

THE TRUTH ABOUT SPIRITUALISM

By
HAROLD ANSON

Master of the Temple

Author of : *Looking Forward; A Practical Faith;*
Thinking Aloud, etc.

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FOREWORD

THIS little book has been written at the request of the late Canon Storr, who hoped that it might be useful to the members of the Liberal Evangelical Movement, and Dr. Tissington Tatlow, who felt that something of the kind was desired by students. Neither of these two is in any way responsible for the opinions expressed therein, but it would not have been written but for their encouragement.

As a member of the Archbishop's Committee on Spiritualism which met in my house, I learnt much both from my colleagues and from the witnesses whom we examined, but the opinions which I have expressed are entirely my own.

My object has been to offer to those who are not able to give time to more adequate study of the subject some idea of the present extent of our knowledge. I want also to impress upon professing Christians the importance of not pouring scorn upon evidences and experiences which are in great part similar to those upon which the events which formed the foundation of the primitive gospel rest, and which must always form the core of our Christian hope and trust.

The time has not yet come, as I believe, when we

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can assess the value of psychical research in relation to our general view of life, but it is high time that the study of the evidence which it offers should be taken much more seriously both by Religion and Science, and that those who have evidence to offer should not be ignored or scoffed at as though that evidence were beneath the notice of serious men.

I hope that this little book may help to make for a more serious study of an important aspect of life.

H. A.

CHAPTER I

Introductory

THIS little book is definitely not intended for two classes of possible readers; for whom it will, as I presume, have no interest.

Of these the former is that of the convinced Spiritualists, who are so certain that communication with discarnate spirits is a matter of everyday occurrence, and that these phenomena are all that they claim to be, without qualification and beyond all doubt, that they resent all hesitation in accepting their conclusions as manifestly true, and beyond the reach of criticism.

The latter class is that of the dogmatic materialist, who denies *prima facie* that non-material appearances are possible, and would much prefer to deny all validity to the testimony of Moses and the prophets than to believe that it were possible that anyone should rise from the dead. "The attitude of the 'orthodox' man of science," says Dr. Walter Matthews, "is extraordinary. For the most part he ignores the existence of the evidence; when compelled to recognize it he writes it down as a tissue of error and deceit. Yet there are facts which appear

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to be well attested and which, if true, would throw a new light upon the nature of existence." I do not believe that anything which I could say would influence the belief of the hard-shell dogmatists of the scientific world, who, when even the ablest of their number record experiences of a supra-material order, shake their heads, and say sorrowfully that so-and-so is getting senile, or that he has lately lost his wife or child, and so has lost his critical faculty, or that he is known to be, in spite of his eminence in his own field, of a gullible character.

This book is, then, intended primarily for the Christian world, both for those who are convinced believers in the Resurrection of Christ, which is the central doctrine of primitive Christianity, and for those who, while they desire to be Christians, and even occupy prominent positions as office-bearers in the Christian society, yet feel constant doubt as to the validity of the evidence on which one of the chief dogmas of that faith is founded.

Christianity is a religion which offers to its followers the gift of eternal life, a life, that is, which is not a mere prolongation of our experience of time and space, or of those activities which are conditioned by our material organs of sense, but a life of union with the Power which brought us into being, an actual experience of that Love and Wisdom which is the completion of those "intimations of immortality" which we dimly discern now, and look forward to as the only satisfying goal of existence.

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Thus Christians rightly say that the desire for mere continuance of this life in another world is not a Christian desire. We cannot rightly desire a life which is not life in God, that is a life in which we become increasingly instruments of His purpose, and objects of His love. To desire to perpetuate for ever this present life is a vulgar wish. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." To be assured by Spiritualists that our friends are going on for ever "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" would not be good news, and would be rather a denial than an enhancement of anything which could be called the Christian hope.

Yet, while we remember all this, it is not unimportant to recollect that the first proclamation of the "Good News," the gospel of Christ, was not merely the statement that immortality is a true theoretical basis of life, but something very much more definite, and very much more challenging and provocative. The gospel, as it was first preached, was that Jesus had died, and was buried, and appeared again on "the third day," then that He was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve, then of more than five hundred brethren at once, many of whom were still alive, and last of all, and so far as its results were concerned, of most vital importance, He was seen by Paul, in a vision which revolutionized the course of the world's history. Christianity, that is, began with a definite, psychical, transcendental "miracle," with an appearance of the dead, buried, but risen

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Christ, a body materialized and dematerialized at will, visible to the eye, audible to the ear, tangible to the hands, a portent more startling and challenging than any recorded by psychical research in our own day.

This, and nothing less than this, formed the content of the first gospel, the gospel which led to the foundation of the Christian Church. This post-mortem appearance of a "dead" person, of a buried human body, of a body now able to pass in and out of a room with shut doors, this stupendous reversal of ordinary experience, and nothing less than this, is the basis on which the Church came into being. Paul preached "Jesus and the Resurrection." "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God should raise the dead?" "For the resurrection of the dead am I called in question this day." When Judas died, it was thought essential to elect a new apostle who was a witness of the resurrection.

Now we may well ask ourselves upon what evidence we hold this belief. The evidence, from a strictly critical point of view, is not overwhelmingly convincing.

Our records of this miracle, it may be pointed out to us, were written at least thirty years after the event, and some of them forty or fifty years after. The only first-hand witnesses are St. Paul and St. Peter. The earliest, St. Paul, makes no mention of any rising from the tomb. The accounts which have come down to us vary very considerably in detail. The earliest gospel account, that of St. Mark, records that the

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women who went to the tomb saw a young man clothed in a long white garment, sitting on the right hand of the tomb, and that they were frightened. St. Luke says that they saw two men in white garments, and they bowed down their faces to the earth. In the fourth gospel we read that Mary saw two angels, one at the head and one at the foot, where the body of Jesus had laid. St. Matthew tells us that many bodies of the saints rose from their graves and appeared to many, and that afterwards the women felt an earthquake, and an angel came down from heaven and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

It is interesting to notice how the account begins with the young man in white, and, with the lapse of a few years, perhaps twenty years, develops into the terrifying angel, "descending from heaven" with an earthquake, and with the addition of the multiple resurrection of the saints.

If this were a modern story, undergoing investigation by a committee of the Society for Psychical Research, it would be pointed out that (*a*) it is unfortunate that no detailed account was written down in the first place, (*b*) that there is no account of any kind for thirty years, (*c*) that such accounts as we have show a very clear tendency to add miraculous appendages to the earlier and simpler accounts. In fact, no modern account of an alleged

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supra-normal happening would be accepted to-day by any student of psychical research if it rested on no better authority than that of the resurrection of Jesus.

Why then do we believe it? Why do I myself believe it, as I most certainly do?

I believe that both those who accept, and those who deny, Christ's resurrection are influenced, far more than they usually suppose, by a preconception (by what is, in the strict sense of the word, a prejudice) as to the likelihood of such a story being true. To some people that story has in it so strong an intrinsic suitability that the relative paucity of the evidence is made up for by an intuitive certainty that such a thing *must* have happened. The evidence of St. Paul, the effect of that belief on his character and upon his work, disposes us to believe that which never could be demonstrated by such proofs as make disbelief impossible. So, in like manner, if we start with a strong prejudice against belief in any kind of life which could survive the dissolution of the body, we are not likely to find the story of Christ's resurrection one which will overcome our materialistic preconceptions.

It is indeed very evident that we should demand a very much less searching quality of evidence for an alleged happening which we regard as natural and probable than for one which we regard as exceedingly improbable. We should, on comparatively light evidence, believe anyone who told us that he had seen King George VI riding in Windsor

Park, but if anyone told us that he had seen Charles I riding in the Park with his head carried under his arm it would be difficult to think of any kind of evidence which would cause us to believe so improbable a story.

There are, however, not a few Christians, who have every wish to believe the Resurrection of Christ to be true, who find such a belief to be consonant with what they believe about God and man, and yet hesitate, or withhold their belief, because they cannot regard the evidence as sufficient to make them believe a story which they would on all grounds wish to believe. Their honesty makes them disbelievers. They feel that if life can transcend the death of the body in one case it ought to in others as well, and that if evidence for such a belief is possible in one case, evidence *ought* to be available that the Resurrection of Christ is not an exception to the general rule, but that He was "the first fruits of them that slept."

But the belief common in orthodox circles is that there is no evidence at all that men survive death: that though we are to believe that they do, we must believe it without any contemporary evidence. Some would even go so far as to say that it is desirable that there should be no evidence.

It is largely with such people in mind—and they are a very considerable number—that I should wish to put forward in a very simple form the accumulation of evidence for survival which (for many people)

goes so far to confirm the faith of the Church that there is a spiritual body which survives death and carries on with it into a world beyond time and space the experiences, whether good or bad, which the spirit has garnered in its passage through this terrestrial life.

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CHAPTER II

Modern Evidence for Survival

THE evidence for survival and for communication with the spirit world, with which I propose that we should here concern ourselves, is almost wholly modern. This does not imply that there is no evidence in previous centuries. The history of religion is full of such stories, and that in every generation saints and sinners alike saw visions and heard voices. But there was no encouragement for the development of psychical research, but very much the contrary. Joan of Arc was not by any means the only person to be burnt for confessing that she was guided by visions and voices from the other world. The evidence for "witchcraft" is very strong, and witches were very often only mediums who could not help the fact that they were clairvoyant and clairaudient, and had no one who could help them to control their gifts and direct them into the right channels.

The modern story of these phenomena begins with the cases of Home and Stainton Moses in the decade between 1865 and 1875.

Home was a remarkable medium whose case was

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carefully studied by Sir W. Crookes, F.R.S., by Lord Crawford and Lord Dunraven. He was indeed accused of fraud (notably by Robert Browning), but Mr. F. W. H. Myers and Sir William Barrett, who carefully investigated the whole case, were unable to find that this charge was substantiated. Home was able to bring messages, which could be afterwards verified, from deceased persons unknown to those taking part in the séance; he was able to make his body appear and disappear, and to float in the air; to materialize hands which did not belong to his ordinary body, and to hold red-hot coals without injuring his hand. Sir William Crookes was unable to persuade the Royal Society even to investigate these phenomena.

The further experiments of Sir William Crookes with the medium, Miss F. Cook, through whom an apparently distinct psychic personality, "Katie King," gradually was built up, so as to be capable of being photographed and touched, and whose body afterwards faded away, are difficult of belief, not because they are not well attested but merely because they seem to us so incredible. Sir William Crookes said: "It was a common thing for the seven or eight of us investigators to see Miss Cook and 'Katie' at the same time under the full blaze of the electric light." In 1916 Sir W. Crookes, at the end of his life, said: "I adhere to my published statements and have nothing to retract . . . they point to the existence of another order of human life continuous with this, and demonstrate the possibility

under certain circumstances of communication between this world and the next." (See *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. xxxi.)

The next notable case is that of the Rev. Stainton Moses, a clergyman of irreproachable character, well known in his day as a master of University College School, London. No one has ever suggested that he was not entirely honest and sincere. His case also was very carefully investigated by competent and critical authorities. Between 1873 and 1883 Mr. Moses received through "automatic writing" a very large number of messages purporting to come from exalted spirits in the other world of whom the principal one signed himself "Imperator." They were given in a handwriting unlike that of Mr. Moses himself, and while he busied himself in reading a book. They were accompanied by "miraculous" displays, and by messages from persons deceased, and unknown otherwise to Mr. Moses, which messages turned out to be true. These were, it was stated, only given as proofs. It is the "spirit teachings" to which value was primarily attached.

It is often urged against psychical messages that they are wholly frivolous and unedifying, and that it would be happier to believe in total extinction than to believe that persons we have loved could perpetuate such folly. This is, I think, quite true of a very large proportion of so-called spirit writings. But this could not be said of the "spirit teachings" given through Stainton Moses. We may agree or disagree with them. I doubt whether they have any

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very great value. I could never tell anyone that they have missed a great deal by not reading them. (The same could perhaps be said of almost all the sermons written in the last few centuries.) But these "teachings" are serious and weighty, and did revolutionize the beliefs of Mr. Moses himself, although he had previously rebelled violently against their purport. They may, indeed, be the outflow of Mr. Moses's own subconscious revolt against his conscious beliefs. That is a quite conceivable explanation, but it is not one which seems to satisfy all the conditions involved.

The messages themselves are dignified and serious. They profess, with a reiterated assurance, that their origin is from the other world, and there is nothing in their quality to suggest that this may not be the case, yet it is almost incapable of disproof that they might arise from some deeper and submerged level of Mr. Moses's own consciousness which was all the time in revolt against opinions which he held in his ordinary consciousness. How, indeed, are we ever to be sure that the work of any prophets who say that they are speaking by divine authority is not, in fact, merely the outcome of their own subconscious brooding upon the deeper aspects of life? If we were asked, for instance, how we know that the work of the second Isaiah comes from an inspired external source, we should, perhaps, answer that it is the quality of the utterance and not merely the belief of the prophet himself which causes us to believe that it has a divine authority.

Even in the highest work of prophets and of poets there is often an element which is inferior to the main bulk of the literary product. In, for instance, the poems of Wordsworth we find, in close juxtaposition, work of superhuman beauty and clarity and also other matter fatuous and banal. The problem of deciding whether the "spirit teachings" from "Imperator" are indeed from a source external to and superior to the mind of Mr. Moses is the same problem which we have to face in considering the inspiration of all prophets and poets alike. It has always to be remembered that those prophecies and poems which we count inspired, once formed part of a great mass of other prophecies and poems whose claim to inspiration was rejected because they sank to a much lower level. In all prophecy there is a great deal of dross and a very little gold, but the presence of the dross must not make us indifferent to the presence of the gold.

One of the chief sources of our knowledge of modern psychical phenomena is the Society for Psychical Research. This society was founded in Cambridge in 1882, the founders being Mr. Edmund Gurney, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, and Sir William Barrett. For the first few years the president was Professor Henry Sidgwick. He and his brilliant wife, who was a sister of A. J. Balfour, were singular in that they combined a scientific scepticism with sufficient imagination to be willing to investigate a science which was at that time generally regarded as beneath the consideration of serious people.

The Society undertook to investigate all those facts which lead us to consider the possibility of there being human faculties which transcend the normal, and lay open to us the possibilities of achieving knowledge beyond the scope of our material senses. It has been mainly through the work of this society that the faculty of telepathy, that is the power of entering into communication with other minds through non-material means, has now become generally accepted.

Let us consider now some of the means by which these faculties which are called extra-sensory are manifested. Among these faculties are clairvoyance, the faculty of seeing at a distance, clairaudience, the faculty of hearing at a distance; dowsing, the faculty of being able to discover the presence of water through sensitiveness of the muscles; automatic writing, the power of writing messages professing to come from an external source while the hand is moved without the will of the person to whom it belongs; mediumship, that is the power of falling into a trance in which the normal consciousness is lost, and in which the personality is apparently taken possession of by an external mind. The medium so entranced will show all the characteristics of another mind apparently having access to a much wider field of knowledge than in ordinary life, sometimes speaking foreign languages unknown to the medium, being able to read books and newspapers which they have never seen. Crystal gazing, the act of looking into a crystal glass, ball, or other

reflecting surface, and seeing images which profess to give information otherwise unobtainable; psychometry, that is the power of describing persons and their doings by holding in the hand some object belonging to them.

The S.P.R. has diligently studied these and other abnormal faculties for over sixty years. It does not profess to come to any corporate conclusion. Its members hold, and have always held, different theories as to the origin of these supra-normal faculties, and as to their value in the scheme of life. Many of the greatest men among them have come to the definite conclusion that these phenomena have given proof of survival and communication from the other world. Others have held, and still hold, that there is no scientific proof of survival, and that these faculties proceed merely from a deeper layer of ordinary personality.

Among the most remarkable of the past presidents of the S.P.R. are Professor Henry Sidgwick, Arthur Earl Balfour, Professor William James, Sir William Crookes, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, Professor Richet, Gerald Earl Balfour, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, Andrew Lang and Professor Bergson. The present Lord Balfour has said, "I have the assurance of Mrs. Sidgwick that upon the evidence before her she herself is a firm believer in survival, and in the reality of communication between the living and the dead. That statement still represents my own views." This statement made by the present Lord Balfour

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represents the view of one of the ablest and most critical women of her day, as well as of a great number of serious and scientific students who have given much time and thought to the investigation of these faculties.

Perhaps the S.P.R. has done its greatest service to this science by having inspired the great work of the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. This great book contains innumerable instances of the exercise of those supranormal faculties which we have mentioned. The evidence of these hundreds of stories has been carefully sifted by scientific investigators. The stories, very often trivial in their details, have built up an impressive mass of evidence for the existence of these hitherto unstudied faculties. No one who has not read this book can claim to be a serious student of psychical research. It is by far the greatest work that has ever been written on the subject.

The great interest of this work is further added to by the fact that, after Mr. Myers died, a great mass of messages, purporting to come from him, were given to several mediums. These messages have been carefully and critically studied by men of first-rate critical intelligence. A method of cross-correspondence* was worked out and given to one of the mediums who knew no language but English, in an elaborate Latin statement written by Professor

* An excellent account of these cross-correspondences is given in *Comrades on the Homeward Way*, by H. A. Dallas (Collins, Sons & Co.).

Verrall of Cambridge. This statement suggested that the late Mr. Myers should give messages to two or three mediums, living in different parts of the world, which should have no meaning when studied apart, but only when they were afterwards pieced together. Almost at once this experiment began through three different mediums. The messages were sometimes in Latin and sometimes in Greek, neither language being known to the mediums. Some of the quotations would only be known by first-rate classical scholars. Considered apart, they appeared to be frivolous and unmeaning, but when put together they form one of the most impressive proofs which could be imagined of the survival of Mr. Myers, and of his power of giving a characteristic message which could have come from no other person.

Those who knew the extremely critical and able character of these Cambridge investigators who were the founders of the S.P.R. will agree that the fact that most of them came to believe in the reality of survival and of communication, and that messages were received after their deaths which convinced their relations and friends of their survival, is one of the most impressive facts in the history of modern psychical research.

CHAPTER III

The Technique of a Séance

To those who are unfamiliar with the procedure of an ordinary séance with a medium it might be interesting to give an account of what might be usually expected to happen.

Mediums vary immensely in quality and character. There are some mediums who are definitely fraudulent and who make a practice, for the sake of gain, of pretending to have acquired from supernormal sources facts which they have either picked up elsewhere, or cleverly extracted from the more gullible kind of sitter. There is probably another class of mediums who have begun by being entirely honest, but seeing that mediumship is their only source of income, gradually accustom themselves to pretending, almost without realizing that they are pretending, to give information as from the other world, which is, in fact, nothing but their own uninspired commentary on the situation with which they have to deal. They may be compared, perhaps, to the clergyman who begins his professional life by genuinely preaching the message which he believes to have been given to him by God, but who,

when confronted with the legal necessity of making two or more sermons every Sunday, very easily slips into a habit of rattling off totally uninspired utterances which have little or no claim to be considered as messages given to him from on high. The paid clergyman and the paid medium suffer alike from the necessity of producing results which they might find it difficult to reconcile with perfect sincerity.

But I will assume that we are dealing with a perfectly honest medium such as, for instance, would be provided by the London Spiritualist Alliance. This would be a person who is vouched for as being one of known probity of character. He would, indeed, like the clergyman, make his living by giving messages from the world of spirit. It is probable that in every case, even with the best mediums, this message is profoundly influenced by the medium's own character and, indeed, by his state of health, and by the personality of the sitter.

The medium will be sitting in an arm-chair in a partly darkened room (a bright light always seems to interfere with the mediumistic trance). The sitter is perhaps accompanied by a friend who takes short-hand notes of the sitting. It is very probable that the medium will first offer prayer. These prayers, in the case of a good medium, would be obviously genuine, dignified, and earnest. The subject of the prayer will be that no spirit may approach who is not in touch with the Divine Will, and that we may be guarded against evil influences. In a few minutes, after perhaps a few deep sighs and small muscular

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movements of the medium's body, the medium will become entranced. Then a totally new voice will emanate from the medium's mouth.

It is curious that in many cases this control, as it is called, appears to be of a childish and uneducated mentality. These controls often have childish names, very often they claim to be Red Indians, or South Sea Islanders, or Egyptian Priests. It is thought by some students of psychical research that the control is not, in fact, a separate individual, as it claims to be, but is only a detached part of the medium's mind which is able to enter into relations with some other mode of existence.

Be that as it may, the control will begin conversing with the sitter with ease and familiarity, asking and answering questions. Generally the conversation will start by the control mentioning the names of various people who are not recognizable, giving descriptions which might easily apply to a great variety of cases, as for instance, "I see an old man. His hair is white and rather sparse, he is short of breath, he was very ill before he passed out, he is of medium height, neither very tall nor very short, he is nearly related to you, he is perhaps your uncle or your father. You do not know him? 'Never mind,' he says, 'you may not have known him but he knows you.'"

This is always the most unconvincing part of the sitting. The medium will go on to ask whether you know John, or Jim, or Mary, or Alice, and you begin to be, if you are at all critical, highly suspicious of

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the whole business. Then, if you are fortunate, the medium may possibly begin to describe people whom you have known in this life. In one sitting that I can think of the control said, "I will try and drive away all these other spirits and shut the door and bring along the spirits that want to talk to you." Immediately afterwards I was given the initials of three men that I have known intimately, then the name by which they knew me, then the name of the place where I was working. I had every reason to believe that the medium could not have known who I was, or who were my friends. There are very numerous cases in which people have been given proofs which they regard as absolutely convincing, that they have conversed, through the medium, with people they have known and loved on earth. Such an experience is shared by thousands of men and women to-day.

The baffling and disappointing part of the ordinary séance is that, even when we do feel convinced that we have indeed come into communication with people whom we have known, the quality of the communication is disappointingly meagre. If we ask the best mediums why this is so, they will reply that we must always remember that these communications pass through an almost incredibly difficult series of channels. Our friend in the other world has first of all to get into touch with the control, the control very often having the mentality of a young kitchen maid. The control then has to try to impress the message upon the brain substance of the vocal organs of the medium who is entranced,

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and this brain substance of the vocal organs has to try to make the message audible and comprehensible to you. We may almost compare the process to two highly educated men trying to send a message to one another when both are at the mercy of an almost illiterate messenger. The one, perhaps, has to transmit the message to an uneducated South Sea Islander. She, in turn, gives the message, we will say, to a schoolgirl, and the school girl then transmits it to the friend. The message will reach its destination, probably ill-spelt and ungrammatical, and so full of mistakes that the friend at one end will feel great uncertainty as to whether it is a genuine message, and, if it be genuine, will marvel that his friend shows so little mental capacity as to have almost forgotten how to speak grammatical English.

Most of these messages then are unsatisfying, even when we feel persuaded that they are genuine. People often complain that instead of informing us about the life of the other world and giving us messages which will be of aid to our religious or philosophical interests, they merely recall to us, let us say, the name of our friend's pet dog or cat, or some absurd incident which happened to us both when we were in a punt on the river. I think we have got to remember that, for purposes of identification, a sermon or philosophical disquisition on the after life would not be very good evidence of identity, whereas the mention of some quite unimportant incident, giving the pet name of a person or an animal or recalling some foolish accident, may be, for

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purposes of identification, far more convincing than any really serious message. My own opinion is that we very seldom get much farther than receiving a definite proof that such and such a person has survived death, by relating some convincing incidents of our past life, and we are wise if we do not ask for more than this; but I must own that many friends whose opinion I trust have been far more successful than I have been in this respect, and have constantly received messages which they regard as not only genuine but informative and reassuring in the highest degree.

The séance may go on for over an hour, the control becoming chatty and loquacious. We shall be told details about our future health and prospects which sometimes come true and sometimes do not (nearly all mediums prophesied that there would be no war). After about an hour the control will probably say that the light or the power is failing, and will then say good-bye with many expressions of goodwill. After a few sighs the medium will then wake up and will be totally ignorant as to what has happened, whether there has been any success or none. It may be well to say here that where a medium is carefully looked after and not allowed to accept too many engagements, there seems to be no reason to suppose that the medium's health suffers, any more than that of any other professional person.

It must not be supposed that all communications through entranced persons are as little satisfactory as the one that I have outlined. There are a few

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(I should say very few) that contain very much more detailed evidence. I have already referred to Mr. Stainton Moses's "spirit teachings." We may read Mrs. Willett's script professing to come from Mr. F. W. H. Myers, and commented on elaborately by the present Lord Balfour in *Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, Part 140. No one could possibly say that these messages are trifling or irrelevant, wherever they may come from. They are serious, important, and detailed. They have convinced men like Lord Balfour, Sir William Barrett and Sir Oliver Lodge that they are genuine, that is to say they have come from persons who have passed into the other world and who can be identified as showing a consistent personality and identity. Anyone who has not studied the literature of psychical research, as for instance in that great book we have mentioned, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, can have no idea how much evidence there is of messages from persons who have passed into the other world, how dignified, carefully weighed and characteristic they are, and how carefully those messages have been sifted by critics eminently fitted for such a task.

The great difficulty remains that it is exceedingly hard to devise any test which will make us *certain* that what professes to be a message from our friend in the other world may not be in fact the evocation by the medium of recollections drawn from the subconscious strata of our own memory. There is no doubt, I think, that many of these "messages" do

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have this origin. The question remains as to whether this explanation fits all of these so-called messages.

Is there any way of escaping this uncertainty? The only real proof of the identity of any person professing to speak from the other world is whether they give a message the content of which is unknown to the medium or the sitter and can only be afterwards verified. Where this is the case, I find it very difficult to escape from the belief that I am receiving a message from an extra-mundane source, and that it comes from the person from whom it professes to come. It has indeed been suggested that we all of us may possibly, in our subconsciousness, have access to all the information which there is in the world, and that even if we do not consciously know this information, we may know everything subconsciously. This really does seem to me to be pressing the theory of telepathy to absurd and incredible extremes. I believe that if we are told some fact of which we cannot have any knowledge, and never have had any knowledge in our past life, and this turns out on investigation to be true, then we may well assume that this is a proof of the survival of the conscious intelligence of the personality from which the message purports to come. Now although nine-tenths of the messages which come through even a very good and successful séance may have a possible explanation in telepathy between the sitter and the medium, there is a very definite residuum of the satisfactory messages which cannot be accounted for by telepathy.

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The following is a typical instance of communication from the other world given by Henry James, the novelist, in his *Letters*, volume two:

I have had from or through a medium in America near Boston a message purporting to come from my mother, who died twenty-five years ago, and from whom it ostensibly proceeded during a séance at which my sister-in-law, with two or three other persons, was present. The point is that the message is an allusion to a matter known (so personal is it to myself) to no other individual in the world but me—not possibly either to the medium or to my sister-in-law, and an allusion so pertinent and initiated and tender and helpful, and yet so unhelped by any actual earthly knowledge on anyone's part, that it quite astounds as well as deeply touches me. If the subject of the message had been conceivably in my sister-in-law's mind it would have been an interesting but not infrequent case of telepathy but, as I say, it could not thinkably have been: and she only transmitted it to me, after the fact, not even fully understanding it. So, I repeat, I am astounded.

Sir Oliver Lodge, speaking of the difficulties which surround all these communications, remarks, "The process of communication is sophisticated by many influences, so that it is very difficult, perhaps at present impossible, to disentangle and exhibit clearly the part that each plays."

Sir William Barrett, speaking of the result of his investigations, says, "Certainly, for our own part, we believe there is some active intelligence at work behind, and apart from, the automatist, an intelligence which is more like the deceased person it professes to be than that of any other we can imagine.

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And though the intelligence is provokingly irritating in the way it evades simple direct replies to questions, yet it is difficult to find any other solution to the problem of these scripts and cross-correspondences than that there is an attempt at intelligent co-operation between certain disembodied minds and our own. . . . Some of the evidence, indeed, seems rather to indicate a more or less truncated personality, a fragment of earthly memories partly roused by, and mainly connected with, those through and to whom the communications come. . . . The intelligent and characteristic messages, however, suggest that the vague ones are due to the fading and dissolving of earthly memories and ties, as the departed become more absorbed in their new life, the very nature of which we are in our present state incapable of conceiving. Our own limitations, in fact, make it impossible for the evidence to convey the assurance that we are communicating with what is best and noblest in those who have passed into the unseen."

There are also the so-called "book tests," when a spirit purporting to speak through a medium refers to some book in the sitter's library or some other library, mentioning, for example, that in the fourth book from the right-hand end on the fifth shelf, on page 321, the fifth line down, will be found such and such a message. It may be a book which the sitter has either never read or has never looked at for many years. Though it is conceivable that our subconscious may retain the memory of a passage

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in a book which we have not read for years past, remembering also the page and the position in the page where the passage is to be found, this does seem to me a very improbable explanation. If again we are told the name of a person who was born in 1721 and we are told where to find the baptismal register and where to look for his gravestone, this being a person whom we have never heard of, it seems to me to be unreasonably sceptical if we refuse to accept this as a genuine proof of supra-normal knowledge.

We have indeed to beware of supposing that, even if such a genuine message is given, it necessarily means that we must accept all the other messages given from the same source as being either valuable or necessarily true. Mr. Stainton Moses was constantly reminded by his "guides" that they were very far themselves from being infallible, though they claimed to have access to a much greater volume of knowledge than he could have in this world, and he was also warned that these proofs of identity had little value in themselves, and that the sooner he could give up asking for signs and wonders the better it would be for his spiritual progress.

Now, as I am rather taking for granted in this book that my readers are for the most part members of the Christian Church, or at all events accept the main facts of the Christian revelation, I am anxious to point out once again (and I feel it is exceedingly important that we should realize this) that the

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proofs which we have of Our Lord's miracles, and especially of Our Lord's resurrection, are very far from being such as would be accepted by men of science to-day.

This thought leads us to ask ourselves on what evidence we do accept or deny the report of supernormal happenings in ancient records. We no doubt begin by accepting them because we are taught them by authorities whom we respect, our parents, our school, the Church, or the Bible. But when we come to a point, as we must all do, when we have to ask ourselves whether these authorities are to be trusted or not, we are largely influenced by our conception as to what we believe is consonant to our ideas about the nature of the universe.

We are ready to accept the record of a man like St. Paul, when he tells us of his vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, and we accept also his explanation of that experience because we feel that the story bears a stamp of veracity and fits in to our general belief in the constitution of the universe. After all, our commonest and most everyday beliefs are subject to a test of this kind. Our only assurance that our everyday experiences are not dreams, but do correspond to actual happenings in the outside world, is due, not to any possibility of conclusive proof, but to our belief that to accept these occurrences as true makes life rational and intelligible.

To sum up then, I believe there is a small residuum of psychical facts which have happened in our own

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day, which can only be explained on the theory that certain individuals who have lived upon this earth are now alive, and are able to communicate with their friends, and that if we reject this evidence we ought also logically to reject the evidence upon which the great facts of our Christian faith are founded.

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CHAPTER IV

Physical Phenomena

AMONG the most hotly disputed of the phenomena of Spiritualism are those which are called physical. They are disputed not because, in some cases, they are not well attested, but rather because they go against all our preconceived notions of what is possible.

Among these are the so-called poltergeists, spirits (apparently) who in certain houses move furniture about, give loud raps on the walls, overturn tables, and so on. These phenomena are supposed to be carried out by spirits who are restless, and who cannot tear themselves away from the scenes of their unhappiness. Some otherwise eminently desirable houses have become unsaleable owing to their being subject to this annoyance.

Then we have levitation, where some people have been seen to be raised up in the air, with no apparent support. This has been often noted in the lives of saints. Certain mediums have claimed to have spirits attending them whose forms can be photographed. The evidence for this appears to be poor and unconvincing.

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Transportation is the name given to the movement by supranormal means of the mediums from one place to another. The late Lords Crawford and Dunraven declared emphatically that they had seen the medium, Home, float out of a window in Victoria Street, London, and return by another window.

Lights are said to play over the heads of sitters at a séance like tongues of fire. Similar phenomena have been noticed at religious revivals, notably at the great missions in the early part of this century in Wales. At the same time an abnormal fall of temperature has been noted.

The most remarkable portents are the materialization of the human form or some part of a form (a face or hand) apparently coming out from the body of the medium. The most arresting claim under the head of physical phenomena is the materialization of a complete human body which can be touched and handled, and has all the appearance of the human form.

This was, according to the testimony of Sir William Crookes, seen in the case of Florrie Cook, who produced the materialized form of "Katie King." Sir W. Crookes never swerved to the end of his life in his belief in this fact. An extraordinary instance of this is recorded by Mr. Harry Price, who has devoted himself to the exposure of fraudulent mediums. It is the case of a family circle in the London suburbs, apparently very reliable and honest, and very averse from publicity and money-making. To them appeared from time to time their little girl

Rosalie, who had died when she was six. Mr. Price visited the house, and, after making every precaution known to the professional investigator to eliminate possible fraud, sat in the circle with the family. After some time the body of a little girl appeared. Mr. Price was able to touch the whole of the body, to feel the pulse and hear the breathing, and the girl answered "Yes" when asked if she loved her mother. To no other question did she answer anything. The body then disappeared. If this incident should prove to be authenticated, as Mr. Price (a very sceptical investigator) thinks it is, it is of extraordinary interest and importance. There are numberless alleged instances of this materialization of bodies or parts of bodies, but many have been proved to be fakes, and many, seen and touched by quite sensible and normal people, have never been submitted to skilled investigation.

If it were to be proved true that, in certain circumstances, solid human bodies can be for a time touched and handled, consolidated, as these messages assert, out of the matter provided by the sitters themselves, it would indeed revolutionize the conceptions of modern science, though it would not be surprising to believers in traditional religion.

The power of the spirit to control and modify matter is a truth accepted by religion, and somewhat tentatively accepted by modern psychologists. The creation of a temporary bodily form with, apparently, all the semblance of vitality, goes infinitely beyond anything which we should, in the present state of

belief of ordinary modern men, be prepared to expect. Nevertheless, there seems to be good evidence for this happening in a few cases, and, with less exacting evidence, in a good many more. If this were proved to be true, it would make it much easier for many Christians to accept the stories of Our Lord's resurrection, which, with their modern outlook, and with the uncriticized evidence on which they are based, they have up to now tended to doubt.

We may perhaps ask why such stories cannot be carefully investigated by the Royal Society. The answer is that Sir William Crookes did invite the Royal Society to investigate them, and the request was refused because, as these learned men asserted, such things could not have happened.

Flammarion, the French astronomer, relates that he was present when the French Academy of Sciences investigated Edison's phonograph. One learned scientist seized Edison by the collar, crying "Wretch! we are not to be made dupes of by a ventriloquist." This was in 1878. The same man, six months later, after having carefully examined the phonograph, again declared that "it was impossible to admit that mere vile metal could perform the work of human phonation." The phonograph, according to his idea of it, was nothing but an *acoustic illusion*.

When the advisability of railways was being discussed in Bavaria, the Royal College of Doctors, having been consulted, declared that railways, if they were constructed, would cause the greatest

deterioration in the health of the public, because such rapid movement would cause brain trouble among travellers, and vertigo among those who looked at moving trains. For this last reason it was recommended that all tracks should be enclosed by high board fences raised above the height of the cars and engines. (*Flammarion, L'inconnu*, chap. I.)

It seems doubtful whether the Royal Society could be induced, even to-day, to examine scientifically the phenomena of materialization. Even, however, if they were willing, there is the further difficulty that these phenomena will not always submit themselves to an unsympathetic atmosphere. It is a rare thing to get so good a test as the "Rosalie" incident, simply because it seems necessary to the occurrence of these incidents that there should be a certain sympathy in the group which witnesses them. If the "spirits" are correct in what they assert, that the material out of which these solid forms are temporarily constructed is derived from the ætheric bodies of the circle, this is very intelligible. It is very doubtful whether a Committee of the Royal Society would be able to witness a materialization, as doubtful as it would be that a committee of Pharisees could have seen Our Lord's risen form, if they had wished to verify the evidence of Cephas, of the Twelve, or of St. Paul on the way to Damascus.

Mr. Myers (*Human Personality*, vol. II, page 288) writes as follows:

Jesus Christ "brought life and immortality to light." By His appearance after bodily death, He proved the

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deathlessness of the spirit. By His character and His teaching He testified to the Fatherhood of God. So far, then, as His unique message admitted of evidential support, it is here supported. So far as He promised things unprovable, that promise is here renewed.

I venture now on a bold saying ; for I predict that, in consequence of the new evidence, all reasonable men a century hence will believe the resurrection of Christ, whereas, in default of the new evidence, no reasonable men a century hence would have believed it. The ground of this forecast is plain enough. Our evergrowing recognition of the continuity, the uniformity of cosmic law has gradually made of the alleged *uniqueness* of any incident its almost inevitable refutation. . . . And especially as to that central claim of the soul's life manifested after the body's death it is plain that this can less and less be supported by remote tradition alone ; that it must more and more be tested by modern experience and inquiry. Suppose, for instance, that we collect many such histories recorded on first hand evidence in our critical age ; and suppose that all these narratives break down on analysis ; that they can all be traced to hallucination, misdescription and other persistent sources of error, can we then expect reasonable men to believe that this marvellous phenomenon, always vanishing into nothingness when closely scrutinized in a modern English scene, must yet compel adoring credence when alleged to have occurred in an Oriental country, and in a remote and superstitious age ? Had the results (in short) of "psychical research" been purely negative, would not Christian evidence—I do not say Christian *emotion*, but Christian *evidence*—have received an overwhelming blow ?

As a matter of fact—or, if you prefer the phrase, in my own personal opinion—our research has led us to results

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of a quite different type. They have not been negative only, but largely positive. We have shown that amid much deception and self-deception, fraud and illusion, veritable manifestations do reach us from beyond the grave. The central claim of Christianity is thus confirmed as never before. If our own friends, men like ourselves, can sometimes return to tell us of love and hope, a mightier Spirit may well have used the eternal laws with a more commanding power. There is nothing to hinder the reverent faith that, though we be all "the children of the most Highest," He came nearer than we, by some space by us immeasurable, to that which is infinitely far. There is nothing to hinder the devout conviction that He of his own act "took upon him the form of a servant," and was made flesh for our salvation, foreseeing the earthly travail and the eternal crown. "Surely before this descent into generation," says Plotinus, "we existed in the intelligible world; being other men than now we are, and some of us Gods; clear souls and minds immixed with all existence; parts of the Intelligible, nor severed thence; nor are we severed even now."

CHAPTER V

Poltergeists

POLTERGEISTS are on the very lowest level of psychic phenomena. It may indeed seem that they have little or nothing to do with religion, yet I think that though the study of poltergeists bring us among trivial and even ridiculous happenings, the study in itself is not unimportant to the cause in which we are interested. The word "poltergeist" comes from the German word "polter," which means "a noise." The fact of these happenings is so well attested by so many people, in so many countries, and on so many different occasions, that it seems impossible to deny them. What we find is that it has become impossible for tenants to live in certain houses on account of the annoying and frightening interferences with the inhabitants, proceeding from no known natural cause. People have found, for instance, that their beds have been violently lifted up and thrown to the ground, the bed-clothes have been stripped, pillows have been taken away and put back, tables and chairs have jumped about the room, doors banged, windows violently opened and shut, showers of stones thrown at the windows, matches lit and

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thrown about, fires started, violent noises like thunder, writing on the wall, and other like irrational acts. These things seem to have no meaning, they are childish and irrelevant. The Society for Psychical Research and other learned and scientific investigators have carefully examined the possibility of fraud or delusion and have come to the conclusion that there are very many cases in which both these possibilities must be excluded.

Those who are interested in these phenomena cannot do better than read the volume on Poltergeists by Sacheverell Sitwell. Here can be found the extraordinary stories of the most famous cases, "The Epworth Ghost" told by John Wesley, "The Haunting of Willington Mill," "The Drummer of Tedworth," "The Haunting of Hintern Ampner," "The Amherst Mystery," and so on.

A very interesting story of poltergeists is contained in Mr. Harry Price's *The Most Haunted House in England*. It gives the story of Borley Rectory, on the border of Essex and Suffolk, where, under carefully controlled conditions, beds and their occupants were overturned, bottles smashed, bells rung, doors locked and unlocked and their keys removed, messages written in pencil on the walls, sounds of heavy weights crashing on the floor, wine turned into ink, the house rendered unsaleable, and finally, after having been once or twice set on fire, completely burnt. All these phenomena (except the last) happened under careful control, without any visible human agency. Dr. Joad, not a witness

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likely to err from an excessive leaning to ^{super}naturalism, sums up the events at Borley Rectory after discussing the advent of some scribbling on the wall which occurred without any ostensible authorship—"As so frequently occurs when one is investigating so-called abnormal phenomena, one finds it equally impossible to withhold credence from the facts or to credit any possible explanation of the facts. Either the facts did not occur, or, if they did, the universe must in some important respect be totally other than what one is accustomed to suppose. In this particular case, my inclination is to doubt the facts; and yet, having reflected long and carefully upon that squiggle, I did not and do not see how it could have been made by normal means." (*The Most Haunted House in England*, p. 231.)

The bearing of such bizarre events upon religion may not, at first sight, seem to be important, but, always supposing that they did occur, and it is very difficult to believe that they did not, then the whole case against supernaturalism, in its more serious and vital aspects, is immensely weakened.

If we ask what such mad happenings have to do with religion I should answer that, though they are in themselves somewhat ridiculous, yet they do definitely prove that there are powers, energies, spirits, whatever we may like to call them, who are at work close beside us, exercising powers of which we have no knowledge, and which obey no law of which we are cognizant, and we are therefore forced to realize and to acknowledge that we are living in

a world which is governed by laws far more wonderful and awe-inspiring than those which the materialist acknowledges.

Whether we like it or no, we must acknowledge, if these stories are true, and I think it is impossible to deny them, that we are surrounded by a world of spirits who differ in their character quite as much as those spirits clothed in flesh with whom we habitually have to do. Religion has been apt to speak as though we had to do only with righteous or wicked spirits, but apparently there are, as well, spirits which are neither good nor bad, but are merely boisterous, ill-mannered and tormenting. They do not do any great injury, yet they may well make life unbearable by their tormenting tricks. This being so, it would become very much easier for many to believe in that non-material world which all religions accept as the foundation of the religious life.

There are two interesting facts connected with Poltergeists which may claim our attention. It seems often the case that they are connected with the presence in the house of the adolescent boy or girl. For some reason or other, which we do not understand, adolescence seems to give power to these puckish spirits. The hauntings or apparitions very often disappear when these young people remove. The other interesting fact is that these people, when hard pressed by critics, have sometimes accused themselves of trickery, and yet there seems every reason to believe that, though they may have given way to trickery when they found their strange

power was vanishing, there was no reason to suppose that the facts which called for investigation were due to trickery. One of the great difficulties of the investigation into Spiritualism is that phenomena which in the first place were genuine and apparently supranormal, may afterwards be repeated dishonestly, either from the fear of losing money, or from vanity, and desire to attract attention. We may compare this with what we find in all organised religion. Time after time mediums, who have apparently been perfectly genuine and above suspicion in their early days, have, when their gift is waning, and either their income or their self-esteem is at stake, been found resorting to fraud and trickery. This has very naturally led many investigators to suppose that there never had been anything genuinely supranormal. Yet I believe that those who have had the longest experience of these subjects would not necessarily believe that the earlier happenings were not genuine. We are sometimes apt to forget that the history of religion is not only a record of magnificent spiritual achievement, but also of fraud, trickery, self-deception and delusion. How often we have to deplore the failure and disgrace of some religious movement which seemed in its earlier days to bear with it the hopes of mankind. The same religion which tells us of heroic martyrdoms and magnificent witness to the cause of God, also has to tell of the basest trickery and superstition deliberately organized with the object of money-getting or to feed the vanity of religious leaders.

Yet when we read these extraordinary accounts of the meaningless activities of the Poltergeist we may well remind ourselves that religion does not consist of intercourse with the psychical world, for we shall find in that world just as many childish, irrational, and mischievous energies as we find in this world; but religion consists of intercourse with God carried out quite as often through fellowship with this physical world in which we live as through intercourse with that world which lies beyond us. The cultivation of psychical gifts is just as likely to bring us into contact with these mischievous entities as it is with higher and more evolved spirits, and we may, from the study of the Poltergeist, not only learn that there are in the universe many other laws besides material laws, but also that the world of spirit is a world which may very well lead astray those who approach it without adequate moral and intellectual preparation. The "next" world is inhabited by many irrational, silly, mischievous beings as well as by the spirits of just men made perfect, or grievous sinners. If we need to choose our company here, we shall have to exercise the same faculty hereafter.

People do not after death become saints or sinners: some remain just childish and silly.

CHAPTER VI

Is Spiritualism Dangerous?

MINISTERS of religion and teachers are constantly being asked whether spiritualism is dangerous to the moral and religious life. It is a question to which it is not easy to give a direct answer.

One is continually being asked whether an interest in Spiritualism does not often lead to insanity, or to possession by evil spirits.

I have myself never come across a person who became insane through Spiritualism, and having enquired from many wise people who have more intimate acquaintance with Spiritualism than I have, I find that their experience agrees with mine.

We know indeed that a certain fraction of the followers of all religions are more or less insane, and, being already mentally unstable, their growing want of balance expends itself in the pursuit of the religion of their choice. You will always find a small percentage of mad or semi-mad people attached to any Cathedral or popular Church. The Churches which are doing nothing will probably be exempt from this trial, but the active and alive Church will always have a few people attached to it who are either

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persuaded that they are in love with the clergyman, or that they have had a message from heaven, or have written a poem or painted a picture under direct inspiration, or have been given first-hand knowledge of the date of the Judgment Day.

Every good clergyman is familiar with these people, and it would be exceedingly unfair to deduce from the presence of these unfortunate persons that it is the teaching at that particular Church which has overturned the mental balance of these unhappy folk. In fact, if the Churches were dead or inactive, these people would never become attached to the Church. The problem of the mentally unstable is one which all live forms of religion have to deal with. Yet it is not to be doubted that some forms of religion are more likely to increase this instability than others.

There are some people who possess the power of making contact with other worlds than ours in a special degree, the clairvoyant, the clairaudient, the psychometrist, and so on. They are not necessarily better people than others, because they possess these gifts: they may well be worse, but these gifts need special treatment, which they are seldom able to get. They may be treated as semi-insane, or dishonest, or unreliable, when they are only peculiarly open to visions, good and bad, of a world of which the ordinary person is wholly unconscious.

What these people need is skilled treatment from persons who have a wide experience of these abnormal gifts, of their uses and abuses.

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Let us take the case of a person who firmly believes that he has held converse with some dear friend who has passed into the other world. This assurance is to him a tremendous fact. It may well change all his outlook on religion. Where this contact is spontaneous and immediate, it may be, as I believe, of immense benefit. But such people will, very probably, not be content with this. They will want to have a sitting with a medium. Now mediums vary in quality as much as religious advisers or doctors vary. It needs a very large measure of mental stability if people are not to be upset and deceived by mediums.

If they suppose that mediums are more likely to give wise advice than good men living in the flesh, they lay themselves open to deception and disappointment. Mediums, as we have seen, are constantly incorrect in their forecasts and mistaken in their opinions.

My own advice to a person wishing to get into contact with those in the other world by means of a medium would be first to make very sure that their motive is good and that they are strong enough mentally to judge sanely of what they are told, and then if they feel a call to do so to take pains to find a medium who professes to be guided by the principles of the Christian faith. Such people may possibly get information which will help them. But a friend who has large first-hand knowledge of mediums, and of those who resort to them, says to me "I feel I have not spoken nearly strongly enough as to the

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danger of resorting to mediums. I should wish to see the Church do everything to warn people as to the dangers which may await them."

What are the dangers ? First, that whereas we have been definitely sent into this world in order to acquire experience of dealing with spiritual problems through the limitations which incarnate life imposes upon us, we may be tempted to lose interest in the relations and problems of this world, in an attempt to sidetrack this mundane life, and acquire knowledge and relationships for which we are not yet fitted.

Secondly, we may make the terrible mistake of supposing that the possession of psychic gifts dispenses us from the simple and unspectacular approach to God by means of humility, trust and love.

Thirdly, we may, even from the very best mediums, acquire completely incorrect information, and be led into folly by acting upon it. This is quite a real danger.

My own experience would lead me to think that little information of value comes through mediums, beyond the assurance that those we love are alive, are near us, and can help us. Being assured of this, we can get into closer touch with them, with much less danger of deception, by meditation and prayer, than by constant conversation, which passes through the two very fallible intermediaries of the control and the medium, before it reaches us.

Having thus stressed the dangers of this form of

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communication, I must also say that there do exist perfectly honest, Christianly-minded, devoted mediums, who, having this power, do devote it to the help of the bereaved, and that some people have reason to be grateful for their help. If people recognize the dangers of this method of communication, and are sufficiently strong-minded to use it only so far as it helps them, and then put it aside, I could not say that it is never lawful to try and get this help.

There are some good people who hold themselves bound by the laws of the Jews as set forth in the Old Testament. They will quote: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them" (Leviticus XIX, 31) or "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer" (Deuteronomy XVIII) or, finally, "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones; their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus XX, 27). It would indeed be difficult to begin to-day to stone mediums, or put to death people who picked up sticks or cooked their food on Saturdays, and the number of people who, to-day, would ground their objection to the cult of spiritualism on these grounds must be very small, and rapidly diminishing.

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The chief importance of these ordinances is that they were taken over by the Christian Church, and were the cause of the most horrible cruelties perpetrated upon those who exercised psychical gifts. The punishment of witches, by Protestants and Catholics alike, forms one of the most terrible indictments of historical Christianity. The punishment of witches went hand in hand with belief in the crudest superstitions, provided that they redounded to the credit of the Church.

When it is asked why psychical phenomena have only of late years been seriously studied, the answer is that, until recent days, those who studied them went in danger of being burnt, and this was not an encouragement to the pursuit of this branch of investigation! There were plenty of psychics, but the Church used them as illuminants in the crudest sense!

We are not, perhaps, even now, able, with any certainty, to say whether the phenomena investigated by psychical research give us any promise of a definite and useful knowledge of our next stage of life, such as men like Myers and Lodge have hoped for.

Possibly we shall never know much more than we know now. Certainly the marvels which the cruder kinds of Spiritualism propound are not such as to make us desire to be mixed up in such doubtful, unlikely and distasteful revelations of the heaven of the cruder kind of Spiritualists.

Nevertheless, I believe that there is a pathway

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by which we may know, and be known by, those whom we love and revere, and that we should be wrong to rule out, *a priori*, the possibility that we may be intended to advance along these lines to a more intelligent converse with the next world than we have, up to now, achieved.

One of the "dangers of Spiritualism" which needs to be stressed, is the confusion between psychic gifts and spiritual gifts. Psychic gifts are, as indeed is the case with physical gifts of bodily health and strength, given to us by God, and are by no means to be despised. It is probable that the Church has suffered from the neglect into which they have fallen, but they are not to be compared to such purely spiritual gifts as faith, hope, and, above all, love.

The emphasis laid upon contact with God through psychical gifts, and the comparative failure to emphasize the "works of the Spirit" constitute a real danger to those who become absorbed in the cult of Spiritualism, as it is known to-day.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the gifts of the Spirit are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." These are the signs of being "in the spirit," and there is no other approach but along this path, to God. Clairvoyance, clairaudience, mediumship, may be gifts having their own importance when brought under the yoke of Christ, but, unless they are so consecrated, they are not spiritual gifts and if they become a substitute for

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the gifts of the Spirit they lead men on the sure road to spiritual destruction.

It is often asserted that Spiritualism leads men away from Christianity. This may, in many cases, well be true, especially when Christianity has only been known in one of its more debased forms. But I have known many whose Christian faith has been notably confirmed and deepened by psychical experience.

The experience of the Rev. A. Webbing in *Something Beyond* (Cambridge University Press) where he relates how he had almost abandoned all belief in God, and was afterwards brought back to a full belief in the Christian gospel by psychic experience, is by no means peculiar. I know very many men and women who have been confirmed and established in their faith through Spiritualism.

The danger which Spiritualism no doubt offers is mainly to those whose hold upon the unseen world is either undeveloped or non-existent. Where the Christian Faith offers a realized and tangible link with the unseen world, and people are able to say, "I know that the spiritual world exists and that the Communion of Saints is a reality," the baser forms of "Spiritualism" will offer no attraction.

CHAPTER VII

Immortality as Understood by Spiritualists

IT is not easy to find a wholly satisfactory definition of spiritualism. If by "spiritualist" we understand a person who believes in the survival of the personality after bodily death, and the possibility of holding communication with spirits departed this life, then all Christians are spiritualists. We all, by virtue of our Christian creed, believe in the resurrection of the body, life everlasting, and the Communion of Saints. But it is convenient to use some definition of the word spiritualist which would exclude the average Christian who does not accept the common doctrine of "spiritualists." We might then say that a spiritualist is one who believes in the possibility of holding habitual converse with the departed by psychical means, such as trance mediumship, automatic writing, clairvoyance, direct voice, and so on.

It is, I think, important to emphasize the fact that, in the wider sense, all Christians are spiritualists. We all believe in survival, and we all believe that we

can influence, and can be influenced by, the " spirits of just men made perfect," and indeed by those who are as yet far from perfection.

As the result of messages, believed by " spiritualists " (in the narrower sense) to have been received, there has grown up a creed founded upon these messages, which is by them commonly held, and which influences profoundly those who accept it. This creed differs widely from that of *popular Christianity*, but not necessarily so widely from orthodox and official Christianity. We cannot sufficiently remember that to the great majority of people it is the Christianity of the hymn book and the Sunday School which represents the Christian faith, and by which that faith is judged. Very few indeed have got further than this very crude and inaccurate representation of the Christian Faith.

The spiritualist then, as the result of messages believed by him to have been received from the other world, holds that the human spirit has two bodies, one the body of flesh and blood, the one with which we are ordinarily familiar, and another, known as the aetheric body, penetrating and informing the carnal body, acting as the intermediary between the carnal senses and the spiritual world. At death it is believed that this aetheric body disentangles itself from the carnal body, which then disintegrates, and which has no further personal life. The aetheric body is said to be connected with the carnal body, and has been seen in the process of leaving it.

I remember being told by the late Bishop Eden

that one of the most brilliant women he had known had told him that she had once been so near to death that the doctors had actually pronounced her to be dead. During that time she had felt an extraordinary sense of freedom and elation. She could look down and see her "dead" body lying on the bed, while she herself was bending over it. After a time she felt dragged back into a miserable prison house, and then heard the doctor saying "She is coming round; she is not dead." She told the bishop that she believed that she had then passed beyond death, and would never dread it again. Such experiences have often been recorded, and rest on good authority.

The aetheric body is the receptacle of the experiences of this earthly life, and is the instrument by which the spirit expresses itself in the next stage of existence. Spiritualists, then, very much believe in the resurrection of the body, but not of the actual particles which at the hour of death form the visible body, and which are buried in the grave, and go to form the bodies of trees and flowers and grass.

We may compare with this the saying of St. Thomas Aquinas: "In a man's body, while he lives, there are not always the same parts in respect of matter, but only in respect of species. In respect of matter, there is a flux and reflux of parts. Still that fact does not bar the man's numerical unity from the beginning to the end of his life. The form and species of the several parts continues throughout life, but the matter of the parts is dissolved by natural

heat, and new matter accrues through nourishment. Yet the man is not numerically different by the difference of his component parts at different ages, although it is true that the material composition of the man at one stage of his life is not his material composition at another."

This aetheric body then, so it is claimed, at once enters into another world, in which, indeed, it has always lived, though it has been partially veiled by its association with the carnal body. It is not "asleep within the tomb," waiting "until the resurrection morning."

The life into which it enters is not essentially different from this life, though infinitely wider in scope, and apparently free from the illusions of time and space. It has activities, experiences, pleasures, corresponding to, though not identical with, those which we enjoy here. It has been an occasion of ridicule that those who purport to communicate from the other world report that they enjoy eating and drinking (and even smoking), that they love their gardens and their concerts, though all these experiences are not identical with those we know here. I have never, for my own part, seen why these messages should be an occasion for derision. In the New Testament, the experiences of the next life are described under forms taken from this life as the Jews knew it. Jesus says that he will drink wine with his disciples in the new kingdom. The Seer says that the blessed will share in the "marriage supper of the Lamb," they will play on harps, they

will walk in "paradise," which means a pleasure ground. We are not shocked at these images, because they are consecrated to us both by usage, and by the sheer beauty of the language. I am not shocked when some departed spirit says that he enjoys something corresponding to a meal, or a garden, or a concert, or a voyage of discovery or even a cigar. It is certainly more convincing than the popular conception of the perpetual Sabbath, or the never ceasing "casting down their golden crowns upon the glassy sea," or "prostrate before Thy Throne to lie, and gaze and gaze on Thee." Many of these messages are no doubt vulgar. The majority of men who die no doubt had rudimentary conceptions of a pleasurable life, and we have no reason to suppose that they will change very suddenly. The heaven of the philosopher or the clergyman would be hell to the average heroic airman or able-bodied seafaring man. But these accounts of the next life are not by any means all vulgar. They give one an idea of a life in which people naturally gravitate to the type of living which they have enjoyed here. There are cycles of heavens, opening up in glory as the soul develops, and a real hell, which consists of living in the purely carnal conceptions of life, and knowing at last that this is the negation of genuine living. The only escape from this hell is to see it in its relation to true ideals of living.

The spiritualist believes that it is possible, but by no means easy, for the emancipated spirit to re-enter this life for an adequate cause, and to hold

converse with this world. The spirits emphasize the fact continually that to do so is exceedingly difficult, and ought only to be undertaken for an adequate reason. With the spirit-life of those still imprisoned in this life they can and do continually converse, speaking of such converse as though it were an exchange of visual vibrations ("The light, to-day, is strong, or weak, or waning"), but to get back into conditions of space and time and matter is extraordinarily difficult, and the intercourse liable to continual errors. It can generally only be done through temporarily making use of another mind and vocal organs of the so-called "medium," and F. W. H. Myers constantly remarked how difficult it is to be sure that the messages sent are the same as those that are received.

Those in the other life claim to be able to foretell the future. There are a great many very well attested instances of people who have been saved from danger by vivid dreams or detailed messages, warning them of danger, showing them the faces of people hitherto unknown, who are contemplating violence, and so on. It would seem that in some sense what we call the future is already in existence, though it does not follow that we cannot alter or modify it by our actions.

Those in the other world do not claim any sort of infallibility. They say that as to the ultimate nature of reality or the nature of God they know very little more than we do. They know enough to be sure that they are being guided towards a progressive

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vision of reality, and they realize more than we do the nature of the soul, but there is no sort of idea that we pass catastrophically from earth to heaven, from ignorance to infallibility, from imperfection to perfection. We are told that people with strong prejudices and inhibitions only very gradually lose them. The convinced and narrow-minded sectarian will continue for some time after death to shield himself from any contact with those of another sect, and these inhibitions give way only by degrees as further light is given.

There are "guardian angels," spirits whose duty it is to help those who come out of the experience we call death, but which would, apparently, be much more truly called birth. These guardians surround us in this life, and pass us on to others as the soul progresses.

Sudden death is apparently analogous to a premature birth in this life. It is a shock to the spirit, and necessitates a specialized kind of assistance from the other world. Infants, and even stillborn infants, grow up, and the experience which they missed in this life is made up to them in the next.

There is some proof, if we are to accept the general spiritualist position, that many of us have lived before we entered into the restrictions of this world, having come into this life in order to gain some particular needful experience, or in order to put right mistakes or sins committed before. Though in our earthly memory we are ignorant of this previous life, in our "aetheric" memory we have not forgotten, and we

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remember that we entered into this life voluntarily and for a definite purpose. This belief in pre-existence was, of course, held by the writer of Ecclesiasticus, by Origen, and, in our own time, by M'Taggart.*

It is interesting to note that the tremendous emphasis upon the sin of suicide, which is a part of the Christian tradition is, rather unexpectedly, borne out by spiritualism. The messages, believed to come from the other world, stress the misery caused by the violent voluntary ending of this life's experience, entailing upon him who commits this violence a long and terrible retribution in another sphere of living.

The Person of Christ receives the greatest reverence in spirit messages. He is regarded as one who came from an inconceivably high sphere, of His own will, and in obedience to the love of God, "for us men and for our salvation," but the position assigned by most spiritualists to Christ falls short of the orthodox theology of the Incarnate Word, and there is little or no teaching about the Triune nature of the Divine Being. It would be quite untrue, however, to suggest, as is often suggested in clerical utterances, that the Name of Christ is ignored or not treated with reverence. The beliefs of many spiritualists are much more in accord with orthodox belief than is commonly known. Sir Oliver Lodge, who is deservedly held to be the principal exponent

* *Human Immortality and Pre-existence*, by J. M'Taggart (Edward Arnold).

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of spiritistic belief, spoke of Our Lord in these words:

Our Master undoubtedly pre-existed as the eternal Christ, and is as living and active to-day as ever He was, having acquired the power of omnipresence and many other faculties of which we have no present knowledge. He lived on earth for a short time as Jesus of Nazareth, and met with that rejection and contumely which awaits all pioneers ; but already He has influenced and redeemed the world to an amazing extent. All the meaning and consequences of that Incarnation we are not likely to know, from any arguments based on scientific procedure. We can be thankful that He has revealed to us part of the nature of the Deity Whose power and majesty are revealed by science, but Who has other attributes, of love and simplicity and affection. These truly human attributes of God were revealed by Christ. He and the Father were one in plan and intention.

Spiritualists differ greatly in their attitude to the Church. A large section of the spiritualist movement is violently opposed to the Church in all its branches, holding it up on every occasion to opprobrium, but this is by no means the case with all spiritualists, many of whom would eagerly welcome the possibility of a more sympathetic approach by the Church to spiritualist teaching.

The spiritualists believe that their emphasis upon the constant outflow of teaching from the spiritual sphere, and the importance assigned to the seer or clairvoyant, is characteristic of the early Christian community. They may rightly remind us of the

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important place given in the early Church to psychical gifts, to speaking "in the Spirit," to the respect shown to prophets and prophetesses. They are apt to forget that the experience of the Church did not lead it to continue to assign this high respect to the men who spoke in trance, or with tongues.

We may well believe that real messages may be given from time to time from higher spheres, messages such as were given to Julian of Norwich in *Revelations of Divine Love*, and yet believe that a Church, guided by such messages to the exclusion of the reasoned thought of devout and learned men, would bring upon itself the same evil which the prominence of the prophet brought on the early Christian community.

Yet I think it is true that if one compares the religion of the average Sunday School and the ordinary hymn book with the better brands of messages about the other life which profess to come from the other world, the latter are often on a higher plane, and come very often, as a gospel, as good news to those who have been brought up upon the meagre conceptions of the other world as expounded by popular Christianity.

CHAPTER VIII

What is Survival?

THOSE who have studied the facts of psychical research are, as we have already noticed, divided somewhat sharply in their conclusions. Some of them are completely satisfied that there is good evidence that men survive the death of the body and are able to make their presence known to us. These comprise, as I believe, the majority of those who have made a prolonged study of this question, but there are some others who, after equally prolonged investigation, remain exceedingly doubtful as to whether any of the evidence leads us to any certain conclusion on this subject. The difference of opinion is, so far as my own belief goes, due very largely to our preconceptions. Those who reject the evidence for survival would quite certainly also reject all the supranormal facts upon which the great religions rest.

There is, however, a much deeper question involved, and it is this. What do we mean by survival? This word is not so simple in its connotation as we might at first suppose. What is the personality which does, or does not, survive? There is a strong reason to suppose that the powers and experiences

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of our everyday life are only a fraction of our potential powers and experiences. It seems likely, as Bergson pointed out, that the human brain is an organ of inhibition rather than of manifestation. By this we mean that just as you put blinkers over a horse's eyes because you want to keep them fixed upon the road so that he may not be terrified, or his mind diverted, by looking at the way-side view, so our brain and bodily organs are given to us so that we may specialize on those particular and restricted experiences which appertain to this terrestrial scene, and may not be put out of tune with the happenings of this world by becoming conscious of the vastly extended powers and experiences which would be ours if it were not for the severe restrictions of our sensuous nature.

There would appear to be good evidence that, at all events in the case of some people, there are times when the normal mind, which beholds the universe as we all of us normally do, is superseded, and the human personality can become conscious, if only in a flash, of an inconceivably greater range of knowledge. The phenomena of the infant prodigy suggests to us how little we really know about the potential capacity of the human mind. Mr. Myers has collected instances of the infant genius (*Human Personality*, section 309). He gives us there a list of thirteen geniuses who were able, in their infancy, to make almost any calculation however elaborate, instantaneously, and without any idea how the process was carried out. This power seems to vanish in

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almost every case when adult life begins. Here is one instance. The child aged six says to his father, "On what day and at what hour was I born?" His father tells him. The child asks, "What o'clock is it at present?" The father answers "7.50 a.m." The child walks on a few hundred yards, then turns to his father and states the number of seconds he has lived. The father notes down the figures and makes the calculation when he gets home, telling the boy he was 172,800 seconds wrong. The boy immediately replies, "Oh papa! You have left out two days for the leap years," which was the case. (Myers's *Human Personality*, section 310.)

In all these cases the child suddenly loses this power of instantaneous knowledge of recondite mathematical calculation and afterwards shows no sign whatever of having a greater power than any other child. Archbishop Whateley gives the following account of his own powers :

"There was," he says, "certainly something peculiar in my calculating faculty. It began to show itself at between five and six, and lasted about three years. I soon got to do the most difficult sums, always in my head, for I knew nothing of figures beyond numeration. I did these sums much quicker than anyone could upon paper, and I never remember committing the smallest error. When I went to school, at which time the above wore off, I was a perfect dunce at ciphering, and have continued so ever since."

Professor Safford when he was ten years old could

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work out in his head in one minute a multiplication sum whose answer consisted of thirty-six figures. When he lost this power he had no greater ability than the ordinary man. Mozart began to compose when he was three years old. He saw an elaborate composition as one whole, without any succession of sounds in time. He then gradually worked out as a succession of sounds the idea which first presented itself to his mind as a single complete whole.

The poet Tennyson tells us that there were times when, his whole being at rest, he had an extraordinary conception of reality which was the deepest reality that he ever knew. Wordsworth (*The Prelude*, Book 6) gives the account of this sudden sense of overwhelming reality :

That awful power rose from the mind's abyss,
Like an unfathomable vapour that enwraps
At once some lonely traveller. I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now could say—
“ I recognize thy glory ”; In such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Gives out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode.

There seems then to be a state of consciousness, which comes very rarely and only to a few people, in which the limitations of space and time completely break down, and the universe appears with complete clarity, and without any of the limitations which are forced upon us by our ordinary life. Mr.

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Dunne has pointed out to us that if we take a careful record of our dreams, we shall find that a considerable proportion of them refer not to the past or the present, but to the future. Mr. Myers, in *Human Personality*, gives us quite a long series of well attested accounts of people who have dreamed of experiences which afterwards actually happened, and in some cases of great dangers which were, in fact, avoided, because the dream gave to the recipient a warning of what was about to occur. If we accept as true this and similar experiences, it must lead us to modify very considerably the ideas which we have concerning the nature and limitations of personality.

It would appear then that during the passage of the spirit through this earthly life the power which controls the universe has placed upon our mind a veil which temporarily obstructs our view of reality. We can well believe that this is done for a wise purpose, in order that we shall keep our mind fixed upon the temporary happenings which would, apart from this veil, cease to interest us. Through the choices which we make and interests which we form while we are thus prevented from seeing the larger aspects of reality, while, to use the words of St. Paul, "we see through a riddle in a mirror," we are at the same time progressing in our power of handling the things of eternity. It would appear that the idea of incarnation does not apply only to that supreme instance of the Incarnation of the Son of God, but in some measure applies to all of us.

If we now return to the idea of survival we see that we have to ask ourselves a much more searching question than we may have imagined. It is not likely that our very restricted earthly experience survives in anything like the shape with which we are now familiar. "Flesh and blood," as St. Paul says, "cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." It would rather appear that the process which we call death is a removal of the veil which, during the spirit's sojourn upon earth, has been placed over its highest capacities. In the innumerable instances of the appearance of persons either just before or just after death, it would appear that the crisis which we call death reveals quite suddenly to the person who undergoes it astounding revelations of an enlarged world, and enables them, either before or immediately after death, to communicate their presence to those who are still under the disabilities of the fleshly life. Communications with the departed seem to be most frequent at the moment of death, and generally to diminish rapidly in number and cogency as the years go by.

The stories which we have of communication would seem to suggest that the enfranchized spirit quickly forgets the limitations which had held it down during the present world. All those relationships which were purely conventional and which had to do only with the flesh, the relationships of parenthood, of marriage, of neighbourhood, of nationality, in so far as they did not rest upon underlying

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spiritual links, fall rapidly away. It is difficult for the personality to remember names, times, and places. It is quite comprehensible that this should be so. The relationship of the liberated soul with those who are still upon earth is primarily a relationship of their own enlarged spirit with the spirit of those on earth, and to communicate with the spirit enclosed still in fleshly surroundings is not likely to prove a permanent or satisfactory relationship, nor one to be desired as a normal or frequent experience.

We shall, I think, now perhaps understand why it is that communications, if we believe them to be real, are so often jejune and unconvincing. It requires probably a great effort for the departed spirit to put himself back into the condition in which present, past, and future, together with the limitations of space, have great importance. In the communications of "Imperator" with Mr. Stainton Moses, it is constantly emphasized that it is a work of immense difficulty to communicate with this present world. Mrs. Piper, one of the best-known mediums, seems to suggest that the inhabitants of the next world do not find us very pleasant, nor our surroundings at all congenial.

The conclusion to which I think we shall come is that there is a survival of that which existed previous to the soul's entry into flesh. It is not a survival of all those relationships due to the temporary limitations in which we now find ourselves entangled.

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Dr. Walter Matthews says, "Personal survival is the hypothesis that the centre of consciousness which was in existence before death does not cease to be in existence after death, and that the experience of this centre after death has the same kind of continuity with its experience before death as that of the man who sleeps for a while and wakes again. . . . One is sometimes tempted to believe that some power—whether beneficent or malevolent I do not know—has determined that we shall never reach certainty on the subject of the life beyond, and that to secure this it has sent a lying spirit into the prophets. The records of psychical research are full of deceit, fraud, and lies. But when one has discounted all this there remains a residuum of established facts which, *prima facie*, suggest the hypothesis of survival; that at least is my opinion." I should myself go somewhat further, and say that the facts make survival an assured truth, but that it is a survival of something deeper and more fundamental than the personality with which we are ordinarily familiar in the commerce of terrestrial life.

CHAPTER IX

Spiritualism as a Religion

IT is necessary to draw a distinction between Psychical Research and Spiritualism considered as in itself an adequate religion. It is possible to believe that some very true and, indeed, important knowledge is to be gained by psychical research and yet to hold that the pursuit of psychical knowledge offers an extremely poor substitute for religion. Yet a very large, and probably growing, number of people in our industrial towns, brought up in a crude materialism, or in an uncritical pietism, believe that by cutting themselves off from the well-known Churches, and concentrating round some supposed entity of the other world, very often claiming to be a Red Indian, or an Egyptian priest, singing hymns, and listening to the demonstrations of a clairvoyant, they can come into touch with the unseen Reality in a way which will be superior to the way provided by the orthodox Churches. This cult of spiritualism does appear to be a very dismal travesty of religion. Though, no doubt, many people are in this way convinced of survival, and of the reality of something beyond this material universe—and this, we

ought to admit, is a gain—yet the messages thus received, for the most part, form a very thin and unnourishing diet for a human spirit to live and grow on.

Spiritualism, considered as a religion, rests upon a misconception that messages given through mediums from the next stage of living are more likely to give us a true approach to God than messages given by men living in the flesh, and using their minds as a vehicle of divine truth.

In the early Church, psychical gifts held a large place (miracles, gifts of healing, prophecy, speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues). St. Paul did not despise these gifts, nor regard them as necessarily evil. He thanks God, indeed, that he himself possessed these gifts. But he knew, by experience, that reverence for these psychical gifts, and trust in them as the principal way of approach to God, was a profound delusion. "Yet show I unto you a more excellent way!" The alternative way is the way of Love. It is through growth in Love and not in the growth of psychical gifts that we most surely progress towards a knowledge of God. And this growth of love comes to us through fellowship with our friends here in the flesh much more surely than through attempts at converse with the other world through mediums. In the early Church, the prophet, who nearly approached the modern conception of a medium, had so great a reputation that he alone was permitted to use his own words in the celebration of the Liturgy.

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But was the prophet identical with the medium?

Probably, at his best, he was something more than a medium. The true prophet was conscious of his own message. This is probably what St. Paul meant when he says, "The spirit of the prophet is subject unto the prophet. For God is not the author of confusion, but of order." The words of the prophet were believed, indeed, to be not his own words, but the words of the Holy Spirit speaking through him, by the prophetic gift passed through the consciousness of the prophet, and enabled him to distinguish between the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and messages from unlawful, irresponsible, or wicked spirits. Just as people often complain to-day that many mediums are either lying or unconsciously deceiving, so, in the early Church, we find complaints of lying prophets, and of those who use their gifts with a view to money-making. Thus, it is suggested that a prophet who claimed hospitality for more than one night is to be discouraged, as being one who prostituted his gift for evil ends.

The percentage of true prophets among the total number of claimants to the gift, and the percentage of writings of real inspirational value to the number of writings claiming to be inspired was probably always very small. Another difference, and it is a fundamental one, between the prophet and the medium is that the modern medium claims to receive his message from a departed spirit, but the prophet's claim (not always, we gather, made good)

was that he spoke by the spirit of God. There is no suggestion, either in the New Testament, or in early Christianity, of anything like a modern séance, in which the spirits of James or Stephen, much less the spirit of the Lord himself, were invited or questioned. The last appearance of Our Lord was to St. Paul, after which we hear of no others until we come to medieval or modern times, and these modern ones are, for the most part, not convincing or edifying. Specimens of such cases are to be found in the "Liber Specialis Gratiae" of St. Mechtilde and the "Legatus Divinæ Pietatis" of St. Gertrude.

Our Lord is represented as placing St. Mechtilde most tenderly over His Heart, and saying, "accept the whole of My Divine Heart." And again, Our Lord says, "as many as shall read this book or hear about you and shall praise Me for what is given to you, by singing the antiphon 'Tibi Deus,' or in any other manner, they shall sing to Me in heaven in the presence of the ever adorable Trinity the same number of sweet songs of love."

When a certain wicked man was chosen Dean of Magdeburg by the canons, Our Lord tells St. Mechtilde, "I have transferred him from his cell to the seat of authority that he may be the food of goats and the nourishment of the unclean."

To St. Gertrude He says, "I have truly honoured her with these special privileges that anything which anyone may hope to obtain by her help, he shall, without doubt, obtain, and whomsoever she

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shall judge worthy of communion, My Loving kindness will never judge unworthy."

On one occasion, when St. Gertrude could not hear mass, Our Lord Himself offered to sing mass to her, and said, "Would you like me, my dear, to sing mass to you?" and she said, "Indeed I would, O joy of my heart; with all my heart I beg you to do so." "And which mass," said Our Lord, "would you like to hear?" "Whichever you like," she said.

Then said Our Lord, "Would you like the mass for the third Sunday in Advent?" "No," said she.

St. Gertrude then asks for the mass of Christmas Eve, but the Lord finally says He will sing the mass for the third Sunday in Advent, and gives her a joyful understanding of each part in turn, and in the end turns to her, and says: "the Lord be with you, my dear," and she answered, "and may my spirit be with Thee, my darling." Then the Lord bowed to the ground before her, and thanked her.

These communications do not make us feel that they add to our knowledge of Our Lord, or that we lose by the absence of such supposed methods of revelation.

We are struck with the fact that if the message has any claims at all to be, in fact, what it claims to be, it has become distorted by the medium through which it has passed, and suggests that the author had deteriorated in character in the passage to another world. This is, of course, the difficulty

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which so many people feel about reputed messages from the other world in modern days. "If they are genuine at all," people say, "one can only view with profound melancholy the deterioration which the change to a new world has effected in the person that we knew." An instance of this is quoted by Mr. Harry Price in *Fifty Years of Psychical Research*, from a newspaper, *The Spiritualist News*. This is a message purporting to come from Dr. H. R. L. Sheppard, "To all people who on earth do dwell—I send greetings. May you all learn, and realize, the Truth. I have been appointed to a position of authority, and *trust*. I am responsible to God and to His beloved Son Jesus Christ, whom I hope to serve all the days of my life. I could not seek any greater honour. For the peoples of the earth I have a wonderful message . . . there is *no* death!" Mr. Harry Price says, "It would be interesting to learn what the surviving relatives of Canon Sheppard think about it all." I am quite sure that both they and all his friends will be filled with disgust, and, if they believed it to be a true message, would pray that they might be delivered from such a terrible deterioration of mind and spirit. In so far as the religion of spiritualism consists of messages from the other world, whether given through trance-mediums, or through clairvoyants (and this is the main core of spiritualism considered as a religion), we may, I think, say that apart from the assurance that there is another life, and that it is possible, on occasion, to communicate with those on the

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other side, the information given is not often of any value, and, in the majority of cases, is terribly poor stuff.

It is a blasphemy to suppose that communion with departed spirits is a substitute for communion with God in Christ. We are not called upon to deny that we may get comfort and, sometimes, valuable information about the next life, through the technique of the séance, but this is not religion, for it need not necessarily bring us any nearer to God. It has not necessarily anything to do with worship.

If we knew everything that there is to know about the next world, if we could communicate familiarly with departed saints, we might make far less progress in the knowledge of God than some poor woman who prays daily to God, who is kind and patient and courageous in her daily tasks, and who has no knowledge of life in the next world except that it means that we shall see God and be made one with Him through Christ.

The desire to know what will happen to us after death is not, I think, necessarily a wrong one, but even if it is possible for us to understand what that world will be like, it is certain that it is through the patient growth in the mind of Christ and through the participation in His Spirit that we can alone fit ourselves for that life, and the idea that it is through talking to spirit "controls" that we normally shall come to know God is indeed a grievous mistake, a pathway leading into the wilderness, and none who

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knows Christ's way to God will want to tread that path.

It is indeed a case in which Christ's proverb is very apt that, "No man, having drunk old wine, desireth straightway new, for he saith, 'The old is better.' "

CHAPTER X

The Christian Doctrine of Immortality

THE Christian belief in immortality rests, as we have already seen, upon a fact in history, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This was the central subject of primitive teaching. St. Paul recognizes it as the true cause of offence, when he is brought to trial, and the eleven apostles felt that the chief reason for electing a successor to Judas Iscariot was that "one must be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection." St. Peter writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Belief in an after-life was, indeed, a common, but not universal, belief among Jews, subsequent to the exile, derived, as many scholars believe, from Zoroastrianism. The Pharisees, as we know, held to this belief while the Sadducees rejected it. St. Paul recognizes that belief in the after-life was a predisposing factor in his readiness to accept the resurrection of Jesus. "If the dead rise not, then is

Christ not raised, and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." "I am a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." (It is interesting to notice here that the Pharisees were prepared to acknowledge that St. Paul might have received a spirit-message, "If a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.")

St. Paul had indeed no doubt at all as to the reality and the objectivity of the Lord's appearances to him, and to the other disciples. These objective appearances (materializations as they would be called in the language of psychical research) were the central point of his teaching, yet he realizes that such a belief had been prepared for and made antecedently credible by belief in an after-life, held prior to his knowledge of Jesus. Because he had been a Pharisee, and so a believer in communications from the other world, and the reality of a life after death, he found the resurrection of Jesus germane to the rest of his creed, and indeed its pre-ordained fulfilment. So Jesus Himself appears to have taught: "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." This may mean that such people will find good reasons for refusing belief in any resurrection however good the evidence if they have strong antecedent prejudices against the reality of spirit.

The first generation of Christians believed that Jesus would return in the clouds at almost any

moment. Those who had died in the interval, they seem to have believed, were "asleep in Jesus." At the coming of Jesus, these, together with those who were alive, would be caught up into the clouds, to meet him in the air. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This teaching, so prominent in St. Paul's earlier epistles, is gradually transmuted into the belief that the coming of the Spirit *is* the coming of Christ, and the experience of the Holy Spirit is the experience of an already achieved immortality. This also is St. John's teaching, "We know that we *have* passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." Immortality is the possession of the divine life, witnessed to by the possession of the gifts of the spirit and fed by participation in the life of Christ ("eating his flesh and drinking his blood"). Over against such a life death has no dominion—it is only an incident in the progress of the life of the spirit, the discarding of an instrument no longer necessary for the protection of life.

Now it is true that traditional Christianity has taught that our new spiritual body rises out of the grave where our material body was buried; but it is doubtful if many thoughtful Christians would believe such a teaching to-day. The doctrine of the

Church of England concerning immortality was elucidated by an attempted prosecution of the Rev. H. D. A. Major, D.D., for heresy in 1921. Dr. Major distinctly taught that immortality meant for him "the survival of death by a personality which has shed its physical integument for ever." It was objected against him that the prevalent teaching in all ages had been that "the resurrection of the body" implied the resuscitation of the material remains which were laid in the tomb. This Dr. Major denied. The Bishop of Oxford, after consultation with eminent Professors of Theology in the University of Oxford, decided that there was no *prima facie* evidence of heresy in Dr. Major's statement, and declined to take action against him. This decision was confirmed on appeal to the Archbishop of Canterbury.* The upshot of this very important case is that it is lawful to hold (as in fact almost all modern teachers of the Christian Faith hold) that the resurrection of the body means not a resurrection of all the material particles laid in the grave or consumed in the crematorium, or dispersed in the sea, or devoured by wild animals or birds, but the survival of the personality together with an instrument or body which shall contain all that is necessary to the expression of personality, and shall be as real and true an expression of the next stage of life as this body of flesh and blood has been a true expression of that personality in this present stage of existence.

* *The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body*, by the Right Rev. H. M. Burge. (Mowbrays.)

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When it is clearly understood that at no stage of its existence does the body which we can see possess any stability or permanence of material structure, being continuously broken down and dispersing, and as continuously renewed by addition from other animal and vegetable sources, it becomes also clear that there is no reason either to believe or to desire that the structure of the material body at any moment shall be carried on into the next stages of life in another world.

The true Christian belief is expressed by St. Paul (II Corinthians V) in these words, " if the earthly house of our tabernacle (R.V. margin, ' bodily frame ') be dissolved we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Not that we desire to be unclothed, but to be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life."

The point which the phrase (now no doubt become somewhat misleading) " resurrection of the body " is intended to express is that we do not go after death to a dim, shadowy, life, empty of real vigorous and vital content, in which we wander aimlessly in a ghostly life, but to a life full and complete, with enhanced, and not diminished, powers of expression and of contact with reality.

This aspect of reality was emphasized for the first Christians by their belief in Christ's appearances after his resurrection. Though He appeared and disappeared, " the doors being shut," yet he had a body visible and tangible, recognizable as having a

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true relationship with the body before death. The new body of the Christ expressed also the happenings of this present life. It bore the marks of the nails. This meant that even our present bodily experiences have their repercussions in eternity. No man must say, if he dishonours the flesh by unlawful indulgence "this is only my temporary body which is defiled—my spirit remains untouched." The defilement of this body means the defilement of the spirit itself, and that defilement will be represented in the "spiritual body" which persists after the disintegration for ever of this body of flesh and blood.

Though the first Christians would never have come to have any assurance of immortality if they had not had experience of the risen Christ, they had also to learn, through the vision of what we now call "The Ascension," the symbolic disappearance of Christ once for all from this earthly scene into a life invisible to us, that contact with Him was not normally to be preserved by visions or "appearances," but by spiritual contact maintained through daily assimilation of His life, until His Spirit should wholly possess them.

This identity of spirit was achieved and maintained not by séances or materializations (as it had been originally after the resurrection) but through the patient growth in spiritual gifts given by the unseen but ever-present Christ to his people. St. Paul felt this so deeply that he said, "Yea, if I have known Christ after the flesh, from henceforth know I him no more." He had no further desire for contact

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on this worldly plane, and for the reason that he obtained more direct and fruitful contact by communion of spirit, so that he could say, "It is no more I, but Christ that dwelleth in me."

Thus St. Paul could at the same time bear witness to the real visible and audible appearance of Christ to him on the road to Damascus, an appearance which was the turning point of his whole life and yet show no desire whatever for such an appearance to be repeated. He had arrived at a closer contact and a more satisfying means of communion.

In the same way, as we have already seen, St. Paul could accept and honour psychical gifts, and claim to have possessed them himself, and yet be clear and positive in placing them on altogether a lower plane when compared to the transcendent gift of Love.

It is no part of the Christian faith to deny or to decry psychical phenomena. They had their part to play in the founding of the Church. They may still have their share in providing evidence of immortality. But it *is* part of the Christian faith to proclaim their inferiority to the pathway of Love.

Christian immortality does not begin with death. It begins when the soul is united to God in love. It can grow as well by bodily acts—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked—as by the ascetic life of vigil and meditation. By acts of love to our brethren we achieve contact with God, and gain assurance that we have passed from death unto life, and by that at-one-ment with the Spirit of Christ which He calls

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eating His flesh and drinking His blood we achieve this contact most of all. While there is no reason to deny that messages from the other world may from time to time be given us, this is not the *characteristically Christian* way of achieving union with the Divine.

Far nearer that temper of mind in which alone we can hope to come in contact with the Divine is that of which Plotinus wrote :

So let the soul that is not unworthy of that vision contemplate the Great Soul ; freed from deceit and every witchery, and collected into calm. Calmed be the body for her in that hour, and the tumult of the flesh ; ay, all that is about her, calm ; calm be the earth, the sea, the air, and let Heaven itself be still. Then let her feel how into that silent heaven the Great Soul floweth in. . . . And so may man's soul be sure of Vision when suddenly she is filled with light ; for this light is from Him and is He ; and then surely shall one know His presence when, like a god of old time, He entered into the house of one that calleth Him, and maketh it full of light (Quoted by F. W. Myers in the epilogue to *Human Personality*.)

The Christian Faith does not teach an immortality which consists of a gradual absorption into God involving a loss of individual being. The resurrection of Jesus witnessed to a very personal and individual survival and that strongly marked individuality which is characteristic of the higher forms of human life, and which every spiritual victory does so much to emphasize cannot, we must surely believe, won as it is at so great a cost, be doomed to extinction. If

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the struggle in nature, and especially in human nature, be towards the production of strongly marked, specialized personalities, we can scarcely believe that these will attain to their perfection by ceasing to be, and by being merged in undifferentiated goodness.

The hope and the intuition of the best of mankind is that we shall see God and one another in God and yet be ten thousand times more ourselves.

"I hope to see my pilot face to face" is the hope which has sustained great men in great affliction. In view of such a hope, messages from the other world, delivered to us in halting phrase and through obscure channels, however much they may have helped us at some stages of our spiritual ascent, seem meagre and unimportant, set over against this incomparably clearer vision of the final purpose of life, and this hope is given to man:

To humbleness of mind descends
This prescience from on high,
The faith which elevates the just
Before and when they die,
And makes each separate soul a heaven,
A court for Deity.