

Arthur Conan Doyle

The Vital Message



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The Vital Message

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Preface

In "The New Revelation" the first dawn of the coming change has been described. In "The Vital Message" the sun has risen higher, and one sees more clearly and broadly what our new relations with the Unseen may be. As I look into the future of the human race I am reminded of how once, from amid the bleak chaos of rock and snow at the head of an Alpine pass, I looked down upon the far stretching view of Lombardy, shimmering in the sunshine and extending in one splendid panorama of blue lakes and green rolling hills until it melted into the golden haze which draped the far horizon. Such a promised land is at our very feet which, when we attain it, will make our present civilisation seem barren and uncouth. Already our vanguard is well over the pass. Nothing can now prevent us from reaching that wonderful land which stretches so clearly before those eyes which are opened to see it. That stimulating writer, V. C. Desertis, has remarked that the Second Coming, which has always been timed to follow Armageddon, may be fulfilled not by a descent of the spiritual to us, but by the ascent of our material plane to the spiritual, and the blending of the two phases of existence. It is, at least, a fascinating speculation. But without so complete an overthrow of the partition walls as this would imply we know enough already to assure ourselves of such a close approximation as will surely deeply modify all our views of science, of religion and of life. What form these changes may take and what the evidence is upon which they will be founded are briefly set forth in this volume.

Arthur Conan Doyle.

Crowborough,

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Chapter I. The two needful readjustments

It has been our fate, among all the innumerable generations of mankind, to face the most frightful calamity that has ever befallen the world. There is a basic fact which cannot be denied, and should not be overlooked. For a most important deduction must immediately follow from it. That deduction is that we, who have borne the pains, shall also learn the lesson which they were intended to convey. If we do not learn it and proclaim it, then when can it ever be learned and proclaimed, since there can never again be such a spiritual ploughing and harrowing and preparation for the seed? If our souls, wearied and tortured during these dreadful five years of self-sacrifice and suspense, can show no radical changes, then what souls will ever respond to a fresh influx of heavenly inspiration? In that case the state of the human race would indeed be hopeless, and never in all the coming centuries would there be any prospect of improvement.

Why was this tremendous experience forced upon mankind? Surely it is a superficial thinker who imagines that the great Designer of all things has set the whole planet in a ferment, and strained every nation to exhaustion, in order that this or that frontier be moved, or some fresh combination be formed in the kaleidoscope of nations. No, the causes of the convulsion, and its objects, are more profound than that. They are essentially religious, not political. They lie far deeper than the national squabbles of the day. A thousand years hence those national results may matter little, but the religious result will rule the world. That religious result is the reform of the decadent Christianity of to-day, its simplification, its purification, and its reinforcement by the facts of spirit communion and the clear knowledge of what lies beyond the exit-door of death. The shock of the war was meant to rouse us to mental and moral earnestness, to give us the courage to tear away venerable shams, and to force the human race to realise and use the vast new revelation which has been so clearly stated and so abundantly proved, for all who will examine the statements and proofs with an open mind. Consider the awful condition of the world before this thunder-bolt struck it. Could anyone, tracing back down the centuries and examining the record of the wickedness of man, find anything which could compare with the story of the nations during the last twenty years! Think of the condition of Russia during that time, with her brutal aristocracy and her drunken democracy, her murders on either side, her Siberian horrors, her Jew baitings and her corruption. Think of the figure of Leopold of Belgium, an incarnate devil who from motives of greed carried murder and torture through a large section of Africa, and yet was received in every court, and was eventually buried after a panegyric from a Cardinal of the Roman Church – a church which had never once raised her voice against his diabolical career. Consider the similar crimes in the Putumayo, where British capitalists, if not guilty of outrage, can at least not be acquitted of having condoned it by their lethargy and trust in local agents. Think of Turkey and the recurrent massacres of her subject races. Think of the heartless grind of the factories everywhere, where work assumed a very different and more unnatural shape than the ancient labour of the fields. Think of the sensuality of many rich, the brutality of many poor, the shallowness of many fashionable, the coldness and deadness of religion, the absence anywhere of any deep, true spiritual impulse. Think, above all, of the organised materialism of Germany, the arrogance, the heartlessness, the negation of everything which one could possibly associate with the living spirit of Christ as evident in the utterances of Catholic Bishops, like Hartmann of Cologne, as in those of Lutheran Pastors. Put all this together and say if the human race has ever presented a more unlovely aspect. When we try to find the brighter spots they are chiefly where civilisation, as apart from religion, has built up necessities for the community, such as hospitals, universities, and organised charities, as conspicuous in Buddhist Japan as in Christian Europe. We cannot deny that there has been much virtue, much gentleness, much spirituality in individuals. But the churches were empty husks, which contained no spiritual food for the human race, and had in the main ceased to influence its actions, save in the direction of soulless forms. This is not an over-coloured picture. Can

we not see, then, what was the inner reason for the war? Can we not understand that it was needful to shake mankind loose from gossip and pink teas, and sword-worship, and Saturday night drunks, and self-seeking politics and theological quibbles – to wake them up and make them realise that they stand upon a narrow knife-edge between two awful eternities, and that, here and now, they have to finish with make-beliefs, and with real earnestness and courage face those truths which have always been palpable where indolence, or cowardice, or vested interests have not obscured the vision. Let us try to appreciate what those truths are and the direction which reform must take. It is the new spiritual developments which predominate in my own thoughts, but there are two other great readjustments which are necessary before they can take their full effect. On the spiritual side I can speak with the force of knowledge from the beyond. On the other two points of reform, I make no such claim. The first is that in the Bible, which is the foundation of our present religious thought, we have bound together the living and the dead, and the dead has tainted the living. A mummy and an angel are in most unnatural partnership. There can be no clear thinking, and no logical teaching until the old dispensation has been placed on the shelf of the scholar, and removed from the desk of the teacher. It is indeed a wonderful book, in parts the oldest which has come down to us, a book filled with rare knowledge, with history, with poetry, with occultism, with folklore. But it has no connection with modern conceptions of religion. In the main it is actually antagonistic to them. Two contradictory codes have been circulated under one cover, and the result is dire confusion. The one is a scheme depending upon a special tribal God, intensely anthropomorphic and filled with rage, jealousy and revenge. The conception pervades every book of the Old Testament. Even in the psalms, which are perhaps the most spiritual and beautiful section, the psalmist, amid much that is noble, sings of the fearsome things which his God will do to his enemies. "They shall go down alive into hell." There is the keynote of this ancient document – a document which advocates massacre, condones polygamy, accepts slavery, and orders the burning of so-called witches. Its Mosaic provisions have long been laid aside. We do not consider ourselves accursed if we fail to mutilate our bodies, if we eat forbidden dishes, fail to trim our beards, or wear clothes of two materials. But we cannot lay aside the provisions and yet regard the document as divine. No learned quibbles can ever persuade an honest earnest mind that that is right. One may say: "Everyone knows that that is the old dispensation, and is not to be acted upon." It is not true. It is continually acted upon, and always will be so long as it is made part of one sacred book. William the Second acted upon it. His German God which wrought such mischief in the world was the reflection of the dreadful being who ordered that captives be put under the harrow. The cities of Belgium were the reflection of the cities of Moab. Every hard-hearted brute in history, more especially in the religious wars, has found his inspiration in the Old Testament. "Smite and spare not!" "An eye for an eye!", how readily the texts spring to the grim lips of the murderous fanatic. Francis on St. Bartholomew's night, Alva in the Lowlands, Tilly at Magdeburg, Cromwell at Drogheda, the Covenanters at Philliphaugh, the Anabaptists of Munster, and the early Mormons of Utah, all found their murderous impulses fortified from this unholy source. Its red trail runs through history. Even where the New Testament prevails, its teaching must still be dulled and clouded by its sterner neighbour. Let us retain this honoured work of literature. Let us remove the taint which poisons the very spring of our religious thought.

This is, in my opinion, the first clearing which should be made for the more beautiful building to come. The second is less important, as it is a shifting of the point of view, rather than an actual change. It is to be remembered that Christ's life in this world occupied, so far as we can estimate, 33 years, whilst from His arrest to His resurrection was less than a week. Yet the whole Christian system has come to revolve round His death, to the partial exclusion of the beautiful lesson of His life. Far too much weight has been placed upon the one, and far too little upon the other, for the death, beautiful, and indeed perfect, as it was, could be matched by that of many scores of thousands who have died for an idea, while the life, with its consistent record of charity, breadth of mind, unselfishness, courage, reason, and progressiveness, is absolutely unique and superhuman.

Even in these abbreviated, translated, and second-hand records we receive an impression such as no other life can give – an impression which fills us with utter reverence. Napoleon, no mean judge of human nature, said of it: "It is different with Christ. Everything about Him astonishes me. His spirit surprises me, and His will confounds me. Between Him and anything of this world there is no possible comparison. He is really a being apart. The nearer I approach Him and the closer I examine Him, the more everything seems above me." It is this wonderful life, its example and inspiration, which was the real object of the descent of this high spirit on to our planet. If the human race had earnestly centred upon that instead of losing itself in vain dreams of vicarious sacrifices and imaginary falls, with all the mystical and contentious philosophy which has centred round the subject, how very different the level of human culture and happiness would be to-day! Such theories, with their absolute want of reason or morality, have been the main cause why the best minds have been so often alienated from the Christian system and proclaimed themselves materialists. In contemplating what shocked their instincts for truth they have lost that which was both true and beautiful. Christ's death was worthy of His life, and rounded off a perfect career, but it is the life which He has left as the foundation for the permanent religion of mankind. All the religious wars, the private feuds, and the countless miseries of sectarian contention, would have been at least minimised, if not avoided, had the bare example of Christ's life been adopted as the standard of conduct and of religion. But there are certain other considerations which should have weight when we contemplate this life and its efficacy as an example. One of these is that the very essence of it was that He critically examined religion as He found it, and brought His robust common sense and courage to bear in exposing the shams and in pointing out the better path. THAT is the hall-mark of the true follower of Christ, and not the mute acceptance of doctrines which are, upon the face of them, false and pernicious, because they come to us with some show of authority. What authority have we now, save this very life, which could compare with those Jewish books which were so binding in their force, and so immutably sacred that even the misspellings or pen-slips of the scribe, were most carefully preserved? It is a simple obvious fact that if Christ had been orthodox, and had possessed what is so often praised as a "child-like faith," there could have been no such thing as Christianity. Let reformers who love Him take heart as they consider that they are indeed following in the footsteps of the Master, who has at no time said that the revelation which He brought, and which has been so imperfectly used, is the last which will come to mankind. In our own times an equally great one has been released from the centre of all truth, which will make as deep an impression upon the human race as Christianity, though no predominant figure has yet appeared to enforce its lessons. Such a figure has appeared once when the days were ripe, and I do not doubt that this may occur once more. One other consideration must be urged. Christ has not given His message in the first person. If He had done so our position would be stronger. It has been repeated by the hearsay and report of earnest but ill-educated men. It speaks much for education in the Roman province of Judea that these fishermen, publicans and others could even read or write. Luke and Paul were, of course, of a higher class, but their information came from their lowly predecessors. Their account is splendidly satisfying in the unity of the general impression which it produces, and the clear drawing of the Master's teaching and character. At the same time it is full of inconsistencies and contradictions upon immaterial matters. For example, the four accounts of the resurrection differ in detail, and there is no orthodox learned lawyer who dutifully accepts all four versions who could not shatter the evidence if he dealt with it in the course of his profession. These details are immaterial to the spirit of the message. It is not common sense to suppose that every item is inspired, or that we have to make no allowance for imperfect reporting, individual convictions, oriental phraseology, or faults of translation. These have, indeed, been admitted by revised versions. In His utterance about the letter and the spirit we could almost believe that Christ had foreseen the plague of texts from which we have suffered, even as He Himself suffered at the hands of the theologians of His day, who then, as now, have been a curse to the world. We were meant to use our reasons and brains in adapting His teaching to the conditions of our altered lives and times. Much depended upon the society and mode

of expression which belonged to His era. To suppose in these days that one has literally to give all to the poor, or that a starved English prisoner should literally love his enemy the Kaiser, or that because Christ protested against the lax marriages of His day therefore two spouses who loathe each other should be for ever chained in a life servitude and martyrdom – all these assertions are to travesty His teaching and to take from it that robust quality of common sense which was its main characteristic. To ask what is impossible from human nature is to weaken your appeal when you ask for what is reasonable. It has already been stated that of the three headings under which reforms are grouped, the exclusion of the old dispensation, the greater attention to Christ's life as compared to His death, and the new spiritual influx which is giving us psychic religion, it is only on the latter that one can quote the authority of the beyond. Here, however, the case is really understated. In regard to the Old Testament I have never seen the matter treated in a spiritual communication. The nature of Christ, however, and His teaching, have been expounded a score of times with some variation of detail, but in the main as reproduced here. Spirits have their individuality of view, and some carry over strong earthly prepossessions which they do not easily shed; but reading many authentic spirit communications one finds that the idea of redemption is hardly ever spoken of, while that of example and influence is for ever insisted upon. In them Christ is the highest spirit known, the son of God, as we all are, but nearer to God, and therefore in a more particular sense His son. He does not, save in most rare and special cases, meet us when we die. Since souls pass over, night and day, at the rate of about 100 a minute, this would seem self-evident. After a time we may be admitted to His presence, to find a most tender, sympathetic and helpful comrade and guide, whose spirit influences all things even when His bodily presence is not visible. This is the general teaching of the other world communications concerning Christ, the gentle, loving and powerful spirit which broods ever over that world which, in all its many spheres, is His special care. Before passing to the new revelation, its certain proofs and its definite teaching, let us hark back for a moment upon the two points which have already been treated. They are not absolutely vital points. The fresh developments can go on and conquer the world without them. There can be no sudden change in the ancient routine of our religious habits, nor is it possible to conceive that a congress of theologians could take so heroic a step as to tear the Bible in twain, laying one half upon the shelf and one upon the table. Neither is it to be expected that any formal pronouncements could ever be made that the churches have all laid the wrong emphasis upon the story of Christ. Moral courage will not rise to such a height. But with the spiritual quickening and the greater earnestness which will have their roots in this bloody passion of mankind, many will perceive what is reasonable and true, so that even if the Old Testament should remain, like some obsolete appendix in the animal frame, to mark a lower stage through which development has passed, it will more and more be recognised as a document which has lost all validity and which should no longer be allowed to influence human conduct, save by way of pointing out much which we may avoid. So also with the teaching of Christ, the mystical portions may fade gently away, as the grosser views of eternal punishment have faded within our own lifetime, so that while mankind is hardly aware of the change the heresy of today will become the commonplace of tomorrow. These things will adjust themselves in God's own time. What is, however, both new and vital are those fresh developments which will now be discussed. In them may be found the signs of how the dry bones may be stirred, and how the mummy may be quickened with the breath of life. With the actual certainty of a definite life after death, and a sure sense of responsibility for our own spiritual development, a responsibility which cannot be put upon any other shoulders, however exalted, but must be borne by each individual for himself, there will come the greatest reinforcement of morality which the human race has ever known. We are on the verge of it now, but our descendants will look upon the past century as the culmination of the dark ages when man lost his trust in God, and was so engrossed in his temporary earth life that he lost all sense of spiritual reality.

Chapter II. The dawning of the light

Some sixty years ago that acute thinker Lord Brougham remarked that in the clear sky of scepticism he saw only one small cloud drifting up and that was Modern Spiritualism. It was a curiously inverted simile, for one would surely have expected him to say that in the drifting clouds of scepticism he saw one patch of clear sky, but at least it showed how conscious he was of the coming importance of the movement. Ruskin, too, an equally agile mind, said that his assurance of immortality depended upon the observed facts of Spiritualism. Scores, and indeed hundreds, of famous names could be quoted who have subscribed the same statement, and whose support would dignify any cause upon earth. They are the higher peaks who have been the first to catch the light, but the dawn will spread until none are too lowly to share it. Let us turn, therefore, and inspect this movement which is most certainly destined to revolutionise human thought and action as none other has done within the Christian era. We shall look at it both in its strength and in its weakness, for where one is dealing with what one knows to be true one can fearlessly insist upon the whole of the truth. The movement which is destined to bring vitality to the dead and cold religions has been called "Modern Spiritualism." The "modern" is good, since the thing itself, in one form or another, is as old as history, and has always, however obscured by forms, been the red central glow in the depths of all religious ideas, permeating the Bible from end to end. But the word "Spiritualism" has been so befouled by wicked charlatans, and so cheapened by many a sad incident, that one could almost wish that some such term as "psychic religion" would clear the subject of old prejudices, just as mesmerism, after many years of obloquy, was rapidly accepted when its name was changed to hypnotism. On the other hand, one remembers the sturdy pioneers who have fought under this banner, and who were prepared to risk their careers, their professional success, and even their reputation for sanity, by publicly asserting what they knew to be the truth.

Their brave, unselfish devotion must do something to cleanse the name for which they fought and suffered. It was they who nursed the system which promises to be, not a new religion – it is far too big for that – but part of the common heritage of knowledge shared by the whole human race. Perfected Spiritualism, however, will probably bear about the same relation to the Spiritualism of 1850 as a modern locomotive to the bubbling little kettle which heralded the era of steam. It will end by being rather the proof and basis of all religions than a religion in itself. We have already too many religions – but too few proofs. Those first manifestations at Hydesville varied in no way from many of which we have record in the past, but the result arising from them differed very much, because, for the first time, it occurred to a human being not merely to listen to inexplicable sounds, and to fear them or marvel at them, but to establish communication with them. John Wesley's father might have done the same more than a century before had the thought occurred to him when he was a witness of the manifestations at Epworth in 1726. It was only when the young Fox girl struck her hands together and cried "Do as I do" that there was instant compliance, and consequent proof of the presence of an INTELLIGENT invisible force, thus differing from all other forces of which we know. The circumstances were humble, and even rather sordid, upon both sides of the veil, human and spirit, yet it was, as time will more and more clearly show, one of the turning points of the world's history, greater far than the fall of thrones or the rout of armies. Some artist of the future will draw the scene – the sitting-room of the wooden, shack-like house, the circle of half-awed and half-critical neighbours, the child clapping her hands with upturned laughing face, the dark corner shadows where these strange new forces seem to lurk – forces often apparent, and now come to stay and to effect the complete revolution of human thought. We may well ask why should such great results arise from such petty sources? So argued the highbrowed philosophers of Greece and Rome when the outspoken Paul, with the fisherman Peter and his half-educated disciples, traversed all their learned theories, and with the help of women, slaves, and schismatic Jews, subverted their ancient creeds. One can but

answer that Providence has its own way of attaining its results, and that it seldom conforms to our opinion of what is most appropriate. We have a larger experience of such phenomena now, and we can define with some accuracy what it was that happened at Hydesville in the year 1848. We know that these matters are governed by law and by conditions as much as any other phenomena of the universe, though at the moment it seemed to the public to be an isolated and irregular outburst. On the one hand, you had a material, earth-bound spirit of a low order of development which needed a physical medium in order to be able to indicate its presence. On the other, you had that rare thing, a good physical medium. The result followed as surely as the flash follows when the electric battery and wire are both properly adjusted. Corresponding experiments, where effect, and cause duly follow, are being worked out at the present moment by Professor Crawford, of Belfast, as detailed in his two recent books, where he shows that there is an actual loss of weight of the medium in exact proportion to the physical phenomenon produced¹. The whole secret of mediumship on this material side appears to lie in the power, quite independent of oneself, of passively giving up some portion of one's bodily substance for the use of outside influences. Why should some have this power and some not? We do not know – nor do we know why one should have the ear for music and another not. Each is born in us, and each has little connection with our moral natures. At first it was only physical mediumship which was known, and public attention centred upon moving tables, automatic musical instruments, and other crude but obvious examples of outside influence, which were unhappily very easily imitated by rogues. Since then we have learned that there are many forms of mediumship, so different from each other that an expert at one may have no powers at all at the other. The automatic writer, the clairvoyant, the crystal-seer, the trance speaker, the photographic medium, the direct voice medium, and others, are all, when genuine, the manifestations of one force, which runs through varied channels as it did in the gifts ascribed to the disciples. The unhappy outburst of roguery was helped, no doubt, by the need for darkness claimed by the early experimenters – a claim which is by no means essential, since the greatest of all mediums, D. D. Home, was able by the exceptional strength of his powers to dispense with it. At the same time the fact that darkness rather than light, and dryness rather than moisture, are helpful to good results has been abundantly manifested, and points to the physical laws which underlie the phenomena. The observation made long afterwards that wireless telegraphy, another etheric force, acts twice as well by night as by day, may, corroborate the general conclusions of the early Spiritualists, while their assertion that the least harmful light is red light has a suggestive analogy in the experience of the photographer.

There is no space here for the history of the rise and development of the movement. It provoked warm adhesion and fierce opposition from the start. Professor Hare and Horace Greeley were among the educated minority who tested and endorsed its truth. It was disfigured by many grievous incidents, which may explain but does not excuse the perverse opposition which it encountered in so many quarters. This opposition was really largely based upon the absolute materialism of the age, which would not admit that there could exist at the present moment such conditions as might be accepted in the far past. When actually brought in contact with that life beyond the grave which they professed to believe in, these people winced, recoiled, and declared it impossible. The science of the day was also rooted in materialism, and discarded all its own very excellent axioms when it was faced by an entirely new and unexpected proposition. Faraday declared that in approaching a new subject one should make up one's mind a priori as to what is possible and what is not! Huxley said that the messages, even if true, "interested him no more than the gossip of curates in a cathedral city." Darwin said: "God help us if we are to believe such things." Herbert Spencer declared against it, but had no time to go into it. At the same time all science did not come so badly out of the ordeal. As already mentioned, Professor Hare, of Philadelphia, inventor, among other things, of the oxy-hydrogen blow-pipe, was the first man of note who had the moral courage, after considerable personal

¹ "The Reality of Psychic Phenomena." "Experiences in Psychical Science." (Watkins.)

investigation, to declare that these new and strange developments were true. He was followed by many medical men, both in America and in Britain, including Dr. Elliotson, one of the leaders of free thought in this country. Professor Crookes, the most rising chemist in Europe, Dr. Russel Wallace the great naturalist, Varley the electrician, Flammarion the French astronomer, and many others, risked their scientific reputations in their brave assertions of the truth. These men were not credulous fools. They saw and deplored the existence of frauds. Crookes' letters upon the subject are still extant. In very many cases it was the Spiritualists themselves who exposed the frauds. They laughed, as the public laughed, at the sham Shakespeares and vulgar Caesars who figured in certain seance rooms. They deprecated also the low moral tone which would turn such powers to prophecies about the issue of a race or the success of a speculation. But they had that broader vision and sense of proportion which assured them that behind all these follies and frauds there lay a mass of solid evidence which could not be shaken, though like all evidence, it had to be examined before it could be appreciated. They were not such simpletons as to be driven away from a great truth because there are some dishonest camp followers who hang upon its skirts. A great centre of proof and of inspiration lay during those early days in Mr. D. D. Home, a Scottish-American, who possessed powers which make him one of the most remarkable personalities of whom we have any record. Home's life, written by his second wife, is a book which deserves very careful reading. This man, who in some aspects was more than a man, was before the public for nearly thirty years. During that time he never received payment for his services, and was always ready, to put himself at the disposal of any bona-fide and reasonable enquirer. His phenomena were produced in full light, and it was immaterial to him whether the sittings were in his own rooms or in those of his friends. So high were his principles that upon one occasion, though he was a man of moderate means and less than moderate health, he refused the princely fee of two thousand pounds offered for a single sitting by the Union Circle in Paris.

As to his powers, they seem to have included every form of mediumship in the highest degree – self-levitation, as witnessed by hundreds of credible witnesses; the handling of fire, with the power of conferring like immunity upon others; the movement without human touch of heavy objects; the visible materialisation of spirits; miracles of healing; and messages from the dead, such as that which converted the hard-headed Scot, Robert Chambers, when Home repeated to him the actual dying words of his young daughter. All this came from a man of so sweet a nature and of so charitable a disposition, that the union of all qualities would seem almost to justify those who, to Home's great embarrassment, were prepared to place him upon a pedestal above humanity. The genuineness of his psychic powers has never been seriously questioned, and was as well recognised in Rome and Paris as in London. One incident only darkened his career, and it, was one in which he was blameless, as anyone who carefully weighs the evidence must admit. I allude to the action taken against him by Mrs. Lyon, who, after adopting him as her son and settling a large sum of money upon him, endeavoured to regain, and did regain, this money by her unsupported assertion that he had persuaded her illicitly to make him the allowance. The facts of his life are, in my judgment, ample proof of the truth of the Spiritualist position, if no other proof at all had been available. It is to be remarked in the career of this entirely honest and unvenal medium that he had periods in his life when his powers deserted him completely, that he could foresee these lapses, and that, being honest and unvenal, he simply abstained from all attempts until the power returned. It is this intermittent character of the gift which is, in my opinion, responsible for cases when a medium who has passed the most rigid tests upon certain occasions is afterwards detected in simulating, very clumsily, the results which he had once successfully accomplished. The real power having failed, he has not the moral courage to admit it, nor the self-denial to forego his fee which he endeavours to earn by a travesty of what was once genuine. Such an explanation would cover some facts which otherwise are hard to reconcile. We must also admit that some mediums are extremely irresponsible and feather-headed people. A friend of mine, who sat with Eusapia Palladino, assured me that he saw her cheat in the most childish and bare-faced fashion, and yet immediately afterwards incidents occurred which were absolutely

beyond any, normal powers to produce. Apart from Home, another episode which marks a stage in the advance of this movement was the investigation and report by the Dialectical Society in the year 1869. This body was composed of men of various learned professions who gathered together to investigate the alleged facts, and ended by reporting that they really WERE facts. They were unbiased, and their conclusions were founded upon results which were very soberly set forth in their report, a most convincing document which, even now in 1919, after the lapse of fifty years, is far more intelligent than the greater part of current opinion upon this subject. None the less, it was greeted by a chorus of ridicule by the ignorant Press of that day, who, if the same men had come to the opposite conclusion in spite of the evidence, would have been ready to hail their verdict as the undoubted end of a pernicious movement. In the early days, about 1863, a book was written by Mrs. de Morgan, the wife of the well-known mathematician Professor de Morgan, entitled "From Matter to Spirit." There is a sympathetic preface by the husband. The book is still well worth reading, for it is a question whether anyone has shown greater brain power in treating the subject. In it the prophecy is made that as the movement develops the more material phenomena will decrease and their place be taken by the more spiritual, such as automatic writing. This forecast has been fulfilled, for though physical mediums still exist the other more subtle forms greatly predominate, and call for far more discriminating criticism in judging their value and their truth. Two very convincing forms of mediumship, the direct voice and spirit photography, have also become prominent. Each of these presents such proof that it is impossible for the sceptic to face them, and he can only avoid them by ignoring them. In the case of the direct voice one of the leading exponents is Mrs. French, an amateur medium in America, whose work is described both by Mr. Funk and Mr. Randall. She is a frail elderly lady, yet in her presence the most masculine and robust voices make communications, even when her own mouth is covered. I have myself investigated the direct voice in the case of four different mediums, two of them amateurs, and can have no doubt of the reality of the voices, and that they are not the effect of ventriloquism. I was more struck by the failures than by the successes, and cannot easily forget the passionate pantings with which some entity strove hard to reveal his identity to me, but without success. One of these mediums was tested afterwards by having the mouth filled with coloured water, but the voice continued as before. As to spirit photography, the most successful results are obtained by the Crewe circle in England, under the mediumship of Mr. Hope and Mrs. Buxton². I have seen scores of these photographs, which in several cases reproduce exact images of the dead which do not correspond with any pictures of them taken during life. I have seen father, mother, and dead soldier son, all taken together with the dead son looking far the happier and not the least substantial of the three. It is in these varied forms of proof that the impregnable strength of the evidence lies, for how absurd do explanations of telepathy, unconscious cerebration or cosmic memory become when faced by such phenomena as spirit photography, materialisation, or the direct voice. Only one hypothesis can cover every branch of these manifestations, and that is the system of extraneous life and action which has always, for seventy years, held the field for any reasonable mind which had impartially considered the facts.

I have spoken of the need for careful and cool-headed analysis in judging the evidence where automatic writing is concerned. One is bound to exclude spirit explanations until all natural ones have been exhausted, though I do not include among natural ones the extreme claims of far-fetched telepathy such as that another person can read in your thoughts things of which you were never yourself aware. Such explanations are not explanations, but mystifications and absurdities, though they seem to have a special attraction for a certain sort of psychical researcher, who is obviously destined to go on researching to the end of time, without ever reaching any conclusion save that of the patience of those who try to follow his reasoning. To give a good example of valid automatic script, chosen out of many which I could quote, I would draw the reader's attention to the facts as

² See Appendix.

to the excavations at Glastonbury, as detailed in "The Gate of Remembrance" by Mr. Bligh Bond. Mr. Bligh Bond, by the way, is not a Spiritualist, but the same cannot be said of the writer of the automatic script, an amateur medium, who was able to indicate the secrets of the buried abbey, which were proved to be correct when the ruins were uncovered. I can truly say that, though I have read much of the old monastic life, it has never been brought home to me so closely as by the messages and descriptions of dear old Brother Johannes, the earth-bound spirit – earthbound by his great love for the old abbey in which he had spent his human life. This book, with its practical sequel, may be quoted as an excellent example of automatic writing at its highest, for what telepathic explanation can cover the detailed description of objects which lie unseen by any human eye? It must be admitted, however, that in automatic writing you are at one end of the telephone, if one may use such a simile, and you have, no assurance as to who is at the other end. You may have wildly false messages suddenly interpolated among truthful ones – messages so detailed in their mendacity that it is impossible to think that they are not deliberately false. When once we have accepted the central fact that spirits change little in essentials when leaving the body, and that in consequence the world is infested by many low and mischievous types, one can understand that these untoward incidents are rather a confirmation of Spiritualism than an argument against it. Personally I have received and have been deceived by several such messages. At the same time I can say that after an experience of thirty years of such communications I have never known a blasphemous, an obscene or an unkind sentence come through. I admit, however, that I have heard of such cases. Like attracts like, and one should know one's human company before one joins in such intimate and reverent rites. In clairvoyance the same sudden inexplicable deceptions appear. I have closely followed the work of one female medium, a professional, whose results are so extraordinarily good that in a favourable case she will give the full names of the deceased as well as the most definite and convincing test messages. Yet among this splendid series of results I have notes of several in which she was a complete failure and absolutely wrong upon essentials. How can this be explained? We can only answer that conditions were obviously not propitious, but why or how are among the many problems of the future. It is a profound and most complicated subject, however easily it may be settled by the "ridiculous nonsense" school of critics. I look at the row of books upon the left of my desk as I write – ninety-six solid volumes, many of them annotated and well thumbed, and yet I know that I am like a child wading ankle deep in the margin of an illimitable ocean. But this, at least, I have very clearly realised, that the ocean is there and that the margin is part of it, and that down that shelving shore the human race is destined to move slowly to deeper waters. In the next chapter, I will endeavour to show what is the purpose of the Creator in this strange revelation of new intelligent forces impinging upon our planet. It is this view of the question which must justify the claim that this movement, so long the subject of sneers and ridicule, is absolutely the most important development in the whole history of the human race, so important that, if we could conceive one single man discovering and publishing it, he would rank before Christopher Columbus as a discoverer of new worlds, before Paul as a teacher of new religious truths, and before Isaac Newton as a student of the laws of the Universe. Before opening up this subject there is one consideration which should have due weight, and yet seems continually to be overlooked. The differences between various sects are a very small thing as compared to the great eternal duel between materialism and the spiritual view of the Universe. That is the real fight. It is a fight in which the Churches championed the anti-material view, but they have done it so unintelligently, and have been continually placed in such false positions, that they have always been losing. Since the days of Hume and Voltaire and Gibbon the fight has slowly but steadily rolled in favour of the attack. Then came Darwin, showing with apparent truth, that man has never fallen but always risen. This cut deep into the philosophy of orthodoxy, and it is folly to deny it. Then again came the so-called "Higher Criticism," showing alleged flaws and cracks in the very foundations. All this time the churches were yielding ground, and every retreat gave a fresh jumping-off place for a new assault. It has gone so far that at the present moment a very large section of the people of this

country, rich and poor, are out of all sympathy not only with the churches but with the whole Spiritual view. Now, we intervene with our positive knowledge and actual proof – an ally so powerful that we are capable of turning the whole tide of battle and rolling it back for ever against materialism. We can say: "We will meet you on your own ground and show you by material and scientific tests that the soul and personality survive." That is the aim of Psychic Science, and it has been fully attained. It means an end to materialism for ever. And yet this movement, this Spiritual movement, is hooted at and reviled by Rome, by Canterbury and even by Little Bethel, each of them for once acting in concert, and including in their battle line such strange allies as the Scientific Agnostics and the militant Free-thinkers. Father Vaughan and the Bishop of London, the Rev. F. B. Meyer and Mr. Clodd, "The Church Times" and "The Freethinker," are united in battle, though they fight with very different battle cries, the one declaring that the thing is of the devil, while the other is equally clear that it does not exist at all. The opposition of the materialists is absolutely intelligent since it is clear that any man who has spent his life in saying "No" to all extramundane forces is, indeed, in a pitiable position when, after many years, he has to recognise that his whole philosophy is built upon sand and that "Yes" was the answer from the beginning. But as to the religious bodies, what words can express their stupidity and want of all proportion in not running halfway and more to meet the greatest ally who has ever intervened to change their defeat into victory? What gifts this all-powerful ally brings with him, and what are the terms of his alliance, will now be considered.

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