

# SPIRITUALISM

BY THE REV. R. H. BENSON

IT is becoming every day increasingly impossible for any educated man to dismiss the subject of Spiritualism with mere contempt. A matter which is engaging the earnest attention of men like Professor Barrett, Professor Oliver Lodge, and women like Mrs Henry Sidgwick; a branch of inquiry which absorbs Professor Richet, which has changed Professor Lombroso from a convinced materialist into a believer in the spiritual world; a religion which numbers hundreds of thousands of adherents throughout the civilized globe, including many professors at foreign universities, and has produced societies in every European country, which can trace back its spiritual descent in every civilization practically as far as ordinary theistic religion itself; which claims, unlike other religions, to produce evidential phenomena practically at will, and to bring spiritual existences before the bar of the senses—all this can no longer be ignored or simply laughed at. A generation or two ago it was possible to take up such an attitude; it appeared then, at least to men of average education, as if the matter had become finally discredited; the thing lurked about among ill-informed people in slightly disreputable and dingy surroundings; its professors, when they engaged public attention at all, were frequently detected in fraud; there was scarcely one adherent to its philosophy—scarcely even one who thought it worth investigation—whose name was known beyond his own immediate circle. But all this has changed. The affair has come out into the light of day; its phenomena are in process of being

respectfully judged by scientists as well as by theologians; and it must take its place at last among the recognized religions of the world.

### I (i)

Its history is, as has been said, as old as the history of civilization, and even older, since, under the form of *Necromancy*, it is said to be traceable among various nations in almost every part of the world, and it survives to-day among peoples so far removed from one another as the Esquimaux and the Hindus. It is also one of its characteristics that it usually undergoes strong revivals at periods when established creeds are beginning to lose their hold, and that it is one of the most common signs of decadence in religious thought. It is mentioned, with decided condemnation, in book after book of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is difficult to determine its creed, since this appears to take its colouring to a large extent from the religious thought of the respective countries in which it flourishes.<sup>2</sup> It is by its phenomena, and its startling claims to bring the spiritual world within the range of the senses, rather than by its dogmas, that it may be identified as one religion rather than many.

It would be impossible therefore to give a coherent or exhaustive account of Spiritualism considered as a world-religion. All that is possible is to describe it as it appears in the world to-day, to state its claims, and to examine its credentials. In its present form, especially under the aspect of communication through

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xx. 6. "The soul that shall go aside after magicians and soothsayers . . . I will set my face against that soul." xix. 31; 1 Kings xxviii. 3; 4 Kings xxi. 6; etc.

<sup>2</sup> Spiritistic practices have been traced amongst nations so far removed from one another as the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks, the Jews, the North American Indians. (Cf. Lapponi, *Hypnotism and Spiritism*, pp. 20 ff.)

rapping on tables, it first appeared in America in the year 1848, whence it spread quickly all over Europe.<sup>1</sup>

(ii)

Briefly speaking, the spiritualist claims that the "other world" is directly accessible to this, not merely by one revelation made once for all and preserved in its integrity, not merely by sacraments or the reception of supersensual grace, not merely by exceptional and abnormal apparitions very occasionally granted by direct Divine permission; but by constant communications from the spirits of the departed, through which men can be assured of the survival of human souls, and can receive a kind of progressive revelation of the supreme laws of the universe.

These communications are made (it is said) in a variety of ways; but for all of them there is required what is known as the *mediumistic* faculty on the part of at least one of the inquirers. The *medium* in fact is a person living in this world who, through his peculiar constitution, is enabled to act as a channel between the two worlds, and to be so used by the discarnate personalities who desire to communicate with human beings. For those communications to take place it is usually necessary for the medium to pass into a state of trance, such as was that into which the priests and priestesses of the old oracles were accustomed to pass. The usual method of procedure at spiritualistic meetings then, though not the invariable method, is as follows:—

The inquirers themselves sit round a table and endeavour to put themselves into a sympathetic attitude of mind, placing their hands upon the table in order to establish the "circle"—that is, a kind of psychical ring, connected perhaps with some unknown

<sup>1</sup> Its revival at the present day is no doubt largely due to the Protestant disregard of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

laws of magnetism—through which the communications may be more easily made. The “spiritual atmosphere” is often helped by the singing of hymns, the playing of soft music, or the offering of prayer. The medium, according to circumstances, sits either with the inquirers or in a cabinet apart by himself. Precautions are usually taken intended to guard against possible fraud, conscious or unconscious.

After a certain period has passed it is claimed that phenomena frequently take place that put it beyond a doubt that discarnate and intelligent spirits are present and are beginning to communicate. These are generally of one or more of the following kinds:—

(a) *Movements of inanimate objects.*—The table at which the inquirers are seated begins to tremble, to move, to emit rapping sounds, to rise from the floor in such a manner as cannot be explained by human agency. Objects in the room are seen (in the twilight, in which the séances are usually held) to move through the air; or, in darkness, are felt by the sitters to touch them. Objects are brought through closed doors and placed upon the table. Other objects are actually “materialized,” that is, are brought into existence in a manner to be discussed later. Lights of a peculiar nature are formed in the air and move about fast or slowly. A pencil placed upon a sheet of paper or within locked slates is heard to move upon the paper, and messages are found later written upon the paper or slates.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Extract from “Report on a Series of Sittings with Eusapia Palladino,” reprinted from the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, part lix., vol. xxiii. pp. 404, 431, 498. By the Hon. Everard Feilding, W. W. Baggally, and Hereward Carrington:—

- (a) “12.5 a.m. Complete levitation of the table.  
 C. I hold both her ankles with my two hands.  
 F. I was holding her right hand in the middle of the table.  
 Prof. G. I was holding her left hand on the rim of the table.  
 F. Prof. G.’s left hand was on my right hand (across the table).  
 Note by M. Large movements of the table; I can just see the table up in the air. . . .”  
 (Extract from shorthand report taken at the time.)

(b) *Messages delivered through the mouth of the medium.*—These consist in sentences spoken by the medium, generally in a voice alien to himself, purporting to come from one or more discarnate spirits present in the room, known either personally or by repute while they lived in the body to one or more of the inquirers. It is claimed that these messages often concern private matters utterly unknown to the medium, known only to the inquirer and to the departed soul who is present. Sometimes these messages are of a private nature, sometimes of public interest, and concern spiritual and religious truths.

(c) *Messages delivered through inanimate objects.*—These come sometimes, as has been said, by means of a pencil placed on paper or within locked slates, sometimes by means of raps upon the table or the walls of a room, interpreted by a code agreed upon by the sitters. Three raps usually are taken to stand for "yes," one rap for "no."<sup>1</sup>

"11.26 p.m. The small table is levitated right on to the séance table, through the curtains between B. and the medium. It rose to a height of two and a half feet from the floor, and is now resting on the séance table. . . ."

"12.50 a.m. F. She taps with her right hand on mine, and the tambourine shakes synchronously within the cabinet.

C. The bell rings, and has been brought on the top of the medium's head from the cabinet, and remains there.

F. I was holding her right hand on the top of the table. I saw the bell arrive on her head. . . ."

(b) "F. A light flashed out about a foot behind and above the medium's head. It was of a brilliant bluish-green colour. (It was a steady light, and lasted about two seconds.)

11.37 p.m. F. Now another light has come out, this time on the medium's lap.

B. Both C. and F. saw a brilliant light inside the cabinet, about two and a half feet from the medium, inside the right-hand curtain. . . ."

It must be noted that these séances were conducted by trained observers under stringent test-conditions. The extracts are given from this report as containing, on the whole, descriptions of the most accurate and scientific observations made in recent times.

<sup>1</sup> "Report," etc., pp. 470, 475.

"11.1 p.m. Four nods of her head are followed by four thumps on the table. She did not touch the table with her head.

11.54 p.m. Table tilts four times, meaning 'talk.'"

(d) *Automatic handwriting*.—For this two methods are employed. (1) Some person, usually the medium, holding a pencil passively in his fingers, begins after a little preliminary scribbling to write, sometimes at a superhuman speed, sometimes with a superhuman minuteness, sometimes in a handwriting closely resembling that used by the person whose spirit is said to be present, messages and sentences concerning private matters known to none present except the one to whom the message is directed. (2) The same results are obtained by the use of an instrument called *planchette*—that is, a little heart-shaped board running on three castors, pierced by a pencil whose point just touches a paper placed beneath. The medium's fingers are placed lightly upon the board, and the pencil moves apparently without the medium's volition. It must be noted that both these methods of communication are frequently employed by inquirers quite apart from any séance, and results are often equally well obtained.

(e) *Materialization*.—This is considered the triumph of spiritualism, and consists in its full form in the actual appearance, before the senses of sight, hearing, and touch, of a discarnate soul that has clothed itself with a body for the occasion. The phenomenon takes place in a variety of ways. It will be enough to describe the more usual.

The medium seats himself, generally partly in view of the sitters, or, if not, tightly secured by cords, within the cabinet, and passes into the state of trance. After a certain period, often of apparent distress to the medium, a certain disturbance makes itself felt: sounds are heard, or movements perceived, or a sensation of cold. There appear then, sometimes in the full sight of the sitters, a luminous cloud that gradually takes shape and existence, and is ultimately recognized by some one present as possessing the form and features of a dead friend. The degree of "materialization" varies with the amount of "power"

that is present. Sometimes it is little more than a faint vaporous intangible model, generally swathed in drapery; sometimes, it is said, the power is great enough to produce a figure that can be handled and touched, and is, apparently, in all respects like a human body, with powers of free speech and movement. Further claims are made with regard to the effect of this appearance upon the photographic lens. Photographs are shown, declared to be taken under test-conditions, representing such figures which were at the time invisible to the human eye; in such cases it is said that the "materialization" took place, but not with sufficient power to manifest itself to a less delicate instrument than the camera. The disappearance of the apparition takes place in various manners. Sometimes it passes back into the body of the medium from which it has been seen to emerge; sometimes it retires behind a curtain; sometimes it disintegrates visibly before the eyes of the sitters into a small incoherent mist, which presently itself disappears.<sup>1</sup>

## (iii)

The spiritualist theory as to the manner of these phenomena is commonly as follows:—There is said to be resident in the human body a certain force or matter called "astral"; and a medium is a person from whom this substance can be easily detached. This "astral" substance is situated on the border line between matter and spirit, and is the means by which discarnate spirits can communicate.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Report," etc., pp. 448, 449, 453, 463:—

"B. A hand comes out from behind the curtain and presses me tightly on my shoulder. I feel the thumb and the four fingers, which are now pressing downwards with very considerable force. . . ."

"At 11.38 there appeared one of these strange objects seen from time to time at Eusapia's séances, to which, for want of a better name, the word 'head' is applied. . . ."

"C. I saw a head come out from the curtains slowly, and within six inches from my head, and it stayed out about two seconds and then went back."

<sup>2</sup> The word "astral" would seem to have been imported into Spiritualism from the East through Theosophy.

For example:—In the case of the sounds and movements mentioned above, it is believed that it is through this “astral force” that the relations with matter are set up. In the case of “materialization” it is this “astral substance” that is drawn off in great quantities, not only from the medium but even from the persons of the sitters, and moulded by the will of the communicating soul into the aspect of that body which it inhabited on earth. To the loss of this “astral substance” is attributed the state of nervous exhaustion in which mediums are so often found after emerging from trance; and to its vital relations with the medium is attributed the violent shock caused to the medium if the “materialized” figure is in any way interfered with. Opinions differ as to the extent in which the substance is reabsorbed by the person from whom it was taken after the close of the phenomena.

With regard to the explanation of the phenomena of *automatic handwriting*, it is held by spiritualists that the communicating spirit, through means of the astral power with which the writer is charged, controls his hand and his brain; with regard to the communications made through the mouth of the medium, it is his voice that is so used. It is freely conceded by spiritualists that certain well-defined dangers to the nervous centres of the medium usually accompany all attempts (especially by means of “materialization”) to communicate with the spiritual world; that deceiving spirits occasionally seek to play tricks upon the inquirers, and even to impersonate their dead relatives; but it is claimed that those perils are reduced to a minimum by the methods used, and that the gain to spiritual knowledge is incalculably greater than the loss to health or serenity.

(iv)

*The Spiritualist Creed*, as has been said, is exceedingly difficult of definition, since professed spiritual

teachings, when brought together, are frequently found to be mutually exclusive. Yet, on the whole (at least at the present day in European countries), spiritualist dogmas seem to be emerging into some kind of coherent form.

The existence of God is usually acknowledged; indeed, Sunday schools and churches organized for purposes of worship as well as of instruction, and for the training of children as mediums, have been in existence in England for many years. Beyond this it is taught that the actions of life here have a corresponding effect upon the state of existence hereafter, though the doctrine of eternal punishment is, practically always, explicitly denied. The condition of life in the next world is said to be one of progressive purification, rising, it would seem, up to some kind of absorption into the Supreme Spirit, to whom the name of God is given. All distinctively Christian doctrines are usually denied, although it is said of Jesus Christ that as a spiritual teacher He has had few equals and no superiors. It is claimed that He Himself was an adept medium, and that His appearances after the Resurrection were instances of "materialization." His Divinity is practically always explicitly denied.

It is exceedingly difficult to say more than this of the Spiritualistic creed, since, besides the divergences in various countries already mentioned, there is occasionally a further divergence even in teaching given to the same inquirer as he advances in knowledge. The disciple is at first told to practise his religion; but later on is informed that Christian worship and doctrine are only embryonic stages of the truth, and that the initiate will find all that he needs in the teaching given him by the spirits.

The dogmatic system of the Spiritualists, therefore, is best described as a vague kind of Theism, at times closely resembling Pantheism.

## II

It will be seen plainly from the foregoing pages that it will be impossible within the limits of a pamphlet to do more than sketch very lightly the criticisms that may be passed upon Spiritualism, and the reasons why the Catholic Church (and indeed all the historical religions of the world) has condemned and rejected it, and forbidden it to her children, both in its present form and under its old presentment in Necromancy. The Jewish Church herself always regarded it with horror, and inflicted the severest penalties upon all her people who meddled with it.

Very briefly, however, the reasons and criticisms are as follows:—

## (i)

First, it is necessary to remember the enormous amount of fraud that has always accompanied the practice of Spiritualism—fraud that is acknowledged and deplored, to be frank, by Spiritualists themselves. While, therefore, fraud on the part of the professors of a religion is not enough to discredit entirely the religion itself (for in that case hardly any creed would be immune), it is yet, in this instance, of sufficient gravity to cause us to doubt very seriously the reckless assertions occasionally made by Spiritualists, and to demand very searching tests indeed before any of the more startling phenomena are accepted as facts. In addition to the instances of this deliberate and conscious fraud—instances known to all who have studied the history of the movement (as, for example, in the case of the famous William Eglinton)—there must also be added unconscious fraud, exaggeration and doubtful testimony, due on the one side to the almost irresistible desire of the medium to produce evidence, and on the other to the very fierce state of nervous excitement of most inquirers under the cir-

cumstances described above.<sup>1</sup> Large deductions, therefore, must be made with regard to the whole body of evidence that is circulated generally among the public.

## (ii)

There remains, however, when all such deductions have been made, a residuum (and of a very startling nature) which it is impossible to disregard; evidence, too, that fits in in a remarkable manner with much that has always been believed by Catholics; though these, as will be shown presently, give a very different explanation of it from that offered by Spiritualists.<sup>2</sup> But even this, however, must be sifted further before anything even resembling a Spiritualistic theory can be deduced from it.

It is now an established fact among psychologists that ideas, or sense-images, can be transmitted from the brain of one living person to that of another, and that the transmission takes place with increased ease if the mind of the recipient or the agent is in a

<sup>1</sup> The most recent opinion of competent judges in the case of Eusapia Palladino is that the medium in question, while possessing undoubted "powers," supplements them by fraud, both conscious and unconscious.

<sup>2</sup> From "Report of Sittings with Eusapia Palladino," etc., p. 463:—  
"B., who is evidently passing through the same stages as I did in my earlier séances, toys with the suggestion of an apparatus, by way of easing his mind. It would be an interesting problem to set before a manufacturer of conjuring machines to devise an apparatus capable of producing alternatively a black, flat, profile face, a square face on a long neck, and a 'cello-like face on a warty, wobbly body two feet long; also a white hand with movable fingers, a yellowish hand, and a hand invisible altogether—all these for use outside the curtain. Further, for use within, a hand with practicable living thumb and fingers having nails. . . . Our manufacturer must so construct the apparatus that it can be actuated unseen by a somewhat stout and elderly lady, clad in a tight plain gown, who sits outside the curtain, held visibly by hand and foot, in such a way as to escape the observation of the practical conjurers clinging about her, and on the look-out for its operation. It must further be of such dimensions as to be concealed about the lady while parading herself for inspection upon a chair, clad in her stays and a short flannel petticoat.—E. F., Dec. 6, 1908."

passive condition.<sup>1</sup> We are bound, therefore, in approaching the subject from the purely scientific side, to allow that a great number at least of the alleged messages from the dead, whether given by the voice or the hand of the medium, may be nothing more than the result of this transmission of thought, or *telepathy*. It is of no evidential value to say that the inquirer in this or that instance has been reminded through such a message of a fact he had forgotten: the very fact that he recognized it as true shows that the thought somewhere resided in his brain.

(iii)

There remain the *physical* phenomena—all such things as sounds, lights, the movement of objects and “materializations”—the physical phenomena that remain, that is to say, after due deductions have been made for fraud, conscious or unconscious. There remains further to be discussed the Spiritualistic philosophy concerning them.

First, then, it must be said in fairness that, at any rate until recently, many eminent scientists who have gravely examined the physical phenomena are dissatisfied with the evidence presented in their favour. They deny, in fact, the assertion that the things in question prove the presence of discarnate spirits. Fraud and imagination, they say, are sufficient to account for all. To this, again in fairness, it must be answered that, as a rule, these inquirers approach the question in a state of convinced scepticism, and

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible, in view of recent researches, to deny any longer that *Telepathy* is an established conclusion of science. It need not be concluded, however, that what St. Thomas appears to teach as to the impossibility of purely mental communications is at all assailed by this discovery. For, curiously enough, some of the characteristics of telepathy are markedly in accordance with the philosophy of St. Thomas. For example, communications by telepathy are nearly always conveyed by faint visualized pictures. The idea is not communicated direct. This seems to correspond remarkably with what St. Thomas implies, at least, with regard to sense-images.

that convinced scepticism is exactly that condition of mind that prevents the best manifestations. Certainly it is an unfortunate dilemma, but a perfectly legitimate one. It is the dilemma in which both Huxley and his Christian adversaries were placed when the former proposed testing the efficacy of prayer by the expedient of praying for the recovery of the patients in one selected ward of a hospital, and of comparing results with those of the other wards. Faith, or at least passivity of mind, it is claimed by Spiritualists, is a condition necessary to manifestations.

To Catholics, however, and indeed to most Christians, the evidence must naturally be of a very different value from that which it has to those who are not satisfied that a spiritual world exists at all. Catholics are persuaded that it does exist, that it does manifest itself (as in the lives of the saints) to the dwellers in this. They are bound, therefore, to be predisposed to accept good evidence to the effect that in this or that instance it has manifested itself; and the only questions that remain to be settled are, firstly, do these phenomena take place among spiritualists? secondly, how are they to be interpreted?

To this first question, no adequate answer can, of course, be given. A Catholic is perfectly free to deny that such things happen if he has examined the evidence and found it insufficient. He is not free, however—if he claims to be an intelligent man—to deny its possibility. Allowing, then, that the evidence has been found sufficient to show that at séances phenomena take place—of the kind described above—in sufficient number to be considerable, and of such a nature that they cannot be attributed to human agency<sup>1</sup>—what further criticisms can be passed upon them, and what conclusions can be drawn?

<sup>1</sup> It would occupy too much space to discuss adequately the theory put forward tentatively by some observers to the effect that the "subconscious self" (*i.e.* the range of these powers and faculties, such as the power of thought-transference, unconscious cerebration, etc., lying beneath the ordinary faculties of man) is capable of producing actual physical phe-

These criticisms are of various kinds—founded respectively upon observation, and on the principles of theology.

A. *Criticisms founded on observation.*

(a) First it cannot but be remarked that the phenomena are extremely frequently of a very trifling nature at the best. Foolish tricks are continually played upon the sitters; mocking answers given, or evasions, to their questions.<sup>1</sup> These are explained by spiritualists as being the work of low-caste or earth-bound spirits who intrude themselves into the circle. Yet the very possibility of this—and it is not denied that this phenomenon is fairly common—throws a very great doubt upon the genuineness of the other communications. If it is found impossible for inquirers, even with the best intentions, to protect themselves against these annoyances, how can it be possible for them to be sure that even the graver

nomena such as some of those described in these pages. It is, of course, a possible explanation—(possible, at least, in the sense that such an assertion cannot possibly be disproved, since it attributes to an almost wholly unknown part of human nature forces completely unanalogous to any others possessed by man)—but so also might it be attributed to electricity or ether, or some completely unknown but natural agency. To those, however, who believe at all in the existence of a spiritual world, it will seem a far more tenable hypothesis to suppose that it is from this spiritual world that the force is generated; and therefore, so far as the evidence goes, a more scientific hypothesis.

<sup>1</sup> (a) "I was suddenly startled by a noise like that of hammering, and of occasional footsteps, clearly emanating from the bedroom occupied by my friend. . . . The strange noises, which appeared to have ceased at the moment of my entrance, recommenced almost immediately with the utmost vigour, and I became the witness of a scene such as I have never witnessed before. . . . A hundred hands seemed to be hammering away on walls and doors and table and bed, and every now and then there was the sound of feet tramping along the floor. . . . As morning dawned the noises gradually ceased."—(*Dangers of Spiritualism*, pp. 45, 46.)

(b) "The moment the door is opened, it may be by the presence of persons of like inclinations, of ignorant or credulous mediums . . . or men of immoral or intemperate habits, troops of so-called 'dark' spirits rush in, and indulge these propensities to silly tricks, lying deception, and temptation to evil."—(Letter from a spiritualist of twenty years' standing, quoted in *Dangers of Spiritualism*, p. 125.)

messages come from those personalities that profess to send them?

(b) This doubt is further enhanced by the extraordinary meagreness even of the most solemn "spiritual teachings." If the spiritualistic theory were true, if it were a fact that some of the greatest thinkers and scientists in the world's history, consumed by a desire to illuminate their brethren still living on earth, returned to give them that teaching, how is it that no historical mystery has ever yet been solved by this means, no scientific problem answered, no ascetical doctrine superior to that already given by teachers on earth ever yet bestowed? The collections of "spiritual teachings" circulated from time to time among the public seldom surpass in intelligence or knowledge the average works of writers even still incarnate; much less do they approximate in knowledge or spirituality to the teachings of the greatest spiritual Leaders of the past.

(c) It is a matter of regret among spiritualists themselves that occasionally, after the most poignant scenes, when the presence of some departed friend has been recognized by one of the inquirers, further investigation has shown that the communicating personality has broken down in some perfectly simple test of identity.<sup>1</sup> This seems to lead to the inevitable conclusion that in some cases at least the discarnate spirit that has manifested itself has been deliberately

<sup>1</sup> "The absolute futility of any attempt at identifying spirits is another discouraging or unsatisfactory circumstance. It is no proof that the spirit communicating is A. B. if he tells me of words or circumstances (supposed to be) known only to A. B. and myself. . . . The alleged 'friend' of a few years ago (while he was writing through me, and turning my ideas upside down through his extraordinary 'counsel' and hypocrisy) certainly was possessed of knowledge of my present history unknown to anybody else. . . . Now if one's diary of thoughts and acts is an open book for one spirit and another to read at his convenience, nothing that he may resurrect to one's mind is any proof that he is trustworthy. . . . any more than would be the case if a shoeblack read over one's shoulder what one had written. . . . and claimed by virtue of his knowledge that he was one's father or mother."—(Extract from a letter quoted in *Dangers of Spiritualism*, pp. 115, 116.)

impersonating another in a most heartless manner. Grave suspicion then is bound to remain even in cases where fraud of this kind has not been detected.

(d) It is a matter of common knowledge among spiritualists that the nervous exhaustion which so often comes upon the medium during or after a séance has led in many cases to a complete breakdown of the mental and moral powers. This is not, of course, in any sense a conclusive argument; religious mania is known in every creed; but the fact becomes more significant when it is remembered that, on the other side, Spiritualism has not produced characters of any extraordinary sanctity or eminence. Except in the cases where materialists have been convinced through means of Spiritualism of the existence of another world, it is impossible to point to any spiritual or mental gain to balance the extremely numerous losses on the other side.

(e) Further, it is exceedingly easy to adduce testimony after testimony from those who, once spiritualists, have relinquished the life because of the loss not only of mental but also moral virtues. An extremely unpleasant symptom in the case of inquirers too much absorbed in such practices as those of *planchette* or ordinary *automatic handwriting* is the appearance of the obscene and blasphemous element in the communications received. Of course such results as those, as well as others less terrible (such as loss of will-power, morbidity, etc.) may very well arise from the mere passivity of mind necessary for success in such experiments, and from the consequent uprush of those realms of human consciousness not directly controlled by the will (as in the case of delirium). Yet, even with all allowances made for such possibilities, there would seem to remain a certain malignancy of deliberate purpose, a certain design followed in the process, certainly not intended by the inquirer, that would argue strongly in favour of another personality being at work. At any rate, in such cases, there is an inten-

tion of communicating with the spiritual world; and if this means of communication were according to the Divine will—if even it were true that the communicating personalities were those which they professed to be—it would be difficult to account for the persistence of this phenomenon.

The following extract from a letter to the author of *The Dangers of Spiritualism* is given at length, as containing an excellent analysis of the state of brain and nerves—to say the least—brought on by the continued practice of automatic handwriting.

“But now comes the worst part of the whole story. My whole being had manifestly undergone a change; I seemed to have received another nature—gross, vile, sensual, originating the most vile and abominable ideas, such as had never formerly entered into my mental life. My old self was still there, thank God! I have never quite lost that. But, although rebellious and disgusted, it nevertheless seemed powerless against the stronger, evil influence which was dominating it. It was as if some unclean spirit had taken possession of me, had driven out my old self, and was using my mind and body for its own vile purposes. At first, I fought and struggled against it, and tried to rouse myself; but it was all to no purpose. All the day long my body was tired, weighed down by a heavy, languid, care-for-nothing feeling. I had no desire but to lie down and to let my thoughts go wandering. I lost interest in everything I used to delight in in former times. I dropped my studies; my hobbies had no longer any charm for me; everything seemed an effort and a trouble. I have read of the mental and physical condition of opium-smokers, and it certainly seemed to me as if I was overpowered by a kind of moral opium which simply rendered me powerless to make any more effort. Only when evening came I seemed capable of moving. I then began to grow restless. If I went to bed I could not sleep, but simply lay awake, my brain all activity,

imagining, picturing the most wretched abominations. Dreading, therefore, to go to bed, I used to go out. Invariably I would find myself proceeding to some low public-house, not to drink, but just to be in the company of, and to hobnob with, any dirty, low fellow I would find there. And, strange to say, such would receive me just as one of themselves, while I felt perfectly at home with them—I, who had never been in the habit of frequenting the bar of even the most respectable public-house. I had no desire whatever to go among decent people of my own station of life; on the contrary, I liked the company I met with in these places; I liked the low, foul conversation; I revelled in the filthy talk! I would treat my companions to drink, and positively enjoyed seeing them drunk. The smell of the stale beer, of the rank tobacco, their crude familiarities, were like tonics to me. The weariness would go; I would sing and laugh with the loudest of them, thinking it a fine thing to be called a 'jolly good chap.' I could never get drunk myself; a single pint of beer would make me sick. When morning came I would get up, haggard, tired, ashamed, disgusted, afraid to meet any person of my acquaintance. I can't describe all the horrible things I went through, some of them veritable orgies. Time passed, things gradually got worse; I dropped my old friends, or they dropped me. I became unsettled and miserable in my work; I felt that I could not remain in my place, that I must get away. With new scenes and new faces I might get the better of this thing. So I sent in my resignation and left the town. . . . At present I am living an idle, aimless life, just existing on the payment I obtain for a few hours' private teaching a week, and a few shillings picked up playing the piano in public-houses. I am without hopes, prospects, or friends. What is there to live for?

"And now let me draw attention to one or two curious points in my history. It is very difficult to

explain exactly the relationship between the two natures inhabiting my body. I shall make myself better understood if I use the word *ego* to signify my own mental identity, and *alter* that of the other. By *I* and *me* I mean my physical self (common to both). Both of them are *I*; but the two are never 'in residence' at the same time. There is now no struggle for mastery. The change is imperceptible. I may now be *ego*, then I suddenly find myself *alter*. This latter, without warning, comes and takes possession, drives out *ego*, or paralyses him, does what he likes, and just as suddenly goes. He just ignores, never remembers or thinks of *ego*. *Ego*, on the contrary, has a vivid recollection of *alter*, is disgusted with him, loathes him, fears him, looks upon him as a vile, sensual thief, who has robbed him (*ego*) of all that made life worth living. When I am *alter* I am strong, active in mind and body, full of devilry, daring anything, imagining and enjoying all evil. When *alter* goes, poor, pitiful *ego* just creeps back into a weak, exhausted body, weary, tired of life, full of remorse, making good resolutions, yet having no power to carry them out. There is one other point. If I can manage to get off into a good sleep, *alter* seems to be powerless. My dreams are always pleasant, mostly of people and places of the good old times, never of anything bad. It is only when I am awake, and when my mind is unemployed, that *alter* catches me. My worst time is at night. If I go to bed without being able to sleep, *alter* is in full possession, running riot with my imagination till the morning.

"There may have been no connection between my dabbling in telepathy and this other thing, but, rightly or wrongly, I believe that on that night some unclean spirit attached itself to me, gradually gaining influence over my nature, and in the end making me his mere slave. For very shame I have been obliged to keep the whole matter to myself. People sometimes marvel (and well they might) at the change which has come

over me. My sense of fairness will not permit me to put the whole blame upon telepathy; there may have been some unconscious error on my part, or some circumstance unknown to me may have caused this alteration in my life. The fact itself remains; I know what I was before that evening, and I know what I have been since.

"I have only succeeded in writing this by fits and starts when I am *ego*; *alter* nearly threw it all into the fire last evening, calling it a d—d lot of rubbish."

So much, then, for criticisms founded on observation. We pass on to—

B. *Criticisms founded on theology.*

It must first be remarked that the following criticisms will have no weight with those who approach the subject of Spiritualism as pure agnostics—beyond the weight of the fact that historical religion has always recognized the existence of Spiritualism or Necromancy, and, up to a certain point at least, the objectivity of its phenomena.

For it is not only the Catholic Church that has condemned Spiritualism, the Protestant bodies have usually done so as well, and the Jewish Church punished the adherents of Necromancy with death. Spiritualism, or Necromancy, or the dealing with "familiar spirits," has always been regarded by the other great world-religions as a bastard, rather than a competitor with a dignity comparable to their own. This fact is at least significant.

(a) First, then, it is sufficient for the Catholic to recognize that Spiritualism is, dogmatically, an adversary, and not an ally of his own creed. It is claimed sometimes that Spiritualism and Christianity are compatible, and, theoretically, it may be so; but, practically, their dogmatic systems are mutually exclusive, and Christians who practise Spiritualism are bound in the long-run to choose between that faith and their own. So far as Spiritualism has produced a coherent creed at all, it directly traverses

even such fundamental doctrines as that of the Incarnation.

(*b*) Catholic theology teaches in detail that the destiny of all men at death takes them elsewhere in the spiritual world. It is entirely incompatible with Catholic belief to believe that the souls of the departed are allowed, except under very peculiar and unusual circumstances, to revisit this earth with the intention of communicating with those still living upon it. To believe that those souls are so far at the mercy of mediums as to be compelled, practically, in instance after instance, to manifest themselves here—particularly under such circumstances as usually accompany spiritualistic séances—is utterly antagonistic both to the letter and the spirit of Catholic teaching.

For these two main reasons, then, as well as for others mentioned above, the Catholic Church condemns Spiritualism without reserve. She acknowledges the fact that the spiritual world is accessible to this, and this to that; but she lays down most stringently the only modes in which such communication may be sought, and denounces the rest as methods contrary to the Divine Will.

(*c*) What, then, is the view of Catholic theologians as regards the phenomena claimed by Spiritualists?

First it must be noted that Catholics do not pledge themselves, as a matter of faith, even to the objectivity of the phenomena. This or that piece of evidence must be judged, as all other evidence, even in support of alleged Catholic miracles, simply on its own weight. At the same time it is undoubtedly true that Catholic theologians as a whole are disposed to accept much of the evidence offered by Spiritualists as a sufficient proof that phenomena do take place at séances and elsewhere which cannot be accounted for on natural grounds. The explanation given, then, is as follows:—

(1) Christians are aware from quite other reasons than those given by Spiritualists that the spiritual world is a fact, that it is inhabited by innumerable

personalities, good and bad, and that to many of these personalities—that is, to spirits that have never been incarnate—this world is perfectly accessible. On the one side are the unfallen angels of God, on the other the fallen; and this earth is to a large extent the battle-ground between these opposing forces. The object of the angels of light is to draw men nearer to God, to protect them from spiritual and even bodily dangers, and to help them towards heaven; the object of the angels of darkness is exactly the opposite.

Now the precise range of powers permitted to the evil angels has not been revealed to men; we know only that they are considerable, though limited; and we may at least conjecture that as it has been permitted in the past to the angels of light to assume a human appearance, so it is at any rate quite possible that the same power may be allowed to their adversaries. We know also as a positive fact that the evil angels are permitted under certain circumstances to obtain such a hold over men who yield to them as actually to *obsess* or *possess*<sup>1</sup> their powers and their will.

(2) Turning once more to the phenomena of Spiritualism, it is to be noticed that the Christian faith is continually assailed by those professed "benefactors" of man; that the mental powers or the morality of those who practise Spiritualism are extremely liable to decay; and further, that the process employed is one calculated to undermine almost imperceptibly the faith and morals of even those who approach the investigation with good intentions. In a word, it would seem that—if the alleged experiences are facts—they are designed with considerable skill to the carrying out of that very object which Catholics believe to be the aim of the spiritual enemies of man. Inquirers are met on their most tender side, the

<sup>1</sup> "Obsession" means the persecution of the human will or imagination; "possession," its more or less complete control by a discarnate spirit.

appeal is made to their highest human affections; they are led on by apparent proof after apparent proof to believe that they are actually in communication with those they once loved on earth. It would appear almost inevitable, then, that such inquirers should ultimately accept such teaching as they receive—and we have seen of what character that teaching is—as undeniable truth. For every man that is converted by Spiritualism to believe in the immortality of his soul, there are probably a hundred who are led by it to relinquish the beliefs and practices of Christianity.

Further evidence in support of the Catholic theory is found in the facts related above under the heading *Criticisms founded on observation*. The large proportion of fraud, both on the part of mediums and of the personalities that claim to communicate, the trifling and often mischievous tricks and evasions with which serious inquiry is so often met, the solemnity of the claim to shed light from the spiritual world upon the problems of this world, coupled with the extraordinary futility of the "revelations" so made, as well as the continual injuries inflicted upon the bodily and mental health of the mediums and the inquirers—all those considerations support very strongly the Catholic contention that the phenomena, if genuine, must be the work of the avowed spiritual enemies of the human race. Theologians emphasize this the more from the fact that in extreme cases of nervous or mental breakdown following upon the practices of Spiritualism, symptoms make their appearance identical with, or at least closely resembling, those which accompany undoubted cases of "possession"; and "possession," it must be remembered, has been familiar to Catholics for many centuries; its treatment finds a regular place in the Ritual and Exorcisms of the Church, and the fact of it is vouched for explicitly in the New Testament.

As regards the exact mode by which the genuine

phenomena—if they exist—are produced, Catholic theology offers no definite opinion. All that can be said is that an acceptance of the “astral” theory is not condemned. It is conceivable that there may be some such force or substance in the human constitution, but of this Catholic theology has no cognizance. It is a matter of psychical, or even physical science, rather than of theology or philosophy.

This, then, is the attitude of the Catholic Church towards Spiritualism:—

(1) She does not in any way commit herself to the acceptance of the phenomena. Yet she does not deny them, and allows fully for their possibility. Each claim stands or falls on its own proper evidence.

(2) So far as the alleged phenomena are genuine, the Catholic Church accounts for them by the action of evil discarnate spirits—called “fallen angels.” She utterly rejects, therefore, their testimony, and warns her children against accepting it.

(3) She condemns in the gravest manner any attempt to communicate in this manner with the spiritual world, as contrary to the Divine Will.

(4) She leaves open—granted the genuineness of the phenomena—the mode in which such phenomena are accomplished.

#### BOOKS RECOMMENDED.

*Modern Spiritism.* By J. Godfrey Raupert. Kegan Paul, 1907.

*The Dangers of Spiritualism.* By J. Godfrey Raupert. Kegan Paul, 1906.

*Sermons on Modern Spiritualism.* By Rev. A. V. Miller. Kegan Paul, 1908.

*Hypnotism and Spiritism.* By Lapponi. Chapman & Hall, 1906.

*The Unseen World.* By Lepicier. Kegan Paul, 1906.