SPIRITUALISM

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND A WARNING.

COULSON KERNAHAN



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A Personal Experience and a Warning

By

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I

SPIRITUAL HOUSEBREAKING

MY belief is that God has, for wise and loving reasons, locked the door which separates this life from the next; and I will give the reasons which have led me to form that opinion.

I write not in the expectation of dissuading spiritualists from their beliefs and practices, for, as I shall show later, spiritualism seems to me something of an obsession. We are free to choose whether we will or will not have dealings with it. Once we decide to do so, we are, I believe, taking the first step towards an end which is uncommonly like the relinquishment of our will power into other and unknown hands—always a very dangerous thing to do. We may or may not go farther,

but I believe that each repeated experience lessens the will power to resist, and that those who commit themselves to spiritualistic experiences are taking chances as dangerous as committing their bodies for a swim or a bathe into octopus-frequented waters; for spiritualism seems to retain its hold with almost octopus-like tenacity. That anything I may say in these pages will prevent confirmed spiritualists from going further in spiritualistic matters, I have therefore small hope, but I do trust to dissuade others, especially the young, from tampering with things which seem to me both dangerous and opposed to the Will of God.

Our Lord's words: "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber," are not, of course, to be applied directly to spiritualism, but in spirit, I cannot help thinking that they may have indirect bearing upon the matter we are considering.

If God, as I have said, has locked the door which separates this life from the next,—to attempt to pick the lock of that door seems to me not far removed from something like spiritual housebreaking. This is plain speaking, but when the sons and daughters of Christian homes, to say nothing of older folk, some of them professing Christians, are meddling in matters which one believes to be forbidden, plain speaking is necessary.

In one of the ablest addresses upon spiritualism which I have ever seen, Sir Henry Lunn quotes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as saying: "Nearly every woman is an undeveloped medium, let her try her powers of automatic writing." Sir Henry Lunn's comment on this is as follows: "There can be nothing more pernicious for our nation than that sorrowing women, instead of seeking in quiet waiting upon God for the comfort which He gave to the sorrowing sisters of Bethany, instead of resting upon the profound truth

which He proclaimed to them, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live,' should seek by the wretched mechanism of planchettes and by automatic writing to penetrate the mysteries which God in His wisdom has veiled from humanity. This way lies madness." Could a wiser, and,—coming as it does from a medical man,—a more weighty warning word be spoken?

Spiritualists assert that they are but seekers after knowledge, and that such quest is laudable and legitimate. I cannot agree with a statement so unqualified.

The Psychical Research Society, as I understand its aims, seeks only to investigate alleged cases of psychical phenomena. It formulates no creed, it pretends to no "revelation": it does not, so far as I know, seek to supersede revealed religion. I do not happen to be a member, nor have I ever been, but against psychical research or the Society for

that purpose, I have nothing whatever to say. Scientific research, there is nothing in God's Word to forbid. Science concerns itself with physical laws and facts: religion, with what is spiritual. The more we know of this wonderful and beautiful world and of the worlds and universes beyond, the nearer do we come to apprehending the infinite power and majesty of God. The deeper our insight into, the wider our knowledge of, the complex and manifold mysteries of human personality, the more truly can we serve our fellows (and thereby serve God) in their extremity.

But to the Son of God Himself there was that into which He might not, and would not inquire. Even from Him, certain knowledge was withheld: "But of that day and of that hour, knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii. 32). The reference is to "the Son of man coming in the clouds, with great power and glory." Here is proof,

definite and distinct beyond all question, that to the Founder of Christianity, Himself, it was not given to know all which is to be. As that day and hour were hidden from Him, as the day and the hour of our death are hidden from us, so I believe that the knowledge of the life which is to be, after death, has, for wise and good reasons, been withheld from us by God.

Here is the first of my reasons for so believing.

In the matter of what is to happen after death, we are, as in life, in God's hand.

He has decreed that what is to happen to-morrow or even to-day, we cannot with certainty foresee. If we could, it is possible that we should all become fatalists—automata in our own eyes and that there thus might be a slackening or even an end of human endeavor. Again: God might have proposed for our own good, here and hereafter, some

wise and loving chastisement. Foreseeing that chastisement, the more self-willed of us might seek to evade it, thus aligning ourselves with Satan and his hosts in open rebellion against God. Eternal Law would then be admitting and permitting something like anarchy into a law-ordered world.

And so with death. If we knew the hour of our death, and the manner of it, we might be minded to say: "So soon! Then of what avail, if the time be so short, to continue in our labors?" and work, precious in God's sight and precious to our fellows, might be abandoned. Many a great teacher—then at his wisest and ripest in thought and experience—has given us of his best in the last year of his life. So, too, has many a worker, man of science, and inventor, who has died suddenly, it may be in his prime.

There is a graver possibility. Could we foresee God's decree in regard to our death, the more rebellious of us might, deliberately

and defiantly, cast about for some means whereby to defeat God's will and God's decree—and again, in our intention at least, there would be anarchy.

If, therefore, in this life which we *do* know, we can see that the knowledge which is withheld from us, is withheld for loving and wise reasons, can we not equally believe that in withholding from us the knowledge of what is to happen after death, God is actuated only by equal forethought and care for our happiness? Even a spiritualist can hardly deny that in life the future appears to be of set purpose hidden from us. Is he then acting in accordance with the Will of God in seeking to force a door which God has closed?

If Lazarus, if our risen Lord had told what they beheld beyond that door, some record of what they said there would surely be. Of such record we have no word. On that subject, God as revealed in Christ, and man, as represented by the one man known to us to

whom some glimpse, at least, of what lies beyond death had been permitted, are silent. Can any one who accepts Christ go with easy conscience to spiritualism to tell him of mysteries upon which the lips of both our Lord and Lazarus are sealed? One cannot believe that Lazarus went all unquestioned; and had he made a statement of any sort, that statement would—in view of the tremendous religious and human importance of the subject—surely have been recorded. But Lazarus is silent as his Lord is silent, and their silence seems to me a tacit condemnation of what goes by the name of spiritualism.

II

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

IN the previous section I have given what I hold to be a weighty reason for standing aloof from the movement known as spiritualism, for believing that, as practiced to-day, it comes under the catalogue of things forbidden.

Before advancing other reasons, I will relate my one and only spiritualistic experience.

I was at the time a young fellow living in the old home with my dear and honored father. It was science not literature which I hoped to follow as a calling. All my inclinations lay that way, and my reading and research were almost entirely concerned with science and natural history. In England, however—it is not so in France or Germany—science offers small chance to make a

living, and as my living I had to make, I was trying my hand at the writing of stories for the magazines. One afternoon I wrote a short tale at a sitting, and, being tired, threw down my pen and left the upstairs room allotted to me as a "study." In the hall I found my father putting on hat and coat. He told me that he had been invited by a certain Madame Ourry to be present at a séance to witness for himself something of her son-in-law's mediumistic powers. He added that he had small taste for such matters, but when invited, as a man of science (he was a member of several learned societies), to investigate the facts, he did not like to refuse.

I asked and obtained permission to accompany him. The séance commenced, the rest of the company consisting of Madame Ourry, her son-in-law the medium, and three other persons, all men, unknown to us. First came a semi-religious service. Then, in a darkened room we all sat around a very substantial

table on which we were instructed to place our hands.

Soon, manifestations of the wearisomely familiar type, common to so many séances then and now, began.

The table began to move, slowly and unsteadily at first, then twisting, turning, canting up at one end, the movements becoming increasingly violent, until at last I was reminded, by the way in which it bumped under our hands, of a bucking horse trying to throw a rider. Other pieces of furniture were now moving, strange and uncanny lights appeared, a concertina played by invisible hands circled about the room in the air, and thumps, rappings and crashes as if the wainscoting within the walls of the room were falling, became frequent.

Then a voice which I believe to have been the medium's inquired, "Who is the strikingly distinguished-looking man with the nobly formed head?"

This referred to my father, and as I do not resemble him in the least, I may be permitted to say that the description was not inaccurate.

Why the question should have been asked I do not know. A spirit so well informed (as will be seen directly) about events in my own home must surely already have known who the sitter in question was. I can only suppose that my father's name was asked for the benefit of the three persons present who were unknown to him personally.

In any case, the answer was, " That is Dr. James Kernahan."

"And who," was the next question, " is the very young man next to him? "

" That is his son."

" That young man," was the next comment, " is possessed of extraordinary mediumistic powers. He can at any moment place himself in instant and close communion with the spirit world, merely by an exercise of will,

and without the interposition of a medium. I hope he will come here again and often. There are few things which we in the spirit world so much desire as to be in communication with one with such spiritual possibilities as his." Then the voice seemed to be addressing me directly.

"You have," it said, "this afternoon finished the writing of a story, to which you have given the name of 'Something like a Mystery.'"

"That is so," I said, with surprise.

"The story ridicules spiritualism, of which you will admit you know nothing. Do you not think you would have done better to have acquainted yourself with the facts before ridiculing that of which you are ignorant?"

"Perhaps so," I said, "but I do not feel in the least guilty. All I tried to do was to please and amuse my editor and readers by making the yarn amusing."

I record here that the spirit correctly stated certain facts known only to myself—for I had not mentioned the story or the title to a living soul. Personally I attach no importance whatever to the incident. The facts were necessarily within my own knowledge and came to the knowledge of the medium merely by thought reading.

The spirit then made certain general communications to the company of which, as the same thing has been said over and over again, and is repeated to-day, I need not write at length.

As I understood these communications, the spirit world consists of a series of spiritually graduated circles or planes. A soul on leaving this world enters either a lower or a higher plane or circle, according to the degree of that soul's spirituality—passing thence when fitted to take higher place. Those who, on leaving this life, are of the earth, earthy, remain, at their passing, and for the necessary

time, at least, in the lower or more earthy circle. Retaining, as they do, their personality and characteristics, their interests at first are with this world, their affections are for the most part, to use a word once common in the theological schools, " carnal," and until they have been purged of grossness, have been taught and trained in spirituality, they are unfitted directly to break with their old life.

Hitherto, so far from being awed or impressed, I was in the main only amused. By the gymnastic performances of the furniture, the concertina playing and the like I was unmoved, and for that reason I could not understand how it came about that I was trembling violently in body and limb. I said as much to the medium.

" You have told me," I said, " certain facts known only to myself—that I have just finished a story and the title of that story which you have given correctly. As you know so

much about me, you possibly know that I am in no physical fear. Why is it that I am, involuntarily so far as I know, trembling violently?"

"You are trembling," came the instant reply, "because we are taking from your body the powers, energies or forces by which it is possible to manifest ourselves."

"*Can* you manifest yourself?" I asked. "Is it possible for me actually to see you with my own eyes?"

Then from an entirely different direction and from the end of the room farthest from the medium, came an entirely different voice. Apparently the speaker was taking upon himself to answer for and instead of the medium.

First I was told that any such manifestation was unusual and difficult in the presence of one who was attending a séance for the first time. In my case, however, the manifestation was possible. I was, moreover, in-

formed that if I wished to see some one actually known to me, who had "passed over," and if I would indicate who that some one was to be, it would be possible for me at a second sitting actually to see and to speak with the person so indicated. But the spirit presence very earnestly warned me never to take part in spiritualistic matters of any sort again. I cannot say that the warning was actually against the danger of lying spirits, although the point that there are dishonest and lying spirits was very strongly made. I was told that the whole thing would be for me, constituted as I am, highly injurious both mentally and physically.

Very few words were spoken, but they were spoken with intense earnestness.

Then, directly in front of me, and over the table around which we sat, there appeared a strange luminosity, out of which looked a singularly beautiful and sensitive face. It was a face entirely unknown to me, but with

an extraordinary resemblance to the poet Heine, of whose work I have always been a student, and whose grave in Paris, as well as his home in Paris where he died, I had recently visited. At the time of the séance no thought of Heine was in my mind, unless subconsciously, which is, of course, possible.

Under high, wide, nobly-formed brows, eyes deep set, penetrating yet tender, looked into mine. The face was Jewish (Heine was a Jew), but Grecian in moulding, with straight aquiline, close-nostrelled nose, and firm-set but finely curved lips. To complete the likeness to Heine, there was about the chin just such a short, slight, and crisply curling beard as is seen in the existing portraits. The trembling of my body and limbs of which I have spoken had ceased, and in its stead was a strange sense of rest, well-being and tranquillity.

I am not ashamed to say that I was now held and possessed, almost dazed, with such

wonder and awe, that I do not, with any certainty, know what was my reply. I believe—I cannot honestly say more—that I expressed my thanks for the warning, and asked whether I might not know by whom I was warned. All I remember with certainty is that the spirit presence made some slow motion of dissent by slightly moving the head—and was gone.

I hasten to add that the face was seen, the voice and the words were heard, not only by me but by all of those present, including my father. Otherwise I should have believed then and should believe now that the face I saw was some memory-picture of Heine, seen, as upon stilled waters on the mirror of my own mind, and thence projected, subconsciously, or all unconsciously, upon the darkness.

Whether what we saw and heard were the result of hypnotic suggestion, as seems to me possible, the reader must decide for himself.

In that case it is curious that at the same séance I should first be urged to come again, and later be earnestly warned never to take part in spiritualistic matters more.

III

SOME COMMENTS ON MY FIRST SÉANCE

I HAVE related as fully and as accurately as I can remember the story of my first and last séance. I now offer some observations on the same.

If spiritualism be what spiritualism claims to be, then the very reverse of what was to be expected after death seems to happen. We think of death as the setting free of the soul from the trammels of the body and of the material world. Judging by what one reads of séances, we are, after death, more dependent than in life upon the material world. In life it is possible for one human soul unaided to go out to another in sympathy and love. If spiritualism be true, one appears to need, after death, the intervention of tables, chairs,

planchettes and the like to establish spiritual relations. We do not shake off the old shackles, but submit ourselves to those which are new and equally substantial.

Moreover, we think of death as adding to our vision, our knowledge and our powers. Whatever spiritualism has to impart—and in all my spiritualistic reading I am not aware of having added one single worth-while item to my stock of knowledge—is surely balanced by that of which spiritualism appears to deprive us. It appears to deprive what was once a thinking, reasoning, imaginative man or woman of all that made for initiation, imagination, originality. Spiritualism claims to be a new revelation. Could anything be less novel, less original, or less of a revelation than these repetitions of table turnings, automatic writing, guessing at the contents of a bag or box, vanishing and reappearing persons, of which we read to weariness?

So far from uplifting and developing

human personality, spiritualism seems to level all personalities down to one commonplace type. The singular family likeness which exists between so-called spirits gives one cause sometimes to wonder whether what claims to be the spirit world is not merely a series of multiple personations by some half-dozen performers, all under one stage management? Or, to vary the figure of speech, is what we are asked to believe is the immortal army of the dead—now employed partly in sending signals to assure us, who are holding the trenches of this earthly life, of our coming relief—is all this no more than the misleading pranks of a few straying Puck-like spiritual camp-followers and hangers-on, at mischief in the No Man's Land which lies between this world and the next?

One other point I note. I have spoken of pranks, and I used the word intentionally, but in these pranks there is no glimpse of that gift of God, as I hold it, a happy sense of humor.

I do not for an instant imply that one looks for anything humorous in spirit revelations of the next world, though I see no reason why those who in this world have the happy gift of sunny humor should lose that gift in the next, any more than that little children should there cease to laugh, even to play. What I mean is this—the fact that spiritualists should seriously and solemnly put these senseless pranks on record and expect us to receive these records seriously and solemnly, as proofs of the genuineness of spiritualism, seems to indicate that, though spiritualism does not deprive its votaries of the luxury of a spiritual cigar (according to Sir Oliver Lodge), it does seem to destroy any latent sense of humor which they once had.

Against the theory of the ascent of souls, onwards and ever onwards, towards perfection, I have nothing to say, except that it is no new discovery, still less a revelation. Any one might evolve as much out of his own

imagination, with the assistance of scientific, and perhaps even of scriptural suggestions. Failing these he might find most of it, and more, in Swedenborg.

Nor is it without a note of warning directed *against* spiritualism. Even spiritualists admit that some of the so-called spirit presences are those of lying spirits. If it be true, as we are told, that grosser spirits remain, as it were, just on the other side of the partition between this world and the next, and in touch with the old life, while holier souls pass on and upward to higher and holier spiritual spheres—here is further testimony to the wisdom of God in forbidding, as some of us believe He has forbidden, any attempt to enter into communication with the dead. Here, too, is some explanation, not only of what is gross and false in spiritualism—coming, as it would thus appear to come, from gross and untrustworthy sources, but also some explanation of the sterility of spiritualistic teaching.

The low-grade spirits have in effect nothing as yet to teach, hence the meaningless and uninforming communications.

Of the strange things that happened at my first and last séance I express no opinion; I offer no explanation. But I believe that the time is not far distant when much in these so-called occult mysteries—spiritualism, clairvoyance, hypnotism and the like—will be found to be due to laws of which our knowledge is now imperfect. Things spiritual (in the true, not merely in the technical meaning of the spiritualists) are everywhere regulated by laws. These laws may be superhuman in the sense that they are, as yet, beyond human knowledge, but it does not in the least follow that they are undiscoverable or supernatural. Just as, having expected such a discovery for years, I was in no way surprised by the coming of wireless telegraphy—a much more marvellous discovery than anything that spiritualism can claim to have made—so I am

prepared for many amazing, even marvellous discoveries concerning the mystery of human personality. These discoveries will, as I say, explain much that is at present unexplainable, but they will come to us legitimately, as the result of human progress and endeavor along God's open and daylit highway to knowledge, and so with God's sanction. They will not, I believe, come to us as the result of spiritualistic manifestations, in darkened rooms, nor by any rite or mystery of occultism. But that even to science, much less to spiritualism or to occultism, will be given to throw open the door between this world and the next, I do not believe.

IV.

TELEPATHY

MANY who essay to meddle with spiritualism do so, in the first instance, merely out of curiosity. They begin as the drug-taker begins, "just for once," to see what the effect is like, and to experience a new sensation. But as in the case of the drug-taker, they do not always stop there. I am not sure, indeed, that the contemporaneous revivals of the spiritualistic habit and the drug habit may not pathologically come under the same diagnosis. Both may be the result of war reaction, the craving for some new excitement, or some new narcotic to distract attention from jarred and overstrung nerves. Both seem to me injuriously to affect the judgment.

Some are led to seek spirit help because of bereavements which call only for our tender pity. They affirm that they have found consolation there. I do not doubt that they so believe, and should anything which I have written here give pain or rouse anger, I can only express my sorrow and plead that I write in absolute sincerity. They have made choice of the source to which to go for consolation, and since one danger of spiritualism appears to me to be that those who have once entered upon it seldom turn back, it were idle to say more. For I admit that though I know of converts to spiritualism, I do not know of any who, having entered upon that road, have turned back.

Spiritualists may point to this as proof of the justice of their claims, as the triumph of progress and truth over ignorance and reaction. I attribute the fact in question to quite other causes. Spiritualism, once yielded to, appears to possess and to obsess mortals,

very much as evil spirits so possessed and obsessed men and women as recorded in the Scriptures. It seems in some way to unbalance the judgment, to blind the inner eye, in spiritual matters at least. Hence a calm unbiased reconsideration of its claims seems beyond spiritualists.

Spiritualists see testimonies to the truth of spiritualism where some of us see only telepathy. I do not deny the marvellous element in telepathy, but when by research and the collection and collation of data, we have brought telepathy more nearly approximating to an exact science, its marvels will no longer be exploited by the spiritualists and the occultists as a proof of their theories. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is much impressed, and appears to expect the rest of us to be equally impressed, by the following incident, which I copy from a daily paper.

He said that during the war he and his wife had a lady living with them who had the

gift of automatic writing. Three of her brothers had been killed, and they used to come and write through her hand.

Her fourth brother was a prisoner in Germany.

"We asked one day," Sir Arthur said, "'What about Jack, will he escape?'

"'Yes,' came the answer.

"'How?' was the next question.

"'In a train,' was the reply."

About a year later he did escape, and Sir Arthur, before learning the particulars, wrote to him saying, "I believe I am right in saying you got away in a train." He replied, "I don't know how you knew it, for I am the only British officer who did escape in a train." They had taken him to Silesia, and he had come across the whole of Germany concealed in a cattle truck.

What do I say about this incident? Here is my answer:

The living human brain, which is of God's

making, is a much more wonderful instrument, and I believe has infinitely greater possibilities than Mr. Marconi's unalive mechanism (wonderful as that instrument is) for the sending or receiving of wireless messages. The living element, the soul of Mr. Marconi's system, is that miraculous power, electricity, a power of God's not of Mr. Marconi's creating, and of which no mortal can claim to be the patentee. One day a scientific genius as great as Mr. Marconi may be telling us that the human brain is not only an electric battery with almost incalculable possibilities, but is also one of God's chief electric power or storage stations, and may tell us also how we may employ and direct the power therein stored, very much as we now employ and direct electricity. Then we shall all send, almost without an effort, our wireless messages, the one to the other, all over the world. All that Mr. Marconi does is to send a THOUGHT across continents or across seas. It is the

THOUGHT, living and pulsing, which matters. The rest is, in a sense, mere contrivance for the sending. Our human thought is as much a miracle as electricity, and though the powers of thought are as yet undefined, we may yet discover that thought has equal possibilities.

Even now some persons have the power (exerted, it may be, unconsciously) of sending messages. Here is a case in point. My wife's only son has been a soldier since 1914. When he was in France she suddenly said to me, one night, " George is in pain from burning. It is his hand. If I put my hand even on a cold object, it is as if I had placed it on something almost red hot. He is not in danger, but he is in pain. I am sure of it. Will you remember that I have said this, and will you take a note in writing of the date and the time? " I did so, and when next we heard from France, it was to tell us that a lamp had overturned, causing a fire, in the putting out

of which George had burned both hands badly. His mother wrote asking the day and the hour. They coincided exactly with the day and the hour in which she experienced a sudden feeling of burning on both hands.

This is more marvellous than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story, for here the message came direct and without the automatic writing apparatus. Sir Arthur's anecdote has no value as a proof of spiritualism.

V

THE BARRENNESS OF SPIRITUALISM

NON-CHRISTIAN spiritualists of my acquaintance, while denying the reality of the always morally beautiful and spiritually significant miracles recorded in the New Testament, ask me to believe in spiritualism on the strength of manifestations which they appear to think scarcely less miraculous.

"There was nothing that happened in Judæa two thousand years ago," says Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "that cannot occur in London to-day." I very much question whether our Lord wrought miracles merely as a concession to the craving after a sign. He rebuked, indeed, a sign-seeking generation as evil and corrupt. Small wonder that

spiritualism of to-day, which appeals, not to the soul that was breathed into us by our Maker, but to the senses and to the flesh, in a word to the clay out of which what is bodily in us was fashioned, and to which what is bodily shall one day return—small wonder that it has so little to say of Christianity. A spiritualism which depends for proof not upon change of heart but upon changes in the position of furniture seems to me no "new revelation," but something of ancient superstition, something not very far removed from the wonder-workings of the old magicians as well as from the African medicine man of more recent times, and the Indian Fakir of to-day.

"But these manifestations," says some spiritualist, "by means of material objects, are merely our initial or Kindergarten methods of instructing, such as you would yourself employ in teaching children. We soon pass on thence to higher things."

We instruct our children by no such methods of mysteries and manifestations, and those whom you thus instruct are not children but educated women and men. But putting the question of Kindergarten methods aside entirely and turning instead to the professors and high priests of spiritualism, what, I ask, has it told us which is in any sense of the word a discovery? What is not taken from Swedenborg, as most of it is, is no more an addition to our actual knowledge than the speculations and deductions of writers like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps of *The Gates Ajar* fame or the anonymous author of *Letters from Hell.* In fact an author of imaginative gifts, or with any quality of "vision," might give the world a much more convincing and in all probability much truer conception and picture of life after death than anything which has been told us by spiritualism.

Claiming as it does to be a great move-

ment, the surprising thing about modern spiritualism is that it has no literature worthy of the name. Swedenborgianism and mysticism have their great exponents in both poetry and prose. Spiritualism has not added a line to what is accounted literature. Even the few distinguished men and women of letters who have joined its ranks seem, when they write on spiritualism, to be other and less than themselves. The most surprising "discovery," the only discovery that recent spiritualism has made, is the "discovery" of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge as spiritualists!

I say this in no sneering sense in regard to the bearers of these distinguished names. Mistaken though we believe both men to be, one cannot deny that here at least spiritualism stands well before the world. For the rest, I have for more than forty years heard spiritualism discussed and have read the reports of séances. I am, it is true, no more than an

" onlooker," of whom the proverb tells us that he sees most of the game, but what I read of spiritualism to-day seems to me at least very little different from what I heard and read when I was a very young man. It seems to me to move only in, and never out of a circle, and that we might as well hope to journey to the stars, or to trace their orbits by riding in some country fair or village "roundabout," as hope by means of spiritualism to wrest from Omnipotence the secrets which Omnipotence has wisely withheld. Compared with the revelations of the New Testament, compared even with the revelation of God in nature—the sea, the dawn, the midnight sky—spiritualism seems to me not far removed from the same village fair—belabored drum, smoking and flaring naphtha lights and all—of which I have just spoken. And this is the new religion which has given the Christian Churches notice to come to heel or to quit! Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is reported to have said: " If

the Church accepted the doctrines of spiritualism, it would get fresh dynamic power which would carry on Christianity. If it did not, it was doomed."

Does not such an assertion as this—remembering that a Christian Church there has been for two thousand years, and that "spiritualism" dates back some odd sixty or seventy years—remind one less of a "New Revelation" than of the *nouveaux riches?*

What has spiritualism done for the betterment of humanity in this world, whatever may be the light which it pretends to throw upon the next? Can Sir Arthur point to one single charitable institution run by spiritualists, a hospital, a home for the old, the infirm, the poor, or the afflicted, such as the Churches have built and organized by the thousand, and are to-day engaged in carrying on?

Spiritualism has claimed St. Paul, of all others—between whose teaching and the

teaching of spiritualism the issue is clear. If St. Paul's words have any meaning, they seem to me directly to contradict the promises of spiritualism: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. ii. 9).

Spiritualism has not hesitated to claim the Holiest Name known to us as that of a spiritualist. Yet the fact that I have noticed more than any other, in my spiritualistic reading, is that of that Name, the "Name which is above every name," there is scarcely ever a mention.

VI

SIN BEGINS IN WANT OF FAITH

I AM sure that the lesson of the Garden of Eden has a deep meaning for Christian people of to-day who allow themselves to be drawn into spiritualism, or are weakly drifting towards experimenting in it. For all that He has given us, God asks, in effect, only one spiritual gift in return—faith in His infinite goodness. With faith, if it be unswerving and sincere, as the first foundation of the Christian life, other things needful must inevitably follow. Faith is the first incentive to "works." Wholly to believe in, to trust, and to love God, implies serving God, doing the will of God. Works are the complement of faith, the other half as it were, and really as much a part of faith as the following of one

footstep, after that which has just been put forward, is a necessary part of walking. To walk with God is to go forward in communion with God, following whither He leads, faith in Him, and love for Him in our hearts, one with Him in will, and so one with Him in readiness to take upon ourselves the work to which He points. Then we go forward. But it is by the firm foot of faith that we first step out, and when that is so, the foot of good works will not, cannot lag behind. But we must entertain no doubt or suspicion of our Leader.

My fixed belief is that sin begins always in want of faith. Had Adam's faith been sufficient, he would not even have entertained the whispered word of distrust. He would, in righteous indignation, have cast it from him, as you or I would cast away and crush a viper which had crept into the folds of our garments.

The first of all recorded sins was a thought

—a thought against God. From doubting God, the next, and easy, almost inevitable step, was an act of disobedience. I do not for an instant question the honesty or the sincerity of spiritualists, nor should I like to imply that for *them* there is sin in what they do. But I do say that for me, thinking as I do, and for the reader, if his or her views be, in the main, mine—to seek to pry into secrets which we believe God withholds from us is to listen to the whispered word which tempted Adam, with guilty conscience, to pluck and eat the fruit of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

Spiritualism seems to me to begin in doubt and to end in disobedience. Again I say that, for all He has given us of good in this world, God asks, in effect, only one spiritual gift in return—faith in His infinite goodness. He asks, not for His sake, but for ours; not to receive but to bestow.

One of the most gifted and sweetest

women I have known was also the most unhappy. She had almost everything which makes for earthly happiness—she was loved, she was a wife and a mother, she had beauty and the health to enjoy the good things of life, friends, even fame, and ample means to follow her tastes and to gratify almost every wish. But she was without faith in God, and without faith, could not, constituted as she was, but be hopelessly unhappy. She did not wish to live, yet she feared terribly to die. She even sought solace in spiritualism, but it brought her none. It added to her unhappiness. She did not believe in it. On the contrary, her intellect unconditionally rejected it. But it opened for her, she said, a fearful possibility.

"Suppose there is a spirit world," she remarked. "Nothing that I have seen at séances brings the least conviction to that effect. But supposing there is a spirit world, it will be under the same executive as here,

the same administration, and I do not wish to be under that executive, that administration again. My one hope is in annihilation, utter and complete. Even of that I cannot be sure," and so once again she was miserable.

God had given her so much to make her happy, and He asked only faith in His goodness in return. But she refused, and so her whole life was doubt-haunted, despairing, and unutterably sad. With faith it would have been glad and happy.

But there seems to me another and a far higher reason for faith in God than this. I believe that to trust God wholly is to gladden Him. To distrust is, in a sense, to pain Him. Who, even of us mortals, can feel ourselves regarded with suspicion and distrust without something like a stab at the heart? And spiritualism seems to me to begin in suspicion, either that there is no hereafter, or that in such hereafter as there is, all is not well. It will trust in itself, its own eyes, its own ears,

its own senses, but it will not trust in the HONOR of God, and so dishonors Him before the world.

VII

A WILL O' THE WISP

SOME time ago a stranger was brought by a friend to call upon me. He had, it seemed, read certain writings of mine and was so good as to speak of them appreciatively.

"But what I cannot understand," he went on to say, "is that a man of your order of mind and your intelligence" (he was kind enough to be very complimentary) "should not long ago have risen superior" (that was his very word!) "to anything so impossible of comprehension, so childish and so superstitious as what is known as Christianity."

Then—he was a theosophist, it appeared—he propounded, for my benefit, certain theories of his own. I recollect very little of them except that the words "Solar Logos,"

"Astral Plane," and "Karma" frequently occurred. They made enormous demands upon credulity and were labyrinthine in their complexity. How different from the Christian faith!—with meanings as profound as the thoughts of the Eternal One—and yet so simple that it can be comprehended by a little child. While refusing to believe that God, for man's sake, became Incarnate, my caller found no difficulty in believing in the countless and continued reincarnations of man. Laying his hand on my shoulder he said earnestly:

"Believe me, it is the only answer to the Riddle of Life!"

"Is it?" I said; "then I prefer the Riddle."

And so with spiritualism. I would rather remain unenlightened on matters which God has hidden from us than seek or accept such sorry so-called enlightenment—and by such means—as spiritualism proffers.

Better, I honestly believe, blithely, bravely, and unselfishly, to continue in our appointed work, and on our way through God's world, striving daily and unceasingly to be truer friends, sounder citizens, harder workers, better Christians—and *to ask no question whatever of what comes after death, leaving all in perfect trustfulness in the hands of God*—than to squander nerve power, will power, and energy in following after the will o' the wisp of spiritualism—the attempting, as it were, to strike damp matches, this side of a vast and deep and dark river, in the hope that thereby we may descry what lies, miles-far, beyond. To me it seems childish—worse still, cowardly, craven, unworthy of noble woman or true man. Death *is* a mystery and a menace, the last and supreme test of courage and faith in woman or man. Let us face this great ordeal of God's appointing in the confidence of Christian believers. The plunge once made into the river of death, we shall find

God's hand in ours to uphold and to guide us across. And as we step out upon the farther bank to enter the City of Light, we know that the Lord and Saviour in Whom we have placed our faith will fling wide the golden portals of heaven, and welcome us to one of His many mansions with such radiant surprise of prepared bliss and rapture as no exiled and home-returning child of God has on earth ever known. Like the peace of God which passeth understanding, the rapture and the joy of that home-coming are here beyond our comprehension.

Compared with that promise, and with the holy calm of Paradise, in which for two thousand years Christians have pictured their sainted and beloved dead; compared, even, with a little child's dream-imaginings of a realm of flowers, of child-laughter, bird-song, and happy play—compared with these, spiritualism with its clumsy contrivances, its catchwords, and its gross promise of such comforts

as "spiritual cigars," seems to me like an unseemly intrusion upon the sanctity, the august majesty, of which we are conscious in the presence of our dead. Spiritualism vulgarizes that which is holy, while adding to our knowledge no single word of real help or worth.

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