no less than 62 pages. I have unfortunately not been able to meet with the volume *Houdini and Conan Doyle, the Story of a Strange Friendship*, by B. M. Ernst and Hereward Carrington (1932). But I may note that the review of it by Dr. W. Franklin Prince in Bulletin XVII of the Boston S.P.R., contains an important rectification of some statements made in the book concerning the Margery case.

mit," he adds, "that I underrated the corruption in the States."²

If this be so, Houdini in his rather noisy campaign, was not merely tilting at windmills. The evidence of fraud in many cases was overwhelming, and he was able to reënforce his contention that all spiritualistic phenomena are faked, by himself performing marvels even more inexplicable than any mediumistic feats capable of being brought to the knowledge of the general public. We should probably be right in concluding that Houdini's denunciations were largely responsible for the sceptical attitude of so many intelligent American Catholics at the present day. In their eyes the marvels produced by D. D. Home, Stainton Moses, and the Fox sisters were all tricks. This attitude, as I have previously urged, seems to me a mistaken one, and an unsound foundation must inevitably weaken the force of any argument based upon it. If we want to get rid of Spiritualism we shall not effect our purpose by pretending that the phenomena are nothing but imposture. Nevertheless, it does not follow that because the great "medium-baiter" was convinced of the fraudulent character of the spiritistic wonders he had witnessed, he was therefore a deliberately untruthful person whose word could not be trusted when he denied the intervention of any psychic agency in the performance of his own marvellous feats.

Seeing that Houdini died in 1926, the details of his astonishing career are, no doubt, already growing dim in the minds of many, even of his countrymen. It may be well, then, to say that this master magician was born at Appleton, Wisconsin, in 1874. His father was a Jewish rabbi named Weiss

²*Ibid.*, p. 7. In his *History of Spiritualism* (1, p. 128) A.C.D. had written when speaking of exposures, "Some of these exposures at long intervals are true indictments of some villain, but usually they are greater deceptions, conscious or unconscious, of the public than the evils which they profess to attack."

who had emigrated from Hungary. There was a large family who were in straitened circumstances, and Erich, the seventh son, from quite early years earned a little by his exceptional aptitude for acrobatic feats and for every development of the showman's business. Locks, rope ties, mechanical device, and tricks of legerdemain were an unfailing source of interest to him throughout his life. When he was twenty he married rashly and tempestuously, a girl of seventeen, whom he had hardly known for more than a week, and, strange to say, the union proved a singularly happy one. She was, it seems, a Catholic of German family, by name Beatrice ("Bessie") Rahner, and though their nuptials were at first a sort of Gretna Green affair, a Catholic priest put matters right soon afterwards when a proper dispensation had no doubt been obtained. As a son and a husband, Erich was irreproachable. Struggling on and for the most part engaged in a variety of small side-shows in which the young couple both took part, they maintained a dire conflict with poverty for half a dozen years. Houdini, as he elected to call himself, after the great French conjuror, Robert Houdin, neither smoked nor drank at any period of his life. At their little domestic celebrations he loved to regale his wife and friends with champagne, but he never touched it himself. He kept himself fit for his performances, many of which demanded strength and endurance of no ordinary kind, by constant physical training. A large proportion of his earnings he regularly transmitted to his mother, and the husband and wife were content to go hungry as long as her needs were provided for. The pair had their occasional tiffs, for they both had tempers, but no reader of Mr. Kellock's biography can entertain a doubt of the depth of affection which united them. Years afterwards, when Houdini, now unrivalled in his own profession, was persuaded to take part in certain film dramas,

so constructed as to give scope for some of his most marvellous displays, we are told how

"the directors in charge of the film were greatly troubled by their hero's casualness in the love scenes. Houdini's puritanical soul apparently shrank from this part of the game, and his nervous reluctance in such scenes aroused no little merriment among his associates. One frantic director after trying vainly through a futile morning to persuade Houdini to embrace the heroine as if he were not submitting to a painful duty, as a last resort entreated Mrs. Houdini to leave the lot. 'Whenever we get him to the point of kissing the girl,' he said, 'he spoils the shot by glancing anxiously at you.'"³

But the famous conjuror was certainly not a hen-pecked husband who lived in terror of his diminutive spouse. She herself recounts an incident of their quite early days, which proves very clearly that he knew how to assert himself when he thought the occasion called for it.

"He had forbidden me [she says] to go to a certain show which bobbed up in a town where we were playing. I was just as determined to go. He said the show was unfit for me, and if I disobeyed him he would spank me and send me home. Naturally after that warning I went to the show. He followed me, carried me out, spanked me thoroughly, divided all our poor savings, led me firmly to the railroad station, bought my ticket to Bridgeport where my sister lived, and put me on the train, placing our pet dog in my hands just before the train pulled out."

"At the last minute, lifting his hat courteously, he said: 'I always keep my word; Good-by, Mrs. Houdini.' My heart was breaking, and I was on the edge of hysteria, but the memory of the spanking rankled and enabled me to reply with a pretence of calm dignity: 'Good-by, Mr. Houdini.'"

"Bessie" goes on to relate how her husband, always considerate, had wired so that she might be met at her destination. She was petted and fussed over, but she confesses that she was intensely unhappy and ready even to beg forgiveness on her knees.

³Kellock, *Houdini*, p. 270.

"Six hours later, at 2 a.m., the bell rang and I heard Houdini's voice. I flew to the door, and we fell into each other's arms weeping. 'See darling,' said Houdini, 'I told you I would send you away if you disobeyed, but I didn't say I wouldn't fly after you and bring you back.'"

As this story sufficiently hints, Houdini's standard of propriety was a high one. His biographer tells us that "he would do anything sensational to draw crowds, but he had one rigid taboo. He abhorred smut and would never tolerate it." So when certain friends in Paris took him to a place of entertainment where a dance was performed which he considered outrageous, he left the theatre in a fury and wrote in his diary: "the two women who did it ought to be publicly horse-whipped." Moreover, we are told that he was not only a rigid monogamist himself, but that he exacted as much of his intimates. If they violated his code they stepped out of his life. No one could possibly accuse him of being either timid or diffident. His self-assertiveness, in fact, was one of the points which unfriendly critics were most ready to dwell upon to his disparagement, but when living among the film artists at Hollywood, he admitted with a quaint mixture of truth and irony: "I am afraid I am not much of a lady's man. I am so old-fashioned that I have been in love with the same wife for twenty-five years."

Houdini's affection for his mother was even more conspicuously manifest to all who came in contact with him. Doyle in the book above referred to, says that it seemed to be the ruling passion of his life, and that after her death he expressed it on all sorts of public occasions "in a way which was, I am sure, sincere, but is strange to our colder Western blood." When she was still living, the quaint fancy seized him of purchasing a dress he had seen in a shop window which had been made for Queen Victoria. He paid a considerable sum for it, and had it sent out for his mother to

wear in the States. He wrote to her every day even when the Atlantic was between them, and his interest in Spiritualism seems to have developed only after she had passed away, and to have been created by his intense desire to get into communication with her once more. But he could never persuade himself that any of the messages which purported to emanate from her were genuine, and the traces of fraud which he repeatedly encountered in the course of this quest so disgusted him that towards the close of his life his persistent campaign against mediums became almost an obsession. To this matter we shall have to return later on, but for the moment we may note, as another curious trait in his deeply affectionate nature, that when his mother was taken from him in 1913, he adopted the practice of writing a letter every day to his wife, even though they were hardly ever separated. "These letters he would hide about the house," we are told, "as parents hide Easter eggs for their children. For six months after his death in 1926, Mrs. Houdini continued to discover them at intervals."

It is again a testimony to the substantial goodness of the man that his assistants were devoted to him in spite of an endless succession of stormy outbursts on his part when they failed to do at the moment exactly what he wanted. Of the three most closely associated with him one was with him twenty years and the other two eighteen.

"All three [says his biographer] adored Houdini. They carried him to his grave. Several times a month he would have a violent quarrel with one or other of them and give them the traditional two weeks' notice to quit. None of them ever paid any attention to such incidents, and Houdini would have forgotten by the next day all about the angry dismissal."

Much to his distress, he had no children of his own, but his delight in children was one of his most characteristic traits. Hardly a week went by without his giving a perform-

ance at some hospital or orphan asylum. He was constantly arranging to have a whole section of the auditorium given over gratuitously to some poor-school for an afternoon or evening, and he even invented an entertainment specially adapted for the blind. In Edinburgh, when he realized the number of little ones who came to the performance barefoot, he made provision to have them fitted with shoes. No doubt he was not indifferent to the fact that all this was good advertisement, for the showman instinct was part of his nature, but there can hardly have been any subtle purpose behind an incident recorded of him in Glasgow where he kept his audience waiting ten minutes while he stopped to mend the broken crutch of a little crippled girl he had met in the street. His fondness for animals and birds was not less manifest and it was only equalled by his skill in teaching them tricks. His fox terrier "Bobby," became quite expert in releasing himself, in imitation of his master, from a pair of tiny handcuffs specially made for him. So again, when another pet dog "Charlie" fell ill during Houdini's European tour in 1909, his diary records the fact, and adds "Bess crying. I don't feel any too good"; while on the following day appears the entry: "Poor dear little Charlie dog died. He is out of his misery. Has been our only pet and earned all our love."

If I have recorded these trivialities in some detail, it has not been without an object. Sir A. C. Doyle, while himself doing justice to Houdini's many amiable and attractive qualities, has, perhaps unintentionally, given the impression that he met his death under the influence of some sort of spell or curse. He was, according to A.C.D., possessed of quite extraordinary psychic gifts, and these he prostituted to base uses, making them not only the source of pecuniary gain, but actually employing them to discredit the very powers which

made him what he was. In reading this chapter one gets the idea that the great magician was a sort of Dr. Faustus who had sold his soul to the devil and that, in the world beyond, a term had been fixed when the spirits of evil would infallibly claim their own. For example, we are told:

"I suppose that at that time Houdini was, from an insurance point of view, so far as bodily health goes, the best life of his age in America! . . . Yet all over the land warnings of danger arose. He alluded in public to the matter again and again. In my own home circle I had the message some months before his death, 'Houdini is doomed, doomed, doomed!' . . . But as the months passed and fresh warnings came from independent sources, both I and, as I believe, the Crandons, became seriously alarmed for his safety. He was on one side of his character, so fine a fellow that even those who were attacked in this monstrous way, were unwilling that real harm should befall him. But he continued to rave [against mediums] and the shadows continued to thicken."

Sir Arthur goes on to recount how Mr. Fulton Oursler, a friend of Houdini's, wrote, after all was over, to say that the famous wizard had sensed the on-coming of death without understanding the significance of the warning. In particular he had telephoned to Oursler in these terms: "I am marked for death. They are predicting my death in spirit circles all over the country." Seeing that according to the same witness, a medium, Mrs. Wood, had declared *three years before* that "the waters are black for Houdini" and that disaster would befall him while performing before an audience in a theatre, there is nothing very convincing about this alleged prophecy, and it was quite natural that the person so threatened, in talking to any intimate friend, should comment upon the amiable predictions by which the mediums were trying to scare him from pursuing his anti-spiritualist campaign.

I must confess that the whole episode seems to me a revelation of one of the most objectionable aspects of these supposed communications with the other world. It reminds one

painfully of the belief in "Malicious Animal Magnetism" which obsessed Mrs. Eddy. If Houdini was superstitious — and there is evidence that there was something of this in his character, for we are told that on any Friday which happened also to be the thirteenth day of the month, he would never undertake his more dangerous feats — such prophecies would be likely to depress him greatly in a bad spell of ill health, and might consequently contribute not a little to their own fulfilment. What is much more certain is that Houdini was a man of extraordinary resolution. Incident after incident recorded by his biographer shows how he would go through with things according to the prearranged programme even when he was almost fainting from some accidental physical injury. In such a career as his he esteemed it his first duty to conquer fear, and no surer way could have been found to make him foolhardy in neglecting such concessions as advancing years demanded, than to hurl at his head the predictions of the mediums that he would break down in the performance of one of his more daring exploits. If Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, as I do not doubt, was absolutely sincere in his belief in the reality of the messages received from the world of spirits, Houdini on his side was equally convinced that the whole business was fraudulent, or at best illusory. If he were to allow himself to be shaken by such warnings as he received nothing remained for him but to give up his career and retire into obscurity. Sir Arthur does full justice to the intrepidity of the friend whose attitude towards spirit communications was the very antipodes of his own. He even appeals to the superhuman audacity of the feats which Houdini performed as conclusive proof that they could not have been accomplished by natural means.

"He had [writes Doyle] the essential masculine quality of courage to a supreme degree. Nobody has ever done, and nobody in all human

probability will ever do, such reckless feats of daring. His whole life was one long succession of them, and when I say that amongst them was the leaping from one aëroplane to another, with handcuffed hands at the height of three thousand feet, one can form an idea of the extraordinary lengths that he would go."⁴

Mr. Kellock bears similar testimony:

"Hundreds of thousands of persons in various cities have seen Houdini, stripped and securely handcuffed by police experts, leap from some bridge or boat into a stream or harbour, on some occasions in weather so cold that a hole had to be cut in the ice before he could jump, and have seen him emerge again within two minutes free and smiling. Other hundreds of thousands have seen him incased in a police strait-jacket, and thus securely trussed, suspended, head downwards, by a block and tackle, outside some public building, and have watched him free himself within a few minutes."⁵

Sir Arthur maintains that in these and other equally daring exploits there was a certain psychic element. Houdini informed him, it appears, that "a voice which was independent of his own reason or judgment, told him what to do and how to do it." So long as he obeyed the voice he was assured of safety. One cannot but suspect that A.C.D. has put his own interpretation upon words which were uttered without any such implication in the speaker's mind as his opponent has attached to them. No one possessing a competent knowledge of psychic research and its past history, can read Houdini's volume *A Magician Among the Spirits* without discovering that he talks and reasons very loosely. He makes confident assertions upon very slender premises, and Doyle is quite right in saying that the book is full of errors of fact.⁶

⁴*The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 2.

⁵Kellock, *Houdini; His Life Story* (1928), p. 1.

⁶As a striking illustration I may note that Houdini takes it for granted that that resolute sceptic, the late Frank Podmore, was a spiritualist, and he assumes that Podmore would be likely to say everything which could be said in defence of the reality of any spiritistic phenomena. Apparently Houdini had no more ground for this strange distortion of the truth than the fact that Podmore was a member of the Society for Psychical Research. See *A Magician Among the Spirits*, p. 41, note 3.

One can understand that the amount of patter and advertisement which is essential part of the showman's equipment, is likely to dull his sense of the value of accurate statement. Moreover, I strongly suspect that Houdini in talking to his spiritualist acquaintances was always trying to draw them out, and that he deliberately played up to their prepossessions just to see what they would say. Certain it is, in any case, that the great magician, on all occasions, denied in the most solemn terms that his feats were performed by any but natural and physical means. This is testimony of a very different kind from the casual conversational utterance to which Sir Arthur appeals. When the wizard escaped from packing cases nailed down and corded by expert workmen, leaving apparently the cords and nails intact, without indication of how the escape was effected, and when on countless occasions he freed himself in a few minutes from all the handcuffs, fetters, and cells which the police of the greatest cities of Europe and America could find to restrain him, the spiritualists, utterly baffled, were forced to declare that such marvels could only be accomplished by psychic power, by the dematerialization, in fact, of his physical body. Several years ago Doyle wrote to Houdini during one of his visits to England:

"My dear chap, why go round the world seeking a demonstration of the occult when you are giving one all the time? Mrs. Guppy could dematerialize, and so could many folk in Holy Writ, and I do honestly believe that you can also. My reason tells me that you have this wonderful power, though I have no doubt that up to a certain point your strength and skill avail you."

Sir Arthur's tone became more impatient as time went on. He distinctly insinuated that Houdini could not obtain any convincing communication from his mother because he disavowed and misused his psychic powers. "Such a gift," he wrote, "is not given to one man in a hundred million merely in order that he should amuse the multitude or amass a for-

tune.”⁷ Further, the spiritualists, as we have seen, were insistent in their predictions that he would come to a bad end. But Houdini did not waver in his attitude and only pursued more actively his campaign against American mediums.

“I do claim [he said] to free myself from the restraint of fetters and confinement, but positively state that I accomplish my purpose purely by physical, and not psychical means. My methods are perfectly natural, resting on natural laws of physics. I do not *dematerialize* or *materialize* anything. I simply control and manipulate material things in a manner perfectly well understood by myself and thoroughly accountable for and understandable (if not duplicable) by any person to whom I may elect to divulge my secrets. But I hope to carry these secrets to the grave as they are of no material benefit to mankind, and if they should be used by dishonest persons they might become a serious menace.”⁸

The secrets, it seems, were never divulged, but there is not the slightest reason for suggesting that there was anything sinister or abnormal about the great magician's death at the early age of 52. He suffered an accidental strain in one of his sensational escapes on October 11, 1926, but, though in great pain, he pluckily went on with the performance, and indeed appeared again on the two subsequent days. Then he collapsed, and had to go to a hospital. During his convalescence he made light of the injury, as was his wont, and was visited by some university students. He was supposed to be normally as immune from injury when struck, as if he had been made of india rubber, and one of these idiotic lads thought this occasion, when he was lying in bed, a suitable opportunity for testing his powers of endurance. He seems to have been allowed to strike him three heavy blows in the abdomen, and four days later Houdini, who for some weeks previously had been overtired and run down, died of traumatic appendicitis. A pathetic, but surely quite natural, termination of the

⁷See Kellock, *Houdini*, pp. 14 and 308-9.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 15.

career of a man of fifty, who, for thirty years, had been straining his physical powers to their utmost limit, and who had escaped, on more than one occasion, only by the skin of his teeth after injuries sustained in his phenomenal feats. How does Sir Arthur's calm assertion that Houdini, in 1926, "was, from an insurance point of view, the best life of his age in America" agree with the following facts condensed from the printed Life?

In 1911 Houdini had to undergo a minor operation for an abscess that had developed on his body from his daily struggles to escape from strait-jackets. A little later a first-class specialist in Pittsburgh informed him that he had ruptured a blood vessel in one of his kidneys. He insisted that he ought to give up his strait-jacket escapes, etc., and told him that if he went on as he was doing he would be dead within a year. In spite of great pain he persisted in all his feats until the engagement was concluded, but he said nothing to his mother or his wife. Early in 1912 he tore a ligament in his side and thereafter continued his performances in much pain and distress. The injured kidney did not heal for some years and even then he always slept with a pillow under his side.⁹

What, again, are we to make of the following account of one of the magician's attempts to rival the burial feats of the Indian fakirs? I borrow it from Mr. Hereward Carrington's recent book and I may note that the writer, though not a spiritualist, is a believer in the physical phenomena of certain mediums, including those of Mrs. Crandon.

"Houdini remained submerged in a metal coffin for about an hour and a half; but when he emerged he was deathly white, running with perspiration and with a pulse of 142. I was present at this experimental burial, as at many others, and know whereof I speak. It is my opinion that Houdini appreciably shortened his life by this endurance burial."¹⁰

⁹See Kellock, *Houdini*, pp. 229-31.

¹⁰Carrington, *The History of Psychic Science* (1930), p. 187.

It is possible that Houdini did say to A.C.D., as the latter reports, that in performing his feats "a voice told him what to do," and that he added, "It all comes as easy as stepping off a log, but I have to wait for the voice." I venture to comment, in view of the description just quoted, and of others of similar purport, that Houdini, if he did so speak was only letting off a little showman's gas. It was no bad advertisement for him if Sir Arthur and his fellow spiritualists proclaimed open-mouthed through two continents, that Houdini's achievements so transcended the known forces of nature that they could only be explained by some traffic with the occult.

It would take too much space to discuss in any detail an incident to which Sir Arthur gives prominence, and which he adduces to prove that when an advertisement was hoped for, Houdini was unscrupulous in the methods he adopted to bring it off. A.C.D. charges the magician with having boasted beforehand that he would expose the Crandons, and with having employed in the séances which subsequently took place some very discreditable devices to throw suspicion on the medium. There is no reason to doubt that the charge is made in perfect good faith, but Sir Arthur himself was certainly not present on any of these occasions and he supplies no references by which it would be possible to test the accuracy of those informants from whom his report is derived. Even from his own narrative it is plain that the accused did not admit the facts alleged, and propounded a very different version of what occurred.¹¹

One feature which unmistakably differentiated Houdini's marvels from those of the séance room was the fact that he stood committed to a definite programme which he never

¹¹I have read much of the literature which has appeared on both sides in connection with the Crandon controversy, including Houdini's booklet, and I must confess that I find it difficult to express a confident opinion as to the rights of the story.

failed to carry through. The best of mediums can never guarantee the production of phenomena. In all reports of séances we are liable to be told that the conditions are not favourable, that there is not enough power, that the presence of a particular person or of too many people is hampering developments, that they must talk more, or sing more, that they must sit upright and draw in their legs, that they must preserve contact, that nothing can happen until the modicum of red light has been further diminished, etc. And when all the requirements have been complied with, it happens over and over again that the sitting proves almost entirely negative of results. In Houdini's experiments, he practically never failed, though he sometimes reappeared, after a more strenuous escape from confinement, bruised and with his clothes torn to shreds.

But, of course, the strongest argument of all was his own unwavering denial that occult forces had anything to do with the feats he performed. He frankly took an interest in Spiritualism, first, because from childhood he had been interested in tricks and every kind of legerdemain, and secondly, because he was intensely anxious, if that were possible, to get into touch with the mother he had loved so tenderly. As his biographer tells us:

"He retained some curiosity about the possibility of posthumous communication even when he had encountered nothing but disappointment in his relations with mediums.

"His carefully planned pacts with his friends show that. According to his pact with his wife, in the event of his death she was thereafter to attempt a tryst with him once a week. Each Sunday at a fixed hour, she was to take her favourite photograph of him, sit with it before her for half an hour, and concentrate on communication. If something of him survived, and it were possible to bridge the gulf, he would give a sign."

Mr. Kellock, writing more than a year after Houdini's death, states that his wife had faithfully fulfilled the condi-

tions but without result. Houdini was not an observant Jew, though he remained faithful to some of the customs of his forefathers, but he respected genuine religion. He was not avaricious, though he stood out for good terms, and being vain of his position as "the great Houdini" insisted on his name heading the bill. His charity was not confined to cases in which it had an advertising value, and he was often the last refuge of the down-and-outer, especially in the case of those who belonged to his own profession of showman. Abstemious as he always proved himself and courageous in upholding high moral principles, I find it impossible to believe that his whole life was an acted lie. And it must have been that, if his wonderful performances had all been effected by some unavowed magic of psychic origin or by any kind of evil compact with the powers of darkness.

It has always been a favourite argument with those who maintain that trickery of some kind is responsible for all the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, to appeal to the inexplicable feats performed by showmen who are avowedly only conjurers. For this reason and in a spirit of fairness to my opponents, I have included the present notice of Houdini¹² as perhaps the most wonderful of all modern magicians. But the fact that we cannot tell how Houdini performed his marvels does not, to my thinking, place them in the same category with the accordion playing, the movement of heavy furniture, the fire-handling, the levitations, etc., which occurred in the presence of D. D. Home and other famous mediums. I cannot here argue the matter at length, but I should like to lay stress upon the fact that Home's demonstrations took place without apparatus, in the drawing-rooms

¹²It appeared in *The Month* for August, 1930, and I wrote it virtually as a review of Doyle's book, *The Edge of the Unknown*, which had just then been published.

of houses in which he was a guest, that witnesses stood close by his side in a reasonably good light, and that many of these phenomena, notably those with the accordion, involved the temporary transference to others of a share in his own peculiar powers. Let me quote further what seems to me the very sensible observations, made long ago towards the close of his life and after many years of personal interest in Spiritualism, by Horace Greeley, the Anti-Slavery leader and the founder of the New York *Tribune*. Speaking of mediums, of whom he had had a large experience, he writes:

"Most of them are persons of no special moral elevation; and I know that more than one of them has endeavoured to simulate 'raps' when the genuine could not be evoked. Let us assume then that the raps prove just nothing at all beyond the bare fact that sounds have often been produced by some agency or impulse that we do not fully understand, and that all the physical phenomena have been or may be simulated or paralleled by such jugglers as Robert Houdin, Blitz, the Fakir of Ava, etc. But the amazing sleight-of-hand of these accomplished performers is the result of protracted laborious training by predecessors nearly or quite as adroit and dexterous as themselves; while the mediums are often children of tender years, who had no such training, have no special dexterity, and some of whom are known to be awkward and clumsy in their movements. The jugglery hypothesis utterly fails to account for occurrences which I have personally witnessed, to say nothing of others."

And again:

"The failures of the mediums were more convincing to my mind than their successes. A juggler can do nearly as well at one time as another; but I have known the most eminent mediums spent a long evening in trying to evoke the spiritual phenomena, without a gleam of success. I have known this to occur when they were particularly anxious — and for obviously good reasons — to astound and convince those who were present and expectant; yet not even the faintest rap could they scare up. Had they been jugglers, they could not have failed so utterly or so ignominiously."¹³

¹³Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (1869), pp. 238-239.

CHAPTER XVII

THE "FRUITAGE" OF MODERN SPIRITUALISM

THOSE who have wrestled with the incoherences of Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy's preposterous work, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, may remember that the closing section, occupying a hundred pages, or just one seventh of the whole book, is entitled "Fruitage." In this chapter Mrs. Eddy professes to give some account of what Christian Science has achieved in the way of concrete results. Three appropriate texts are prefixed to her summary, of which the first is: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." It may not perhaps be out of place if I end the present rather desultory volume, by an attempt to answer the question: What is the "fruitage" of Spiritualism? What has the "New Revelation" done for mankind during the eighty years of its recognized existence?

So far as the reading public in general is concerned, I mean for the intelligent man in the street who takes no particular interest in the occult but who likes to acquaint himself with what is going on around him, any mention of Spiritualism calls up two outstanding ideas. The one is that of the frequent exposures of dishonest mediums who have been caught out in manifest trickery. The other, is a remembrance of the publishing broadcast of many strange and contradictory communications which purport to reveal the conditions of life beyond the grave. Up to the present no deeper impression has been made upon the world at large than is summed up in the association of the cult with these

two vague impressions. This slender result of the many millions of hours spent in attempted intercourse with the spirit world is certainly in flat contradiction with the marvellous promises which were again and again impressed upon the first pioneers of the movement. Ballou was told in 1852 that the whole earth was about to be transformed into a new garden of Eden, and, as he has left on record, his son, communicating from beyond the grave, was insistent in his appeal: "Father be patient; watch and wait. Another century cannot commence before this great change will be wrought."¹

Upon the prevalence of imposture among the rank and file of professional mediums who make money by the exercise of their psychic gift, a good deal has already been incidentally said in the course of this volume, and I cannot see that any useful purpose would be served by accumulating further examples. I will only notice that within the past few months before the writing of this chapter a climax has been reached in the exposure of a particularly flagrant example of fraud tested by Mr. Harry Price in the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London. One Mrs. Victoria Helen Duncan, a medium of Dundee, who had acquired a great reputation in Scotland for her materialization phenomena, was invited by certain English organisations, notably by the London Spiritualist Alliance, to give a series of séances in the metropolis. These apparently took place to the complete satisfaction of all concerned, and hundreds, if not thousands, of well-meaning adherents of the movement went away convinced that in a good light they had witnessed with their own eyes the extrusion from the medium of a vast web of ectoplasm, which covered her from head to foot and out of which spirit hands and spirit faces were built up as the audience gazed spellbound. It was then arranged that Mrs.

¹Ballou, *Spirit Manifestations* (Boston: 1852), p. 230.

Duncan should give five séances at the National Laboratory where a small group of people, including such expert investigators as Professor William McDougall, F.R.S., formerly of Oxford, but now of Duke University, N. C.,² Professor Flügel, and Professor Fraser Harris, assembled to subject the manifestations to rigid control.

To detail the incidents which occurred during the five séances would be impossible here. At each of the first four an immense sheet of "ectoplasm," proceeding exclusively from the medium's mouth, though attempts seem to have been made to suggest that it also came from the nose and ears, covered the whole front of her person, trailing on the ground when she rose to her feet. Flashlight photographs were taken at intervals and the very excellent apparatus used has allowed these photographs to be almost indefinitely enlarged. When studied in this way the substance revealed itself as beyond all doubt a woven texture, in which the warp and weft could be plainly distinguished, in which there were many notable rents, in which the selvedge plainly showed at the edges, and in which traces could be discerned of the creases caused by the way in which it had been at some time folded. The numerous reproductions in Mr. Price's volume make the matter perfectly plain to even a purblind reader. If this is ectoplasm, then ectoplasm differs in no respect from the ordinary cheesecloth which can be bought very cheap at any Woolworth establishment. Moreover, one of Mr. Price's illustrations shows that a piece of such cheesecloth, six feet long, thirty inches wide, and weighing only an ounce and a half, can be squeezed tightly into a roll which could, without difficulty, be held in the mouth.

But the cheesecloth material was not the only feature

²Besides being the author of many works on psychology, Professor McDougall was at one time President of the English Society for Psychical Research.

which suggested that the phenomena were susceptible of an explanation which involved no preternormal agencies. A hand which was seen in the third séance coming from the medium's mouth was in due course photographed. This, when hanging down at the end of a strip of "ectoplasm" and also in a crumpled-up condition, leaves an unmistakable impression, even in the halftone reproductions, of being nothing more than a rubber surgical glove. There is a grayish shiny gloss upon it which marks it off clearly from the white material and which is equally inconsistent with its being a hand of flesh and blood. What is more, a small safety pin came into view on this and another occasion, and though it showed itself in the middle of the "ectoplasm," it is difficult to suppose that it can have had an ectoplasmic origin. Again, the girl's face, which was conspicuous in the middle of "ectoplasm" in the fourth séance, was, we are told, not a solid face in three dimensions, but simply a picture in the flat.

There can be no need to dwell upon other details which are duly set out in Mr. Price's book.³ Practically no doubt remained in the minds of any of the group of investigators that this garb of ectoplasm was produced by a sheet of cheesecloth or butter muslin, which Mrs. Duncan, a big woman who measured 57 inches round the chest and weighed over 17 stone, swallowed and was able to regurgitate and reabsorb at will. If any hesitation could still have been felt regarding this conclusion, it would have been subsequently removed by the evidence of Mrs. Duncan's servant, Mary McGinley, who in a statutory declaration made on February 22, 1932, before a Commissioner for Oaths, revealed many in-

³*Bulletin of the National Laboratory of Psychic Research — Regurgitation and the Duncan Mediumship*, by Harry Price. With 44 illustrations (London: Published at 13d. Roland Gardens, S.W. Price 5s. net).

teresting facts. She had been sent to purchase seven yards of cheesecloth for her mistress, had washed it after use and had noticed its particularly sour and musty smell, had found a pair of india-rubber surgical gloves, thrown aside at the top of a shelf and also a little picture of a girl attached to a piece of muslin.⁴ No shadow of doubt could be felt that the whole manifestation had been cunningly thought out and contrived with such skill that many audiences of simple people had been successfully imposed upon.

As a further illustration of the frequency of such frauds it may be noted that in the same year, 1931, three other notorious cases attracted public attention. Charles Albert Beare, "a certificated clairvoyant and trumpet medium" — which means that he had been tested by a spiritualist organisation and pronounced genuine — made public avowal of his trickery. The detection of George Valiantine in an attempt to produce fraudulent finger prints has already been noticed, while in September of the same year, Craig Falconer and George Falconer, two Glasgow men, after a legal prosecution and trial in South Africa, were convicted of producing bogus manifestations which purported to be the work of spirits. The prisoners were each sentenced to a fine of £150, or in default to twelve months at hard labour, the judge remarking that the accused had preyed upon the feelings of credulous persons and had committed their frauds under the cloak of religion. "Such frauds," he added, "made a mockery of religion."

Seeing that similar examples of detected imposture may be cited from every period in the history of the movement, one is led to ask whether the holding of dark séances does not amount to a direct encouragement offered to unscrupu-

⁴This Statutory declaration has been separately printed by Mr. Price as a supplement and is now issued as Appendix H.

lous charlatans. Whatever successes may at times have been achieved by genuine mediums, the whole atmosphere of what I may for convenience call "platform Spiritualism" is tainted with fraud.

And when we turn from platform Spiritualism and look into the communications received through mediums in private consultations or occupy ourselves with the reams and reams of automatic script which has accumulated during these eighty years, do we find things very much better? I have not for my own part the least doubt that there are honest mediums, and that they may be met with even among the ranks of those who make a livelihood out of their gift. Mrs. Piper in America, whose supernormal powers brought conviction to such sceptically minded investigators as Dr. Richard Hodgson and Professor William James, the psychologist, or again Mrs. Osborne Leonard in England, who has been consulted by scores of honourable people whose scientific standing is hardly less distinguished than that of Sir Oliver Lodge, are both of them professional mediums. In both cases subtle tests have been devised and detective agencies employed to discover whether the strange knowledge they evince, in their trance condition, of facts which they could not have learned by reading or by common report, had been acquired by some subtle back-stairs method. No suspicious circumstance has been brought to light in either case by these enquiries. On the contrary, the mystery has only deepened, and I have heard of no one, however sceptically inclined, who, having studied the evidence with care, doubts the good faith of the two psychics just mentioned. Among modern representatives of the science of divination, they stand for the high-water mark not only in personal character, but in the quality of their gift.

Nevertheless if anyone sets himself to peruse, just as they

were given, the communications which have come to us through these exceptional channels, he will often find the task inexpressibly tedious and unprofitable. There may be grains of gold here and there, but the amount of pure rubbish is exasperating beyond description. Whether the "Imperator" who controlled Stainton Moses is to be identified with the "Imperator" who controlled Mrs. Piper can only be matter of conjecture. In the former case Imperator expressly claimed to be the prophet Malachias.

"Know then [so Stainton Moses' script records] that I was incarnated upon your earth in those terrible days of desolation which succeeded the return of God's people from the land of Persia under Nehemiah. . . . In those days I lived and spake with human utterance the prophetic message, even as now I convey through you a fuller and clearer knowledge of the same God whom I then revealed. When Nehemiah stood forth to guide the people and to bring them back to God, I, Malachias, the Angel of Jehovah, the Messenger of God as I was called, stood by his side and prophesied of God's judgments."⁵

The communication, which runs on to much greater lengths, is signed "Imperator S.D." Mrs. Piper's Imperator is not less sententious or less sanctimonious, but never by any chance does he impart information which would be of value or give utterance to a thought which one would wish to remember. When questions are put to him he seems to resent any imputation of ignorance, but on the other hand talks against time without ever coming to the point. Here is an extract from Imperator's discourses on Melchisedek — communications which were apparently expected to clear up the forgotten history of the people of Israel:

"We must give thee light in brief. There is so much to relate to thee, my friend, that the light would never last long enough for us to give thee a full detailed account of the lives and workings of the mediums of God, never friend. Could we have taken up this light in its

⁵See Trethewy, *The Controls of Stainton Moses*, p. 25.

earlier stages we could have given thee this information but it is too far gone for this. So I would ask thee to hasten and get all the information concerning them, viz., the messengers of God. There is not time enough for details in full. So we must give thee all we can."

To this, Hodgson, the sitter, replies:

"I shall be glad if you will give the outline in as brief a form as you think desirable."⁶

Nevertheless he obtains no definite statement of any kind — nothing that could not have been supplied by any well-informed child in a Sunday school. A new control, "George Pelham," then appears and Hodgson makes mild complaint of Imperator's vagueness. Pelham assures the sitter that Imperator is "very high" and near the sight of God. The dialogue continues thus:

"Hodgson. I have asked him about the course of spirit teaching from the beginning on Jewish lines.

"Pelham. Well, he knows if anyone does.

"Hodgson. Exactly. He seems to know, but he does not convey it to me in the straight way in which I would convey it to you in a brief outline history. . . . It is very general as he gives it."

I may add that the communications purporting to emanate from such well-known personage as George Eliot through Mrs. Piper's mediumship are equally feeble and unconvincing.

Again, in the case of Mrs. Leonard, a great deal of the information which her control, "Feda," communicates seems to have little serious value. It was natural enough that many passages in Sir Oliver Lodge's book, *Raymond* recording the supposed happenings on the other side of the veil should be ridiculed and burlesqued. I do not believe that Sir Oliver himself regarded them as in any sense veridical, though he

⁶*Proceedings of S.P.R.*, xxviii, 481. *Light*, in spiritualist phraseology, is the stored-up psychic force which renders such communications possible and which like the electricity in an accumulator is liable to be rapidly exhausted.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 484.

considered it a duty to record such utterances conscientiously, even when fully aware that the mention of cigars, whisky and soda, etc., were bound to create a prejudice in the minds of a great proportion of his readers. He speaks more than once rather impatiently of "Feda talk," and emphasizes the truth that "sophistication" is sure to occur in these messages owing to their dependence upon so many mental factors, the minds, that is, of the communicators, the control, the medium, and the sitter. None the less the trivialities are there, and cannot be explained away. No one could regard the revelations made through Mrs. Leonard or her ordinary control as a source of inspiration. Moreover, as Mrs. W. H. Salter has observed in her discerning "Report on Sittings with Mrs. Leonard," "there can be little doubt that when Feda is at a loss, when for one reason or another she is not able to get any genuine impressions of a supernormal character, sooner than remain silent, she resorts to what may be termed her 'stock in trade' and pads freely."⁸

But if this is the case with the very elect, with such highly gifted psychics as Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Leonard, to whom all the spiritualistic public pays honour, what are we to expect of the crowds of lesser automatists whose supposed intercourse with their departed friends somehow finds publishers and floods the world with messages from the unseen. Few who have not looked into the subject can form any idea of the dimensions which this literature is assuming. In a little bibliography which appeared in *The Spiritual Magazine* as far back as 1867, I find the enumeration of some sixty-five printed works "claiming to have been given by direct spiritual influence through human mediumship," and this list was certainly not exhaustive. It does not, for example, include any of the more general treatises, such as those of Ballou, Edmonds, and Hare, which incorporate long spirit com-

⁸*Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, Vol. XXXII, p. 8.

munications merely as a subordinate part of their contents. None the less, some of these last are among the best attested and most interesting we possess. Take, for example, the work of the Rev. Adin Balou (1852), several times previously mentioned, which was one of the very earliest and perhaps quite the sanest of the books written to expound the doctrine of communication with the spirit world. Like Sir Oliver Lodge, and like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Mr. Ballou, a much respected Universalist Minister in Massachusetts, had lost a beloved son, who died in the flower of his age (February 8, 1852). A lady, who was seemingly not a paid medium but a friend of the family, a person, says Mr. Ballou, "who, I firmly believe, is morally incapable of intending to deceive and who declares she is unconscious of originating the ideas or of any volition to express them in writing" was "impressed to write these things out with her hand by an intelligence distinct from and superior to her own." After some preliminary communications from the other side, questions were asked and replies given. On February 19 of that year we have such answers as the following:

Q. Do you seem to be at a considerable distance from the earth and how does it appear to you?

A. At quite a distance; we see all the earths as well as the one you inhabit. They do not look as stars or planets do to you. They are indeed worlds like yours and we see them as such.

Q. Have you anything analogous to sleep or refreshment in your state?

A. Our rest is change. Our food is spiritual. Knowledge is food. Spirits more enlightened might explain more than I am now able to do.

Q. Have you dwellings, etc.?

A. We are in open space; our dwelling is immensity.

Q. Concerning appearances in the spirit world?

A. Things analogous to *nature*, but not to art, we have.

This is very definite, but it is in flat contradiction with the account furnished from equally authentic sources to the Rev.

G. Vale Owen, honoured by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as both a seer and a saint. In Vale Owen's script we find a great deal of information about houses. For example:

"Our home is beautifully appointed within and without. Within are baths and a music-room and apparatus to aid in registering our work. It is a very large place.

"I call it a house, but it is really a series of houses, each allotted to a certain class of work and progressive as a series. We pass from one to another as we learn all we can from any particular house. But it is all so wonderful that people would neither understand nor believe; so I will tell you of simpler things."

Or again we are told regarding the first impressions of one who has just passed over:

"Also, he would see all around him dwellings and buildings of various kinds, some of which I have described. But those buildings would not be merely houses and workplaces and colleges to him. From each structure he would read not its character so much as the character of those who built it and those who inhabit it.

"Permanent they are, but not of the same dull permanency as those of earth. They can be developed and modified and adapted, in colour, shape, and material, according as the need should require."

No doubt, Sir Oliver Lodge's son Raymond also speaks of houses and streets, and some of the documents contained in the Edmonds and Dexter volumes are exceedingly precise in their details. Take this account of a lady's house in the spirit land:

"It was in extent a suburban villa with the character of a cottage ornée. It was of an oriental style of architecture, somewhat between Saracenic and florid Gothic. I was shown the interior. . . . The arrangement of the furniture was similar to that in first-class houses here. . . . My sister showed me her dresses. . . . I was then shown her husband's wardrobe. I found that it did not differ in any essential particular from clothing worn by gentlemen here. I noticed one vest that pleased me. It was of the form now worn here — a double breaster. It was of velvet, beautifully figured, black and purple."⁹

⁹Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, Vol. II, pp. 541-42 (Tenth ed., 1855).

This suburban villa in an oriental style "somewhat between Saracenic and florid Gothic" leaves us a little bewildered, but I must own my incompetence to offer any opinions upon questions of taste in architecture, upholstery, or costume. All the same, one cannot help wondering whether the fashions followed by the more aristocratic class of spirits in the "Summerland" are borrowed from the prevailing mode in Paris or are dictated by abstract æsthetic principles.

Not less definite was the account which Dr. Robert Hare, Professor of Chemistry in the University of Pennsylvania, received from the spirit of his equally distinguished father. The script was obtained through an automatist, Mrs. Gourlay, but Dr. Hare, meticulous as regards the accuracy of such a priceless document, did not have it printed till he himself read it all to his father's spirit presence and had it confirmed by raps, paragraph by paragraph.

"The spirit world [so Senator Hare averred] lies between sixty and one hundred and twenty miles from the terrestrial surface, the whole intermediate space, including that immediately over the earth, the habitation of mortals, is divided into seven concentric regions called spheres.

"You will understand, then, that they are not shapeless chimeras, or mere projections of the mind, but absolute entities, as much so indeed as the planets of the solar system or the globe on which you now reside. They have latitudes and longitudes and atmospheres of peculiarly vital air, whose soft and balmy undulating currents produce a most pleasurable and invigorating effect. Their surfaces are diversified with an immense variety of the most picturesque landscapes, with lofty mountain ranges, valleys, rivers, lakes, forests and the internal correspondence of all the higher phenomena of earth. The trees and shrubbery, crowned with exquisitely beautiful foliage and flowers of every colour and variety, send forth their graceful emanations."¹⁰

There are pages and pages of this kind of description, very

¹⁰Dr. Hare, *Experimental Investigations, etc.*, Fourth Edition (New York: 1856), p. 87.

much akin to the Rev. Vale Owen's in the general effect of tedious platitude, but differing in all the more precise details. Dr. Hare had the advantage of obtaining communications from his father, sister, and two of his children. This spirit family do not seem to have worn waistcoats or "double breasted" of velvet. They were clothed "in flowing vestments of effulgent nature." This "raiment being composed of phosphorescent principles," was seen by clairvoyants on earth "in different degrees of brightness from a dusky hue to the most intensely brilliant light."

Judge Edmonds, on the other hand, was not dependent on automatic writing alone. He had visions, in which he visited the spiritual abode of his deceased wife and went out for drives with her. He has printed a full account of the experience:

"The carriage was light and tasty, with a high seat for the driver, and one seat behind for two persons. It was painted yellow and on its panels was my seal! The harness was light and airy, and the horses were superb animals of the true Arabian breed, with long, sleek bodies, clean limbs and a springing motion to every step. They were well groomed, high spirited, and well broke, and of different colours, being matched rather for quality than looks. . . . And now how can I describe the scene through which we passed? It seemed almost an earthly one, but more sublimated, more refined, more beautiful and joyous and so free. . . . It was a beautiful landscape interspersed with cottages and gardens, etc., etc."¹¹

The automobile, we are led to infer, was at this date still as undreamed of in the spiritualist heaven as it was on earth. Have motor cars come in since, I wonder? At the moment I cannot recall any mention of them in such detailed description of life in the spheres as we find in *Raymond*, "Claude's book," or *We are here*. Also one cannot help asking who

¹¹Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, II, p. 163. (Edition 1855.)

lived in the "cottages" and who in the "stately mansions" described further on, one of which was "castellated and spacious, surrounded by a large park," and so forth. However, lest the idea of proprietorship should jar upon American democratic feeling, we are told:

"I observed that though some of the grounds were fenced by rows of trees and bushes, there were always openings left for a free passage in all directions and through all parts."

A further remark is suggestive of some of the details furnished by the Rev. Vale Owen:

"As I was returning [Judge Edmonds continues] I observed that the houses on either side of me were enveloped in different coloured lights — some red, some blue, some green, some orange, and the like, which, while it added immensely to the beauties of the scene, served to indicate the prevailing characteristics of the occupants."¹²

Judge Edmonds undoubtedly believed that all these things represented realities and that they were shown him in vision for a definite purpose. In an earlier vision a newly arrived inhabitant of heaven wanted to know why he (Edmonds) was not staying on with them. Thereupon the spirits explained: "That I was a mortal yet, and could not remain; that I came there to see that country that I might describe it to my fellow mortals, and had been drawn there by the strong affection of my wife and children."¹³

On rare occasions we have something in the way of episode. For example, the following incident recounted by Edmonds:

"My attention was attracted to a noise in the woods, and I saw a stag, with large horns branching out, running towards me at full speed, closely pursued by a large greyhound. It was an exciting scene and I asked myself, do they hunt here? But I soon saw that it was only sport between those animals. As they approached the bank of

¹²Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, II, p. 166 (Edition, 1855).

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 135.

the stream the stag stopped and turned round. The hound stopped also and began to gambol round the stag, apparently enticing him to chase in turn."

For the most part, however, the script or the communications obtained by the early mediums present nothing but countless pages of intolerably dreary platitude, and the same may be said of much that has been published in quite recent times, not certainly excepting the widely advertised relations concerning a future life which have been vouchsafed to the Rev. George Vale Owen. One is reminded of Mr. J. Arthur Hill's comments on the surprising fluency and incredible length with which trance controls will hold forth at spiritualist meetings. "The Secretary of the Spiritualists' National Union," he says, "once backed the late J. W. Colville to 'talk till this time next week, without intervals for meals,' yet with a dullness and inanity which would drive any but a very tolerant audience mad." Enquirers who will take the trouble to dip into almost any specimen of this type of literature from the days of Edmonds and Dexter to those of Mrs. Maria King, Cora Tappan, and now of Mrs. Meurig Morris, so recently famous in the Law Courts, will appreciate how little of exaggeration there is in Mr. Hill's cynicism. But, the most surprising feature about the attitude of convinced spiritualists towards these revelations is their readiness to ignore all contradictions involved. Hardly any writer of our times had a wider acquaintance with the phenomena and the literature of modern Spiritualism than the late Mr. J. H. Hyslop, formerly Professor of Logic and Ethics in Columbia University, afterwards secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research. In one of his books Professor Hyslop speaks as follows:

"But there is one more important objection or difficulty with which we have to deal: the contradiction in the messages descriptive of the future life. Though they speak of it as though it were the same phys-

ical world as that known to the senses, hardly any two writers or communicators represent it in the same way. One may tell us that spirits wear clothes, and another may modify this statement by saying that clothes are 'creations of thought.' One represents the dead as living in houses, and others deny that they do so, while still others mediate between these two extremes by making the houses products of thought or merely imaginary. Some tell us that we could not understand any statement about the spiritual world. All these contradictions imply either differences of opinion about the other life or the distortion of messages by the sub-consciousness of the medium, or perhaps both combined. In any case the statements are so different and apparently so contradictory that we cannot unreservedly trust any communication as correctly describing the nature of that life."

It must be remembered that Professor Hyslop favoured belief in the abstract possibility of communication, none the less he wrote:

"The contradictions are so numerous that it is hopeless to try to accept a superficial interpretation of the phenomena. One set of communicators — it makes no difference whether they are real or merely sub-conscious personalities — tells us that life in the spiritual world duplicates the physical life exactly, including food, dress, trade, art, 'cigar manufactories,' 'whisky sodas' and the whole gamut of objects and employments that we indulge in. Another set totally denies this, and tells us that we cannot conceive what the world is like. Some tell us that reincarnation is true; others deny it. Some teach orthodox religious views, others the opposite. Some believe in God, and some do not. Some claim to live in houses, and others do not. There is no sort of unity in such claims except on the theory that the after life, as Swedenborg maintained, is one of mental states. Everyone is free to think as he desires, and, if he can create his own world, as is constantly asserted in communications, that world will take as many forms as there are variant minds to create it, just as the subjective existences of living people differ."¹⁴

Fifty years earlier, an assailant of Spiritualism, Dr. William Potter, had raised just the same objection based on his study of the messages received from beyond the veil.

¹⁴J. H. Hyslop, *Contact with the Other World* (1919), pp. 359 and 364-65.

"Endless contradictions and absurdities are mixed up with the most exalted truths and the most profound philosophies. We are taught that God is a Person, that He is impersonal; that He is omnipotent, that He is governed by natural laws; that everything is God, that there is no God, that we are gods; We are taught that all are immortal. . . . We are taught that the spirit world is on earth, just above the air, beyond the milky way. That it has but one sphere, three spheres, six spheres, seven spheres, thirty-six spheres, an infinite number of spheres. That it is a real tangible world; that it is all the creation of the mind of the beholder, and appears different to different spirits. That it is inhabited by animals, birds, etc.; that they do not inhabit it. . . . That spirits converse by thought-reading, by oral language. That their music is the harmony of the soul; that it is instrumental and vocal. That they live single; in groups of nine. That they marry without having offspring; that they have offspring by mortals; that they have offspring by each other. That their marriage is temporary; that it is eternal. That spirits never live again in the flesh; that they do return and enter infant bodies and live many lives in the flesh."¹⁵

To this objection Mr. Epes Sargent in his book, *Planchette*, professes to make reply; but his answer does not take the form of denying that these contradictions exist. So feeble a rejoinder from a champion of the cause, who is by no means wanting in intelligence, can only serve to make the unanswerable character of the difficulty more patent.

And yet these acres of unverifiable and contradictory messages from the beyond, whether obtained through the voice of the medium or by automatic writing, are all that is permanently left us as the result of 80 years of supposed communication with the spirits of those who have "passed over." The books which contain them multiply incredibly; they may now literally be numbered by the hundred. This is pre-eminently the fruitage of Spiritualism; for who can weigh the amount of self-deception, and often of subsequent disil-

¹⁵Epes Sargent, *Planchette*, p. 291 (who quotes this from Dr. William Potter's pamphlet).

lusionment which is involved in the experiences of those who profess to have been consoled by being brought once more into contact with the dear friends they have lost? Is any one of them really satisfied? I doubt it, however much they may protest. What alone we are certain of and what may be proved to demonstration by anyone who takes a little pains over the enquiry, is, first, that the practise of Spiritualism from the beginning until the present day has been honey-combed with every species of trickery and fraud; and, secondly, that a vast literature has been called into existence of supposed revelations concerning the life to come, the greater part of which is patently nonsensical and self-contradictory, while none of it can offer any reliable evidence of the identity of the purporting communicator.

Something has already been said about the danger of personation, but I make no apology for referring again in these concluding pages to so vitally important an aspect of the subject. The well-known spiritualist, Mr. Stainton Moses, who is cited with approval alike by Sir Oliver Lodge and by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, has reiterated almost *ad nauseam* the most emphatic warnings against the danger we are speaking of. In his essay entitled, "The Intelligent Operator at the Other End of the Line," this writer devotes much space to discussing the question of communication and the reasons for distrusting the identity of those who purport to be sending messages so far, also, as regards the causes of this deception, he asks the following questions in a way that evidently betrays his own leaning to an affirmative answer:

"Is it that there are in the world of spirit, as with us, those who delight to strut in borrowed plumes, and to pass themselves off for something great and good, being but sorry stuff after all? Can spirits, being, as we know, able to obtain access to sources of human information, get up their facts and give such travesty of them as they can remember; reckoning, not without some show of reason, on the

credulity which will accept any plausible story, or on their power to psychologise the investigator, or so to mix up fancy, frauds and fact as to bewilder and perplex him?"¹⁶

A great deal more to a similar effect might be added from the same authority. He tells us that at one time he "came to doubt the identity of all communicating spirits." He represents his most trusted guide in the other world as repeatedly warning him against the danger of personation, and on one occasion after he had long, apparently, been in a state of perplexity, Mr. Moses finally gets this information from his control: "We have ascertained that the spirit who falsely pretended to be working with us is a personating spirit, whose aim is to injure and retard our work."¹⁷ Further, the grounds upon which Mr. Moses eventually reassured himself seem to me, I must confess, very frail. He was persuaded, he tells us, that "no systematic course of imposture, such as the argument contemplates, would have been permitted by the controlling agency"; meaning, apparently, would have been permitted by the Almighty. At the same time he admits that he is unable to impart his own confidence to others. For himself, after reminding us of Tennyson's lines: "How pure in heart and sound in head," etc., he so prepares himself, we learn, that in his "hour's communion with the dead," he has the sense of rectitude which banishes fear of illusion. It is his own good conscience which:

"predisposes us to believe that we are not the victims of an organised system of cruel imposture, prolonged over a period of many years, and trifling with the most sacred subjects as well as with the tenderest feelings of the heart. The spirit that would so act, and yet maintain an air of sincerity, and even sublimity in tone, must surely be the very devil transformed into an angel of light."

Well, that is, of course, what most Catholic teachers, from

¹⁶Stainton Moses, *Spirit Identity* (Ed. 1902), pp. 41-42.

¹⁷*Spirit Teachings* (Ed. 1918), p. 230.

the Fathers of the early centuries downward, do precisely say that it is. At the same time I do not, for my own part, see or maintain that we are in all cases constrained to accept that view. There are other intelligences in the great beyond, for example the souls of the unbaptised, about whose activities we know very little. Their freakish and deceptive communications might even be meant in a friendly spirit, and might be intended to give stimulating, if fallacious, comfort to those in sorrow. What we do clearly know is that the voice of Scripture and of the Church in all ages has forbidden any attempt to communicate with the dead through unauthorised channels. We further know that the employment of mediums is a procedure rife with endless possibilities of fraud and self-deception, while the very atmosphere of the séance room is repellent to the healthier instincts of sane and industrious mankind. Those who neglect these warnings, cannot complain if they fall victims to the guile of personating spirits more skilful and persistent in simulation than the enquirer can hope to be in penetrating their disguise. In this game of deception there may be some bunglers on the other side who are easily found out, but why should we suppose them all to be bunglers?

APPENDIX

PRELIMINARY NOTE

The article here reprinted first saw the light a very long time ago in the pages of *The Month* (August, 1893). It was signed only with the initials A.E.W., and for a number of years I tried in vain to discover the writer's name. No one could give me any information, and when I sent the printed text to the editor of this series, along with my own manuscript, I had not yet been able to arrive at any solution. Curiously enough, however, I happened shortly afterwards to get into correspondence over some psychic puzzle with my friend Father Benedict Zimmerman, O.D.C., the well-known and very learned expert in Carmelite history and mysticism. A casual remark of his disclosed the circumstance that he had read the article in question when it first appeared, and that he knew the writer well. She had, in fact, been a penitent of his for some years before her death; he had visited her almost daily during her last illness, and celebrated the Requiem Mass at her funeral before she was carried to the grave.

He has told me that she was a Mrs. Whitehead, the daughter of a clergyman named Lysons. An uncle of hers, Sir Daniel Lysons, K.C.B., was a very distinguished British general who won fame in the Crimean War and was for a long period "Constable" of the Tower of London. Mrs. Whitehead, it appears, had many curious psychic experiences after, as well as before, her conversion. Tribulations also came to her in many forms, but she remained to the end a most sin-

cere and edifying Catholic, dying, as Father Benedict finds noted in his diary, at 9 a.m., on May 7, 1902. He had visited her the evening before, but she was then unconscious. Her husband had been taken from her early in their married life. Her son, an only child, went to sea, and it chanced that she lost all trace of him. She was not then a Catholic, and tried to get information as to his whereabouts through the planchette or the "indicator." The answer purported to come from the boy himself, to the effect that he was very ill and in an institution, evidently a hospital, but otherwise quite happy, and was being visited by a very kind gentleman. Two or three months later, Mrs. Whitehead received a letter from an English or English-speaking Jesuit in some town on the west coast of South America (Father Benedict, to whom, of course, I am indebted for all this, does not remember the town or country) to the effect that he had attended the sailor boy at a hospital, that, at the lad's own request, he had received him into the Catholic Church, and that he had died a very pious death.

It was after this, apparently, that a mysterious influence, which the bereaved mother in some way connected in her mind with St. Catherine of Siena, began to teach her Catholic doctrine. Let me here emphasize Mrs. Whitehead's own statement in the article which follows. "I cannot of course," she wrote, "answer for the personal identity of my saintly instructress; neither is it possible to decide how much was actual and objective, and how much was subjective and imaginative in the communication."

One thing seems plain, that in holding intercourse, as she did, with what she believed to be a blessed spirit from the other world, Mrs. Whitehead was in good faith; she was not acting against her conscience. On the contrary, she was honestly seeking guidance; and it is also to be remembered that

even for Catholics in those days, there was as yet no *explicit* prohibition of automatic writing or the planchette. That only came in 1898. As Père Mainage, O.P., points out (in the volume he has edited, *Les Voies de Dieu*,¹ narrating the very similar conversion through automatic writing of Madame Mink Jullien), God has strange ways of revealing Himself to those who seek Him in singleness of heart.

In accord with Père Mainage, it has been my own contention throughout the present volume that man possesses mysterious faculties which have only begun to be studied systematically in recent times, and with regard to which we as yet understand very little. There is, for example, such a thing as telepathy between the living. Certain exceptional individuals, independently it seems of any religious purpose, are liable to receive strange intimations of the death or grievous peril of those at a distance. There are circumstances again in which men can walk through fire unscathed. The instances of second sight with prevision of the future cannot easily be all ascribed either to exceptional sanctity or to the operation of the Evil One, and many intelligent investigators are convinced that water-finding by the divining rod has an objective basis and is not merely a figment of the imagination. Finally, automatic writing and the seeing of visions in a crystal appear to be faculties which come to some people almost spontaneously but are withheld from the majority. All these powers are as yet but little understood, but we must recognise that the sphere of the unknown — of the occult, in other words — is precisely that in which the spirits of darkness most readily find opportunity for their evil activities. For this reason the Church may very wisely forbid her children to court danger by practises which may render them

¹It has been translated into English as *The Ways of God* (London: Burns and Oates).

easy victims to the wiles of their spiritual enemy. But is it, asks Père Mainage, beyond the bounds of probability that God should sometimes use these same ill-understood powers for the benefit of a soul whom He wishes to save, while leaving in their case no room for any sort of diabolical intervention? God is supremely merciful and we cannot be surprised if He should adapt His action to those conditions which give His grace the easiest means of approach to one who simply and honestly seeks to be guided.

That St. Catherine of Siena had anything to do with the instruction of Mrs. Whitehead can neither be affirmed nor denied. The saint would certainly not have revealed herself to one who sought her aid by disobeying the commands of lawful authority. But this was a very different case. On the other hand, no one will contest that the "voices" of St. Joan of Arc were in truth of heavenly origin. But was it really St. Margaret, as she believed, who among others spoke to her and guided her? About that there is no certainty. St. Margaret was venerated in the church of Domremy, but this St. Margaret is, so hagiographers tell us, one of the most mythical of saints. Let it suffice for us that God may convey His intimations to the soul through channels which He knows will safely bear His message, even though misinterpretation may possibly follow as to the manner in which the message has been delivered.

A CONVERT THROUGH SPIRITUALISM

An article from *The Month* for August, 1893.

The story of each "pilgrim's progress," from that special "house upon the sand," wherein he happened to be born, or which he had constructed for himself, towards the House, built by the Living God upon a rock, has its own individual

interest, not only as a human document, but even more, as being a record of the dealings of God with that particular soul.

Yet there has been a certain underlying similarity, beneath wide differences of character and circumstance, in most accounts of the conversions of educated English men and women, since the time of the Oxford movement, arising from the fact that such converts have been, for the most part, earnest and devout Anglicans of one type or another. Among such, with whatever divergencies and idiosyncrasies, a common if vague idea of the existence of a right road, could it but be discovered, has been already present to their minds, and, as many sought it simultaneously, they found cheer and comfort by the way. But the brief history now to be related, is that of one who groped on, alone beneath the stars, through strange untrodden paths, out of the beaten track; yet, who was wonderfully led into God's Church; now, many years ago.

For me, as for one of old, the *fiat* had gone forth: "Behold I take from thee the desire of thy eyes with a stroke"; and I was alone, and desolate. My short marriage had been perfect in its love and sympathy, and life without my husband seemed unendurable; but a little child was left me, and for his sake I resisted the longing to turn my face to the wall and die.

I had not ceased to believe in "God, the Father Almighty," nor in "the life everlasting"; but these two articles may be said to have comprised my creed. Everything else had become to me more or less shadowy and uncertain.

I had been brought up in the Church of England, but I had never felt any loyalty or allegiance to her, or attraction toward any section of Anglican opinion, and all assumption of authority by either party roused in me indignation and re-

bellion. I felt it illogical, that religious submission should be demanded by any Protestant institution, the fundamental basis of Protestantism being the right of private judgment in matters of faith. I had always been conscious of a sort of distant awe and reverence for the great Church of Rome, though I knew nothing of her doctrines; moreover, her poetry and art appealed to my love of the beautiful; but I shrank from her claim to authority, having an intense dread of dogmatism and domination, and regarding truth entirely from a subjective point of view.

In miracles, visions, and apparitions, whether of angels, or of the departed, I had sorrowfully ceased to believe; because it appeared to me undoubted, that God being always the same God, and His laws the same and changeless, that which had happened could happen again, and in all probability would do so; therefore, being accustomed to hear it asserted, or taken for granted that since Apostolic times the supernatural had ceased to influence this earth, I came to regard Biblical statements of such occurrences as mythical embodiments of some moral or spiritual lesson; and belief in their actuality, as the superstition of simpler ages.

Nevertheless, I was in good faith, and was ready and anxious to follow any gleam of light, at any cost, and, so light was sent me, in what would seem an exceptional manner, although I am by no means a solitary instance of conversion to the Church through what is called "Spiritualism."

The main difference between all that is included under that comprehensive title, and the possibilities of communication between the living and the dead, believed in by Catholics, consists, so far as I apprehend the question, chiefly in this: that in what goes by the name of "Spiritualism," a certain conscious initiative is taken on the human side, with direct intent to induce manifestations from beings out of the

flesh, whereas, all intercourse between the seen and the unseen, in Catholic records, has been apparently, and certainly so far as the consciousness of the recipient extended, commenced and carried out, solely and entirely, from the invisible world, without his consent or desire. Upon the hypothesis of the *unconscious* fulfilment of conditions, I will not enter now. The character of such communications has necessarily been much more elevated. I am referring here to visits from and words spoken by souls in purgatory, for it is hardly necessary to say that Divine revelations to the saints, visions and apparitions of our Blessed Lady, or of Angels, stand on a much more exalted footing, and it is not to such that I venture to make allusion. It has always been recognized by Catholic writers, that mysticism has its diabolic side, its natural side, and its divine side, and that it is not easy to distinguish at once between these; or to be quite sure where one merges into, or is superseded by another. Immense caution has consequently been recommended by theologians, and has been practised by such Catholics as in different ages have been led through strange experiences. Even with the safeguards of true doctrine, and true sacraments, intercourse with the unseen has always been attended with considerable danger, on account of the subtlety of evil spirits, for, as St. Paul tells us, "Satan transformeth himself into an angel of light."

In the preternaturalism of the present day, outside the Church, there are many shades and grades and degrees and differences, included under the general name of "Spiritualism"; but I think it scarcely possible to overstate, or to exaggerate, its many and fearful perils. Such only as have penetrated deeply into its arcana, can form any, even approximate, idea of these. That gifted and clever, but unhappily deluded man, Lawrence Oliphant, speaks most emphatically of the risks incurred by those attending séances, and this quite apart

from other objections that might be urged by a Catholic as to Scriptural or ecclesiastical prohibitions.

To return to my own history. Not very long after my husband died, when I was hungering and thirsting for some sign of his presence, for some evidence that he still lived and loved me, I began to hear Spiritualism discussed, and I read eagerly and listened earnestly, so as to obtain all the information I could. I gathered from sincere and enlightened enquirers into the subject, that with all its deep and absorbing interest, there was always much uncertainty. Mediums, they said, were occasionally deceptive, but were more often themselves deceived; conditions not being as yet well understood, they were not reliable, many factors combining to make up what is called Spiritualism, among these thought reading, the dual action of the brain, and the unconscious influence of mind upon mind, whether in the circle or at a distance; each and all causing additional complications; and finally, the identity of the spirits communicating, was not to be easily verified, owing partly to the imperfection of processes, and partly to the audacity and falsehoods of evil spirits, who did not hesitate to take any names, and to pass themselves off as those with whom intercourse was desired. A frame of mind as patient and as passive as might be possible was therefore advised. I was given to understand that the need for a medium arose from the fact that the spirits could only exert their influence and action in and through a magnetic atmosphere, rarer and finer than the palpable one with which we are surrounded, and in which we breathe and live; and that mediums were simply persons possessing an unusually large amount of this force, a subtle and etherialized form of electricity, the spirits being able to collect from such persons sufficient power to aid them to come into contact with other human beings not thus gifted.

I became most anxious to find some medium, but had no

idea how to accomplish it, when an unexpected way was opened to me under very pleasant and desirable circumstances. A lady I knew told me she would like to introduce me to an old friend of hers, who, together with her daughter, was investigating Spiritualism in a very serious and religious manner. Accordingly, the introduction was effected, and the old lady kindly begged me to go and pay them a visit.

Mrs. R. (as I will call her) and her daughter Margaret had been originally Unitarians, as was our mutual friend and introducer, but at the time I made their acquaintance they were Christian dissenters, the spirits having declared to them the Divinity of our Lord.

I may here add, that Margaret eventually became a Catholic under the same influences which helped me to become one, although some time after my reception, and she has remained a thoroughly good and faithful child of the Church for now more than twelve years, having baptised her mother on her deathbed, and instructed many in the Faith. I make a point of mentioning this, because I have seen it stated, not only that spiritualists seldom become Catholics (which is probably true, though I think many would do so if they could be brought under Catholic influences), but that in the rare instances of apparent conversion, they have always gone back. I can only say that this is distinctly contradicted by facts within my own knowledge.

The séances held at Mrs. R.'s house were entirely private, and were attended by no professional medium, but several of the *habitués* possessed considerable magnetic force, which had been developed and increased by these frequent meetings. There was, in particular, a certain Mr. B., a member of the congregation to which my friends belonged, who had very extraordinary powers. He used to fall into a sort of trance, appearing like one dead, pale and livid, and then

would suddenly start up, gazing straight before him into space, with eyes that had in them no speculation, and would begin to speak in voices quite other than and distinct from his own, voices of men, of women, and of children, voices refined and cultured, and voices coarse and rough, he being all the time entirely unconscious of what was being spoken through him. Occasionally a voice would be recognized by friends of the departed individual from whom it professed to emanate, but often the voices were those of strangers, coming for the most part to implore prayers. I afterwards saw this "trance mediumship," as it is called, in several other instances, especially in that of a German lady, now dead — an interesting person, of sensitive temperament and religious aspiration, who had come out of Calvinism through the teachings of her disembodied friends, and who was gradually learning Catholic doctrines. Her husband used to write down what she said in her trances; much, often, to her own surprise on reading what had been set down.

Mr. B. the mediumistic guest of Mrs. R. and her daughter, could also sometimes see and describe spirits in the room, and could see places and persons at a distance, in a crystal.

On the first evening that I joined their circle, he said to me, "I see a spirit standing near you, in the dress of a priest. He says he is a priest. He belongs to your family. His name is H—. He has been a long time in the other world. He wants you to pray for him. He takes a great interest in you." I, who yearned above all things for communication with my husband, was, although interested, somewhat disappointed, and exclaimed with some vexation, that I knew nothing of any such person, and that there were no priests in my family. "He says there were once priests belonging to it," Mr. B. replied, "and he affirms that he belongs to your family." Curiously enough, it was not until afterwards, when I had been

a Catholic perhaps about ten years, that I chanced upon some family documents mentioning a collateral ancestor, of the name given by Mr. B., who was the last abbot of a certain Cistercian monastery in the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII.² A voice, certainly like that of my husband, spoke words of comfort to me later on that evening, through Mr. B.'s mediumship, which gave me consolation for the moment, but I could have no possible certainty of identity. Messages purporting to come from him were also written during my visit, through the hands of another guest of my hostess—one who was then, and still is, a good religious person, but who has never come into the Church. Margaret and I also received messages said to be from my husband, and also from many spirits, spelt out on what was called an "indicator," upon which we used to place our hands. Some of these messages were beautiful, explanatory, and helpful, but occasionally deceptions were attempted. We were bidden always to make the sign of the cross before entering into these communications, and to request any spirit, wishing to spell a message, to move the indicator in the form of a cross, as they said that evil spirits were unable to make the holy sign. We found this a great protection, but still I think we were sometimes deluded, unless it might have been, that we perhaps did not always accurately obtain a message as it was intended.

I recollect particularly, that on one occasion, when a friend of mine and I had our hands on the indicator, a spirit endeavoured to communicate with me which professed to be that of my husband. This, for several reasons I doubted, and, in accordance with the directions we had received, we both

²I may add, that I am the first Catholic in my family since the Reformation. Supposing the communication to have been genuine, this might account for the interest expressed.

made the sign of the cross in order to test the character of the spirit. Yet it still persisted in the assertion. Still dubious of the identity, and conscious of a distressing influence, I said: "I charge you to speak the truth in the name of the Blessed Trinity." Instantly the movement of the indicator ceased, though our hands remained upon it. After some minutes it began again to spell, though very slowly, and, as it were, painfully: "I am one of the unhappy beings whom you would call a devil." At that time I was not a Catholic and did not know that for such there could be no redemption, so I replied: "You will always be miserable if you try to deceive." "I like to deceive people," was the answer. "But," I said, "You will be always unhappy in so doing." "Are you yourself saved from misery?" asked the evil Spirit. "I hope I am saved," I rejoined, "from such misery as yours." Then the spirit spelt out, "Ha! ha! ha!" and both my friend and I had a gruesome impression as of the mocking laughter of a fiend.

In this instance, even the sign of the cross was insufficient to compel the truth; but, adjuration in the name of the Blessed Trinity prevailed, as it has in many similar cases. I think St. Teresa says she found that some evil spirits were wicked enough to resist the cross. If St. Teresa, who was a great saint, was exposed to attempts of the devil to deceive her, which were intermingled with the revelations she received from Almighty God and the messengers of heaven, how much more will this be the case with those who are not saints and who are stumbling alone in the darkness of error, even though they may be in good faith and honestly searching after truth. I say nothing of those who hold these communications with the unseen world, not from any good motive, but out of morbid curiosity and with a half-guilty consciousness of the "influence" to which they are subject, being no heaven-sent messenger. They must expect to be made

the sport of the malicious spirits whose delight is to deceive, and who will avail themselves of their superior powers and knowledge to impart to them just that amount of information that will earn their confidence, in order that they may the more completely lead them astray respecting all that concerns their highest interest and the welfare of their souls.

All the séances at Mrs. R.'s were begun by prayer and the singing of hymns, by the special desire of the spirits present. They invariably begged to be prayed for, as did nearly always all the spirits with whom I was brought into contact during my investigations, in other places, and through other mediums. This fact struck me very much, and was, indeed, the first ray of light which flashed across my path. "Is not this the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory and of prayer for the dead?" I asked of a spirit. "Yes, and it is true," was the reply. The spirits literally beset us with entreaties for prayers. Some of them appeared very unhappy, greatly lamenting the selfish and useless or sinful lives they had led upon earth, and which they were now expiating. "Are you in heaven?" we would sometimes enquire of one whose words were more hopeful, and whose influence was sweet and peaceful. "Oh, no, not yet — but I soon shall be, if you will pray," was once the answer.

And so we prayed for the dead for the first time in our lives! Gradually many other Catholic truths were taught to Margaret and to me, spelt out by the indicator, but we were so ignorant of the doctrines that we did not always understand them, or recognize their full import at the time, though we began to wonder whether, as the Church of Rome was apparently considerably right, it might not be actually possible that she should be right in a good deal more. And what if she should be altogether right, and be the one true teacher!

I have heard that Mr. B. also became a Catholic eventually, but as my friends, the R.'s, lost sight of him when he left their neighbourhood, I am not sure of the fact.

Another old friend, at present a professed nun, who has been a Catholic more than twenty years, often joined me in my enquiries into Spiritualism at the period of which I am writing, chiefly by putting her hand with mine on the indicator to obtain the spelling of messages. Quite recently I paid her a visit at her convent, and, as we were talking over the "Auld Lang Syne," before the conversion of either of us, and wondering at our dreads and difficulties in those now dim and distant days, she recalled to my mind an incident that had escaped my memory (though I now remember it perfectly), as to a communication we had received, in reply to a question of hers as to whether the Church of England was preferable to other forms of religion, as she believed it then to be, meaning, of course, to Protestant sects, the Catholic Church being entirely outside her region of thought. "All these Churches fall short of the ideal," was the reply; "the Roman Catholic Church is the true religion." Upon this, my friend immediately exclaimed: "Now, I know that this is not a reliable message!" Yet she says she never forgot this testimony, and considers that it indirectly helped in her conversion.

I never had much medium-power myself, except with the indicator, which used to spell very rapidly under my hands; and I had also what my friends called "an impressional gift," consisting in a strange, sudden, inward apprehension of some Catholic dogma, quite new and unknown to me, sometimes with, and sometimes without, words interiorly spoken. I mention this because it is connected with a remarkable incident which considerably aided my conversion.

On leaving the R.'s, I went to London on a visit, and saw

a great deal of Spiritualism, of all kinds, some of which was decidedly undesirable, and dangerous even from the point of view of a non-Catholic; but I was now determined to go fully and thoroughly into the subject. I also met and became intimately acquainted with some of the most enlightened and intellectual leaders of the movement, who were in reality rather mystics of the school of Böhmen, Jung, Stilling, Oberlin, and others, than ordinary spiritualists. By one of these earnest and thoughtful persons, I was lent an old Italian *Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, which took a great hold upon me, so much so, that I began to invoke her, asking of her instruction as well as intercession. And from this time I came gradually to see more clearly, and to accept Catholic doctrine in a way very wonderful, considering that I had never seen a priest, or read any dogmatic Catholic book, or spoken to any Catholic in the flesh.

One day I went to a séance with some friends, two of whom were High Church clergymen, at the house of a well-known medium. Answers to enquiries were spelt out by raps on the table, floor, and, indeed, all over the room. Questions having been asked on theological matters by the two clergymen, especially concerning the Real Presence, and some confusion in the answers having arisen, I said, "May I tell you what has been told to me?" As I repeated what had been given me by "impression," I was accompanied by a perfect chorus of raps. "Is she right?" asked one of the clergymen. "Yes, yes, yes," from all parts of the room. "How does she know this?" "Because a very high spirit, called Catherine, is teaching her." "Who is this Catherine?" said one of my friends to me. I replied, "I have been reading the *Life of St. Catherine of Siena*." "Yes, yes, yes," came again from the invisible chorus. The impressional message received by me concerning transubstantiation was, as I afterwards found

when more fully instructed, entirely in accordance with Catholic doctrine. I cannot, of course, answer for the personal identity of my saintly instructress, neither is it possible to decide how much was actual and objective, and how much subjective and imaginative, in the communication, nor have I the least idea who constituted the consenting chorus. I simply chronicle the circumstances.

From this time I began to go to Mass, and left off attending Anglican services, but I knew no Catholics, and had not the remotest idea of how to put myself in communication with a priest. I have often since heard priests say, that it is quite easy for Protestants to go and see them, if they wish for instruction; and so, literally speaking, it certainly is, but I think they hardly realize the unseen barriers of hesitation, uncertainty, and general difficulty which stand between an ordinary Protestant and a Roman Catholic priest, whom prejudice and tradition have represented as a very awful personage. I was, however, received into the Church, about six months after this episode, by a very experienced and remarkable priest, now dead, to whom I was made known by an American lady, herself a convert to Catholicism through the teachings of the spirits, a friend of the person who lent me the *Life of St. Catherine*. Her occult experiences far transcend mine in interest, and she came into the Church in a much more marvellous manner. She died a few years ago, after receiving the sacraments, an undoubted instance of the perseverance of a former spiritualist. I should like to relate many of the wonderful things she told me about her conversion, but space fails, so I will only say in passing that it would seem to have been chiefly the work of Jesuit and Franciscan martyrs, who appeared to her and taught her, she being utterly ignorant not only of the Catholic religion, but of any form of Christianity, though very desirous of truth at any

price, and from whatever quarter. Her husband, and some friends, impressed by these extraordinary manifestations, followed in her footsteps, and were also received in America — I believe by a Jesuit Father.³

I have only been able, in this sketch, to furnish a few broad outlines of strange facts, which to some may seem startling, but which I hold to be less unusual than is ordinarily supposed, for God is very good to souls who seek Him.

A.E.W.

³As the reader can hardly fail to surmise, this American lady was undoubtedly no other than Mrs. Mary S. Gove Nichols, the wife of Dr. T. L. Nichols, whose story has been told in Chapter III. I have some reason to think that "the very experienced and remarkable priest," to whom Mrs. Whitehead was introduced and by whom she was received into the Church was Father John Dobree Dalgairns, of the London Oratory, a conspicuous figure in the Oxford Movement. Like Cardinal Manning and W. G. Ward, Father Dalgairns was an active member of the Metaphysical Society in which these Catholics met and debated amicably the profoundest questions of religion and philosophy with Huxley, Henry Sidgwick, Frederic Harrison, Tennyson, Ruskin, Dr. Martineau, Tyndall, Shadworth Hodgson, R. H. Hutton and many others equally eminent in the world of letters. See the account given by Mr. Wilfrid Ward in Chapter XII of his book *William George Ward and the Catholic Revival*. On page 310 of that work, we may read how Dr. James Martineau, the famous Unitarian divine, wrote in a private letter: "for myself I can say that if I had gained nothing from the Metaphysical Society but the impression of Father Dalgairns's personality, I should have been forever grateful to it." H. T.

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