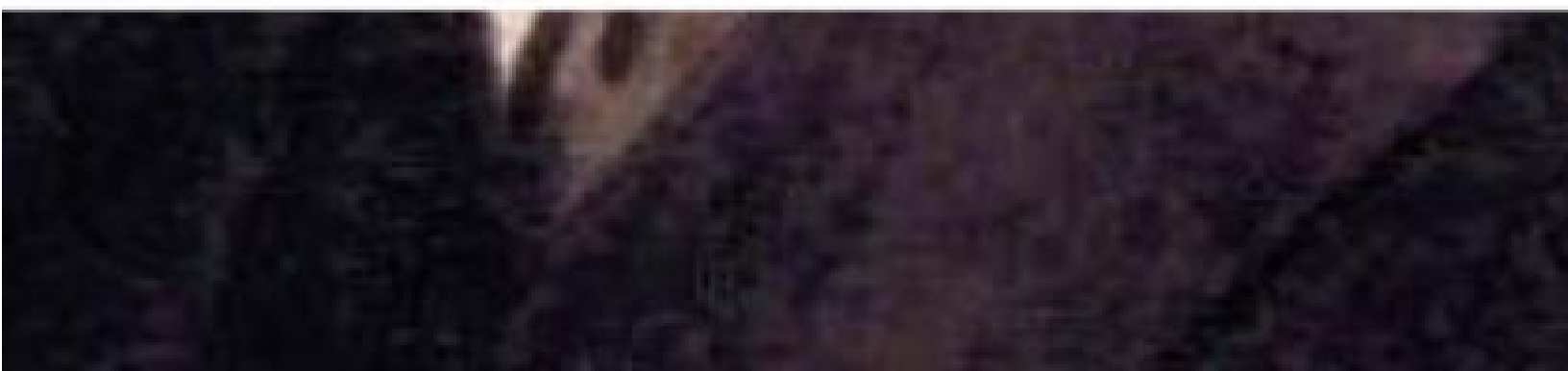


IS SPIRITUALISM BASED ON FRAUD?

JOSEPH McCABE



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**THE EVIDENCE GIVEN BY SIR A. C. DOYLE
AND OTHERS DRASTICALLY EXAMINED**

BY

JOSEPH McCABE

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PREFACE

On March 11 of this year Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did me the honour of debating the claims of Spiritualism with me before a vast and distinguished audience at the Queen's Hall, London. My opponent had insisted that I should open the debate; and, when it was pointed out that the critic usually follows the exponent, he had indicated that I had ample material to criticize in the statement of the case for Spiritualism in his two published works.

How conscientiously I addressed myself to that task, and with what result, must be left to the reader of the published debate. Suffice it to say that my distinguished opponent showed a remarkable disinclination to linger over his own books, and wished to "broaden the issue." Since the bulk of the time allotted to me in the debate was then already spent, it was not possible to discuss satisfactorily the new evidences adduced by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and not recorded in his books. I hasten to repair the defect in this critical examination of every variety of Spiritualistic phenomena.

My book has a serious aim. The pen of even the dullest author—and I trust I do not fall into that low category of delinquents—must grow lively or sarcastic at times in the course of such a study as this. When one finds Spiritualists gravely believing that a corpulent lady is transferred by spirit hands, at the rate of sixty miles an hour, over the chimney-pots of London, and through several solid walls, one cannot be expected to refrain from smiling. When one contemplates a group of scientific or professional men plumbing the secrets of the universe through the mediumship of an astute peasant or a carpenter, or a lady of less than doubtful virtue, one may be excused a little irony. When our creators of super-detectives enthusiastically applaud things which were fully exposed a generation ago, and affirm that, because they could not, in pitch darkness, see any fraud, there *was* no fraud, we cannot maintain the gravity of philosophers. When we find this "new revelation" heralded by a prodigious outbreak of fraud, and claiming as its most solid foundations to-day a mass of demonstrable trickery and deceit, our sense of humour is pardonably irritated. Nor are these a few exceptional weeds in an otherwise fair garden. In its living literature to-day, in its actual

hold upon a large number of people in Europe and America, Spiritualism rests to a very great extent on fraudulent representations.

Here is my serious purpose. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made two points against me which pleased his anxious followers. One—which evoked a thunder of applause—was that I was insensible of the consolation which this new religion has brought to thousands of bereaved humans. I am as conscious of that as he or any other Spiritualist is. It has, however, nothing to do with the question whether Spiritualism is true or no, which we were debating; or with the question to what extent Spiritualism is based on fraud, which I now discuss. Far be it from me to slight the finer or more tender emotions of the human heart. On the contrary, it is in large part to the more general cultivation of this refinement and delicacy of feeling that I look for the uplifting of our race. But let us take things in order. Does any man think it is a matter of indifference whether this ministry of consolation is based on fraud and inspired by greed? It is inconceivable.

And, indeed, the second point made by my opponent shows that I do not misconceive him and his followers. It is that I exaggerate the quantity of fraud in the movement. If they are right—if they have purified the movement of the grosser frauds which so long disfigured it—they have some ground to ask the critic to address himself to the substantial truth rather than the occasional imposture. But this is a question of fact; and to that question of fact the following pages are devoted. I survey the various classes of Spiritualistic phenomena. I tell the reader how materializations, levitations, raps, direct voices, apports, spirit-photographs, lights and music in the dark, messages from the dead, and so on, have actually and historically been engineered during the last fifty years. This is, surely, useful. Spiritualism is in one of its periodical phases of advance. Our generation knows nothing of the experience of these things of an earlier generation. To teach one's fellows the weird ingenuity, the sordid impostures, the grasping trickery, which have accompanied Spiritualism since its birth in America in 1848 can hurt only one class of men—impostors.

J. M.

Easter, 1920.

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CHAPTER I

MEDIUMS: BLACK, WHITE, AND GREY

Mediums are the priests of the Spiritualist religion. They are the indispensable channels of communication with the other world. They have, not by anointing, but by birthright, the magical character which fits them alone to perform the miracles of the new revelation. From them alone, and through them alone, can one learn the conditions under which manifestations may be expected. Were they to form a union or go on strike, the life of the new religion would be more completely suspended than the life of any other religion. They control the entire output of evidence. They guard the gates of the beyond. They are the priests of the new religion.

Now it will not be seriously disputed that during the last three quarters of the century these mediums or priests have perpetrated more fraud than was ever attributed to any priesthood before. A few weeks ago Spiritualists held a meeting in commemoration of the "seventy-second anniversary" of the birth of their religion. That takes us back to 1848, the year in which Mrs. Fish, as I will tell later, astutely turned into a profitable concern the power of her younger sisters to rap out "spirit" communications with the joints of their toes. There have been some quaint beginnings of religions, but the formation of that fraudulent little American family-syndicate in 1848 is surely the strangest that ever got "commemoration" in the annals of religion. And from that day until ours there is hardly a single prominent medium who has not been convicted of fraud. Any person who cares to run over Mr. Podmore's history of the movement will see this. There is hardly a medium named in the nineteenth century who does not eventually disappear in an odour of sulphur.

Podmore was one of the best-informed and most conscientious non-Spiritualists who ever wrote on Spiritualism. If one prefers the verdict of the French astronomer Flammarion, who believes that mediums do possess abnormal powers and has studied them for nearly sixty years, this is what he says:—

It is the same with all mediums, male and female. I believe I have had nearly all of them, from various parts of the world, at my house during the last forty years. One may lay it down as a principle that all professional mediums cheat, but they do not cheat always. [1]

If you are inclined to think that this applies only to professional mediums, whose need of money drives them into trickery, listen to this further verdict, which M. Flammarion says he could support by "hundreds of instances":—

I have seen unpaid mediums, men and women of the world, cheat without the least scruple, out of sheer vanity, or from a still less creditable motive—the love of deceiving. Spiritualist séances have led to very useful and pleasant acquaintanceships, and to more than one marriage. You must distrust both classes [paid and unpaid]. [2]

Listen to the verdict of another man who believes in the powers of mediums, and who has studied them enthusiastically for thirty years, a medical man with means and leisure—Baron von Schrenck-Notzing [3]:—

It is indisputable that nearly every professional medium (and many private mediums) does part of his performances by fraud.... Conscious and unconscious fraud plays an immense part in this field.... The entire method of the Spiritualist education of mediums, with its ballast of unnecessary ideas, leads directly to the facilitation of fraud.

If this is not enough, take another gentleman, Mr. Hereward Carrington, who has studied mediums for two decades in various parts of the world, and who also believes that they have genuine abnormal powers:—

Ninety-eight per cent. of the [physical] phenomena are fraudulent. [4]

These are not men who have dismissed the phenomena as "all rot." They believe in the reality of materializations or levitations. They are not men who have been recently converted, in an emotional mood. They have spent whole decades in the patient study of mediums. I could quote a dozen more witnesses of that type; but the reader will be able to judge for himself presently.

Some Spiritualists try to tone down this very grave blot on their religion by distinguishing between the professional medium and the unpaid. The men I have quoted warn us against this distinction. It is quite absurd to think that money is the only incentive to cheat. The history of the movement swarms with exposures of unpaid as well as paid mediums. An unpaid medium who can display "wonderful powers" becomes at once a centre of most flattering interest; and we shall see dozens of cases of this vanity leading men and women of every social position into fraud and misrepresentation, even in quite recent times. All that one can say is that there is far less fraud among unpaid mediums. But there are far less striking phenomena among unpaid mediums, as a rule, and so this helps us very little. The "evidence" afforded by mediums like Mr. Vale Owen, and the myriads of quite recent automatic writers and artists, is absolutely worthless. What they do is too obviously human.

We must remember, also, that the distinction between "paid" and "unpaid" is not quite so plain as some think. Daniel Dunglas Home is always described by Spiritualists as an unpaid medium, but I will show presently that he lived in great comfort all his life on the strength of his Spiritualist powers. Florence Cook, Sir William Crookes's famous medium, is described as "unpaid," because she did not (at that time) charge sitters; but she had a large annual allowance from a wealthy Spiritualist precisely in order that she should not charge at the door. To take a living medium, and one very strongly recommended to us by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle under the name of "Eva C." (though it has been openly acknowledged by her patrons on the continent for six years that her name is Marthe Beraud): she has lived a luxurious life with people far above her own station in life for fifteen years, in virtue of her supposed abnormal powers.

The distinction is, in any case, useless. When Spiritualists try to conciliate us to their wonderful stories by telling us that the medium was "unpaid," they do not know the history of their own movement. The most extraordinary frauds have been perpetrated, even in recent years, by unpaid mediums, or ladies of good social position. Flammarion, Maxwell, Ochorowicz, Carrington, and all other experienced investigators give hundreds of cases. Not many years ago Professor Reichel, tired of examining and exposing professional mediums, heard that the daughter of a high official in Costa Rica was producing wonderful materializations. He

actually went to Costa Rica to study her, and he found that she was tricking (dressing a servant girl as a ghost) in the crudest fashion, as I will tell later. The daughter of an Italian chemist, Linda Gazerra cheated scientific and professional men for three years (1908-11), but was at last found to conceal her "ghosts" and "apports" in her false hair and her underclothing. There is no such thing as a guarantee against fraud in the character of the medium. Every case has to be examined with unsparing rigour.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle meets the difficulty by cheerfully distinguishing between white, black, and grey mediums: the entirely honest, the entirely fraudulent, and those who have genuine powers, but cheat at times when their powers flag and the sitters are impatient for "manifestations." It is a familiar distinction. To some extent it is a sound distinction. We all admit black mediums. The chronicle of Spiritualism, short as it is, contains as sorry a collection of rogues, male and female, as any human movement *could* show in seventy years. Politics is spotless by comparison. Even business can hold up its head. For a "religion" the situation is remarkable.

Next, we all admit white mediums. We all know those myriads of innocent folk, tender maidens and nervous spinsters, neuropathic clergymen and even quite sober-looking professional men, who bring us reams and rivers of inspiration through the planchette and the *ouija* board and the crystal and automatic writing. Bless them, they are as guileless, generally, as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. I have seen them—seen men and women of such social standing that one dare not breathe a suspicion—stoop to trickery more than once in order to get communications of "evidential value." But there are tens of thousands of amateur mediums of this kind who are as honest as any of us. We all admit it. It is sheer Spiritualistic nonsense to say that we dismiss the whole movement as fraud. We do not question for a moment the honesty of these myriads of amateur mediums. What we say is that the evidential value of *their* work would not convert a Kaffir to Spiritualism. Dr. J. Maxwell, a distinguished French lawyer and doctor, who has been a close investigator of these things for decades and believes in mediumistic powers, says:—

I share M. Janet's opinion concerning the majority of Spiritualist mediums. I have only found two interesting ones among them; the hundred others whom I have observed have only given me automatic

phenomena, more or less conscious; nearly all were the puppets of their imagination.[\[5\]](#)

No, Spiritualism does not rely at all on these innocent and useless productions. Invariably, your Spiritualist opponent turns sooner or later to the big, striking things, the "physical phenomena," the work of the "powerful" mediums.

Now, which of these were ever "white"? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, when he came to this important point, named four "snow-white" mediums. He *could*, he added, name "ten or twelve living mediums"; but since he did not, we still hunger for the names. The four spotless ones were Home, Stainton Moses, Mrs. Piper, and Mrs. Everett—not a great record for seventy years (since Home began in 1852). Mrs. Piper we will discuss later, but I may say at once that a man for whom Sir Arthur has a great respect as a psychic expert, Dr. Maxwell, speaks of Mrs. Piper's "inaccuracies and falsehoods" with great disdain. Who Mrs. Everett may be I do not know. If Sir Arthur means the Mrs. Everitt of forty years ago, I insist on transferring her to the flock of the *black* sheep. In later chapters we will examine the performances of Stainton Moses and Home, and probably the reader will agree with me that these snow-white lambs were two of the arch-impostors of the Spiritualist movement. But a word of general interest may be inserted here.

The snow-white Daniel, whom Sir W. Barrett and Sir A. C. Doyle and all other Spiritualists quote as one of the pillars of the movement, as a spotless worker of the most prodigious miracles, was quite the most successful and cynical adventurer in the history of Spiritualism. He was no "paid adventurer," says Sir A. C. Doyle in his *New Revelation* (p. 28), but "the nephew of the Earl of Home." To the general public that statement suggests a cultivated and refined member of the British aristocracy, above all suspicion of fraud. It is the precise opposite of the truth. Even Daniel himself never pretended that he was more than a son of a bastard son of the Earl of Home. He appears first as a penniless adventurer in America at the age of fifteen, and he lived on his Spiritualistic wits until he died. He married a wealthy Russian lady in virtue of his pretensions, and his second marriage was based on the same pretensions. It is true that he did not charge so much a sitter. He had a more profitable way. He lived—apart from his

wives and a few lectures (supported by his followers)—on the generosity of his dupes all his life.

In the Debate Sir A. C. Doyle tried to defend him against one grave charge I brought against the white lamb. In 1866 a wealthy London widow, Mrs. Lyon, asked Daniel to get her into touch with her dead husband. The gifted medium did so at once, of course. For this he received a fee of thirty pounds, nominally as a subscription to the Spiritual Athenæum, of which he was paid secretary. Daniel stuck to the lady, and got immense sums of money from her; and a London court of justice compelled him to return the lot.

Now, Sir A. C. Doyle, who said several times in the Debate that *I* did not know what I was talking about, while *he* had read "the literature of my opponents as well as my own," asserts: "I have read the case very carefully, and I believe that Home behaved in a perfectly natural and honourable manner." He quotes Mr. Clodd (who has, apparently, been misled by Podmore's too lenient account of the case), but I prefer to deal with Sir Arthur's own assurance that he has "read the case very carefully."

It was on in London, under Vice-Chancellor Gifford, from April 21 to May 1, 1868. Sir A. C. Doyle seems to regard Mrs. Lyon's affidavit as waste-paper. She swears that Home brought a fictitious message from her dead husband, ordering her to adopt Daniel and endow him, and she gave him at once £26,000. She swears that, when Home's birthday came round, another fictitious message ordered her to give Daniel a further fat cheque, and she gave him £6,798. Sir A. C. Doyle may set aside all this as "lies," because he is determined to have at least one snow-white medium in the nineteenth century, and his cause cannot afford to lose Home's miracles. But when he and other writers say that Home was acquitted of dishonourable conduct, they are, if they have read Gifford's decree, saying the exact opposite of the truth. It is enough to mention that Vice-Chancellor Gifford decided that "the gifts and deeds are *fraudulent* and void," and he added:—

The system [Spiritualism], as presented by the evidence, is mischievous nonsense—well calculated on the one hand to delude the vain, the weak, the foolish, and the superstitious; and on the other to assist the projects of *the needy and the adventurer*. Beyond all doubt

there is plain law enough and plain sense enough to forbid and prevent the retention of *acquisitions such as these* by any medium, whether with or without a strange gift.

That is the official judgment which Spiritualists constantly represent as acquitting Home of fraud! This man, scornfully lashed as a greedy impostor from the British Bench, is the snow-white medium recommended to the public by Sir A. C. Doyle, Sir W. Barrett, Sir W. Crookes, and Sir O. Lodge. Sir Arthur adds in his *Vital Message* (p. 55) that "the genuineness of his psychic powers has never been seriously questioned." That statement is hardly less astounding. Home's performances, which we will examine in the third chapter, were regarded by the overwhelming majority of the cultivated people of his time as trickery of the most sordid description from beginning to end. Has Sir A. C. Doyle never heard of Browning's "Sludge"? It expressed the opinion of nearly all London.

As to Stainton Moses, the other lamb, an ex-minister who ran Home close in sleight-of-hand and foot (in the dark), it is enough to say, with Carrington, that "no test conditions were ever allowed to be imposed upon this medium." Spiritualists ought to quote that whenever they quote the miracles of Stainton Moses. His tricks were always performed—in very bad light (if any)—before a few chosen friends, who had not the least inclination to look for fraud. Home was never exposed, though he was once caught, because he chose his sitters. But Stainton Moses chose a far more exclusive circle of sitters, and never once had a critical eye on him. We shall see that the tricks themselves brand him as a fraud. He was not exposed; but it was the sitters who were lambs, not Stainton Moses.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in effect, recommends two further mediums as snow-white. One is Kathleen Goligher, of Belfast, whose performances shall speak for her in our third chapter. The other is "Eva C.," whose miracles will be examined in the second chapter. We shall see that she was detected cheating over and over again. At the present juncture, however, I would make only a few general remarks about this living "lamb."

In a work which was published in 1914—in German by Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, and in French by Mme. Bisson (they are not two distinct books, as Sir A. C. Doyle says)—there are 150 photographs of

"materializations" with this medium. We shall see that they tell their own story of crude imposture. In the introductory part of his book Baron Schrenck describes the character of the lady (pp. 51-4). He says, politely, that she has "moral sentiments only in the ego-centric sense" (that is to say, none); that she "behaves improperly to herself"; that she "lost her virginity before she was twenty"; and that she has "a lively, erotic imagination" and an "exaggerated idea of her charms and her influence on the male sex." That is bad enough for a snow-white Vestal Virgin, a sacred portal of the new revelation. But worse was to follow; and it was evident to me during the Debate that, while Sir A. C. Doyle twitted me with knowing nothing about these matters, he was himself quite ignorant of the developments of this case six years before. The young woman's real name, Marthe Beraud, had been concealed by Baron Schrenck, and her age mis-stated by six years, for a very good reason—she is the "Marthe B." who was recommended to us in 1905 as a wonderful medium by Sir Oliver Lodge, and who was detected and exposed (in Algiers) in 1907! Baron Schrenck was forced to acknowledge her real age and name in 1914.

Where, then, are the snow-whites? Does Sir A. C. Doyle want us to go back to the pure early days of the movement? Take the Foxes, who began the movement. In 1888 Margareta Fox, who had married Captain Kane, the Arctic explorer, and had been brought to some sense of her misconduct by him, confessed (in the *New York Herald*, September 24) that the movement was from the start a gross fraud, engineered for profit by her elder sister, and that the whole Spiritualist movement of America was steeped in fraud and immorality.

Perhaps Sir A. C. Doyle would plead that this appalling outburst of fraud, which poured over America from 1848 to 1888, was only the occasion of the appearance of genuine mediums. Well, who are they? Take the mediums who founded Spiritualism in England from 1852 onward. Was Foster white? As early as 1863 the Spiritualist Judge, Edmonds, learned "sickening details of his criminality." Was Colchester, who was detected and exposed, white? What was the colour of the Holmes family, whose darling spirit-control, "Katie King," got so much jewellery from poor old R. D. Owen before she was found out? Are we to see no spots on the egregious "Dr." Monck, who pretended that he was taken from his bed in Bristol and put to bed in Swindon by spirit hands? Or in corpulent Mrs. Guppy (an amateur

who duped A. Russel Wallace for years), who swore that she had been snatched from her table in her home at Ball's Pond, taken across London (and through several solid walls) for three miles at sixty miles an hour, and deposited on the table in a locked room? Was Charles Williams white? He was, with Rita, detected by Spiritualists at Amsterdam in 1878 with a whole ghost-making apparatus in his possession. Were Bastian and Taylor white? They were similarly exposed at Arnheim in 1874. Was Florence Cook, the pupil of Herne (the transporter of Mrs. Guppy at sixty miles an hour) and bewitcher of Sir W. Crookes, white? We shall soon see. Was her friend and contemporary ghost-producer, Miss Showers, never exposed? Or does Sir A. C. Doyle want us to believe in Morse, or Eglinton, or Slade, or the Davenport brothers, or Mrs. Fay, or Miss Davenport, or Duguid, or Fowler, or Hudson, or Miss Wood, or Mme. Blavatsky?

These are not a few black sheep picked out of a troop of snowy fleeces. They are the great mediums of the first forty years of the movement. They are the men and women who converted Russel Wallace, and Crookes, and Robert Owen, and Judge Edmunds, and Vice-Admiral Moore, and all the other celebrities. They are the mediums whose exploits filled the columns of the *Spiritualist*, the *Medium and Daybreak*, and the *Banner of Light*. Cut these and Home and Moses out of the chronicle, and you have precious little left on which to found a religion.

Spiritualists think that they lessen the reproach to some extent by the "grey" theory. Some mediums have genuine powers, but a time comes when the powers fail and, as the audience presses for a return on its money, they resort to trickery. That is only another way of saying that a medium is white until he is found out, which usually takes some years, as the conditions (dictated by the mediums) are the best possible for fraud and the worse possible for exposure.

But Sir A. C. Doyle is not fortunate in his example. Indeed, nearly every statement he made in his debate with me was inaccurate. Eusapia Palladino was a typical "grey," he says. "One cannot read her record," he assures us, "without feeling that for the first fifteen years of her mediumship she was quite honest." An amazing statement! Her whole career as a public medium lasted little more than fifteen years, and she tricked from the very beginning

of it. In his *New Revelation* Sir Arthur assures the public that she "was at least twice convicted of very clumsy and foolish fraud" (p. 46).

Such statements are quite reckless. Eusapia Palladino tricked habitually, on the confession of Morselli and Flammarion and her greatest admirers, from the beginning of her public career. Eusapia began her public career in 1888, but was little known until 1892. She was exposed at Cambridge by the leading English Spiritualists in 1895, only *three* years after she had begun her performances on the great European stage. Myers and Lodge reported that not one of her performances (in 1895) was clearly genuine, and that her fraud was so clever (Myers said) that it "must have needed long practice to bring it to its present level of skill." Mr. Myers was quite right. She had cheated from the start. Schiaparelli, the great Italian astronomer, investigated her in 1892, and said that, as she refused all tests, he remained agnostic. Antoniadi, the French astronomer, studied her at Flammarion's house in 1898, and he found her performance "fraud from beginning to end." Flammarion himself reports that she tried constantly to get her hands free from control, and that she was caught lowering a letter-scale by means of a hair. Thus her common tricks had begun as early as 1898, 1895, and even 1892.

"*Our* hands are clean," Sir A. C. Doyle retorted to my charge of fraud. That is precisely what they are not. Spiritualists have from the beginning covered up fraud with the mantle of ingenious theories, like this "grey" theory. Fifty years ago (1873) a Mr. Volckmann, a Spiritualist, grasped "Katie King," the pretty ghost who had duped Professor Crookes for months. He at once found that he had hold of the medium, Florence Cook; but the other Spiritualists present tore him off, and put out the feeble light; so Florence Cook continued for seven years longer to dupe Spiritualists, until she was caught again in just the same way in 1880. From the earliest days of materializations there were such exposures, and the Spiritualists condoned everything. The medium, they said, when the identity of ghost and medium was too solidly proved, had acted the part of ghost unconsciously, in a state of trance. The ghosts had economized, using the medium's body instead of making one. Some even said that the ghost and medium coalesced again (to save the medium's life!) when a wicked sceptic seized the phantom. Some said, when gauzy stuff, such as any draper sells, or a curl of false hair, was found in the cabinet, that the spirits had forgotten to "dematerialize" it.

Some laid the blame on "wicked spirits" who got snow-white mediums into trouble. Some learnedly proved that thoughts of fraud in the mind of sceptics present had telepathically influenced the entranced medium!

These things are past, Sir A. C. Doyle may say. Not in the least. In the decade before the War exposures were as frequent as in the palmy days of the middle of the nineteenth century, and Spiritualist excuses were just as bad. Craddock, the most famous materializing medium in England, who had duped the most cultivated Spiritualists of London for years, was caught and fined £10 and costs at London in 1906. Marthe Beraud, the next sensation of the Spiritualist world, was caught in 1907, and had to be transformed into "Eva C." Miller, the wonderful San Francisco maker of ghosts, was exposed in France in 1908. Frau Abend, the marvel of Berlin and the pet of the German Spiritualist aristocracy, was exposed and arrested in 1909. Bailey, the pride of the Australian Spiritualists, was unmasked in France in 1910. Ofelia Corralès, the next nine days' wonder, passed among the black sheep in 1911; and Lucia Sordi, the chief medium of Italy, was exposed in the same year. In 1912 Linda Gazerra, the refined Italian lady who had duped scientific men and the Spiritualist world for three years, came to the same inevitable end; and Mrs. Ebba Wriedt, the famous American direct-voice medium, met her disaster in Norway. In 1913 it was the turn of Carancini; in 1914 of Marthe Beraud in her new incarnation, "Eva C."

We will consider the trickery of these people in detail later. This mere list of names, of more than national repute, gathered from one single periodical (the German *Psychische Studien*), shows how the mischievous readiness of Spiritualists to find excuses, and their equally mischievous readiness to admit "phenomena" where real control is impossible, make the movement as rich in impostors to-day as it was half a century ago. It must be understood that behind each of these leading mediums—men and women of international interest—are thousands of obscurer men and women who cheat less cultivated and less critical folk, and are never detected. It is therefore useless to divide mediums into professional and amateur, or into black, white, and grey. You take a very grave risk with every one of them. You need a close familiarity with all the varieties of fraud, and these we will now carefully examine. We will then consider more patiently and courteously what phenomena remain in the Spiritualist world which are reasonably free from the suspicion of fraud.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] *Les forces naturelles inconnues* (1907), p. 18.

[2] Same work, p. 213.

[3] *Materialisations-phänomene* (1914), pp. 22, 28, and 29.

[4] *Personal Experiences in Spiritualism* (1913), p. ix.

[5] *Metapsychical Phenomena* (1905), p. 46.

CHAPTER II

HOW GHOSTS ARE MADE

The most thrilling expectation of every Spiritualist is to witness a materialization. The wild ghost, the ghost in a state of nature, the ghost which beckoned our grandmothers from their beds and waylaid our grandfathers when they passed the graveyard on dark nights, has become a mere legend. Hardly fifty years ago authentic ghost stories were as common as blackberries. But the growth of education and the establishment of exact inquiry into such matters have relegated all these stories to the realm of imagination. According to the Spiritualist, however, we have merely replaced the wild ghost by the tame ghost, the domesticated ghost of the séance room. The clever spirits of the other world, who could not when they were alive on earth detach a single particle from a living body (except with a knife), are now able to take a vast amount of material out of the medium's body and build it up in the space of quarter or half an hour into a hand, a face, or even a complete human body. This is the great feat of materialization.

Let me truthfully record that many of the better educated Spiritualists fight shy of belief in this class of phenomena. They know that in the history of the movement every single "materializing medium" has sooner or later been convicted of fraud. They have, on reflection, seen that the formation, in the course of half an hour, of even a human hand—which is a marvellously compacted structure of millions of cells—would be a feat of stupendous power and intelligence. They feel that, if all the scientific men in the world cannot make a single living cell, it is rather absurd to think that these spirit workers, whose messages do not reflect a very high degree of intelligence, can make a human face out of the slime or raw material of the medium's body in half an hour, and put all the atoms back in their places in the medium's body in another half hour.

The faith of the great majority of Spiritualists is, of course, heroic enough to overlook all these difficulties. Indeed, it is amazing to find even students of science among them indifferent to the enormous intrinsic improbability of a

materialization. During the debate at the Queen's Hall Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had on the table before him a work which contained a hundred and fifty photographs of materializations. Several of these represented full-sized human busts (sometimes with the superfluous decoration of beards, spectacles, starched collars, ties, and tie-pins). One of them represented a full-sized human form, dressed in a bath robe. And Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a trained medical man, assured the audience that he believed that these were real forms, moulded out of the "ectoplasm" of the medium's body, in the space of less than half an hour, by spiritual powers! Sir William Crookes believed in materializations of a still more wonderful nature, as we shall see. Dr. Russel Wallace believed implicitly in materializations. Sir W. Barrett and Sir O. Lodge believe in materializations, since they believe in the honesty of D. D. Home, who professed to materialize hands.

So we must not blame the ordinary Spiritualist if he knows nothing about the tremendous internal difficulties of this class of phenomena, and the consistent and appalling career of fraud of mediums in this respect. Materialization is the crowning triumph of the medium, the most convincing evidence of the new religion. It goes on to-day in darkened rooms in London—done by men who have already been convicted in London police-courts—and all parts of the world. Fraud follows fraud, yet the believer hopes (and pays) on. *Some* of the phenomena are genuine, he says; that is to say, some of the tricks were not proved to be fraudulent. Let us see how these things are done.

The incomparable Daniel was the first, apparently, to open up this great field of Spiritualist evidence. In the early fifties he began to exhibit hands which the Spiritualists present were sure were not *his* hands. But we shall see how, even in our own day, Spiritualists easily take a stuffed glove, a foot, or even a bit of muslin to be a hand, in the weird light of the dark room; and we will not linger over this.

The real creator of this important department of the movement was Mrs. Underhill, the eldest of the three Fox sisters who founded Spiritualism. I will tell the marvellous story of the three Foxes later, and will anticipate here only to the extent of saying that Leah, the eldest sister (Mrs. Fish, later Mrs. Underhill), was the organizing genius of the movement. She was an expert in fraud and a woman of business. Until her own sisters gave her

away, forty years after the beginning of the movement, she was never exposed; and even an exposure by her sister in the public Press and on the public stage in New York made no difference to her career. She was the Mme. Blavatsky, the Mrs. Eddy, of Spiritualism.

Leah began in 1869, every other branch of Spiritualist conjuring having now been fully explored, to produce a ghost at her sittings. In the dark a veiled and luminous female figure walked solemnly about the room, and profoundly impressed the sitters. The mere fact of *walking*—ghosts have to *glide* nowadays—would tell a modern audience that the ghost was the very solid medium; and the luminosity would have an aroma of phosphorus to a modern nostril. But the Americans of 1869 were not very critical. A few months later a wealthy New York banker, Livermore, lost his wife, and the "hyenas"—as Sir A. C. Doyle calls mediums who prey on the affections of the bereaved—hastened to relieve his grief and his purse. For four hundred sittings, spread over a space of six years, Katie Fox impersonated his dead wife. As Katie Fox confessed in 1888 that Spiritualism was "all humbuggery—every bit of it," we need not enter into a learned analysis of these sittings.

English mediums were put on their mettle, and after a little practice in private they announced that they had the same powers of materialization, and it was unnecessary to bring over the Americans. Mrs. Guppy, the pride of London Spiritualism, opened this new and rich vein. The story of Mrs. Guppy need not be told here. It is enough that, while she was still Miss Nichol, she was the chief medium to convert Dr. Russel Wallace to Spiritualism; and that, on the other hand, she was the lady who professed that she was aërially transported by spirits from Highbury to Lamb's Conduit Street, and through several solid walls, in the space of three minutes. Mrs. Guppy was above suspicion: first because she was unpaid, and secondly because she exposed several fraudulent mediums. So Mrs. Guppy set up her little peep-show in the first month of 1872, and drew fashionable London. But the performance was rather tame. While Mrs. Guppy sat in the cabinet, a little white face appeared, in the dim moonlight, at an opening near the top of the cabinet. It did not speak, as the New York ghosts did. Dolls do not speak.

A few months later Herne and Williams, the professional friends of Mrs. Guppy whose spirit-controls had wafted that very voluminous lady as rapidly as a zeppelin across London, set up a more robust performance. As they sat in the cabinet (unseen), spirit-forms emerged—dim, luminous, but unmistakably alive—and moved about the room. It was the first appearance in England of those famous spirits, John King, the converted pirate, and Katie King, his daughter, who had been a great attraction in America for several years. John's beard looked rather theatrical, and his lamp smelt of phosphorus. But what would you? Spirits have to use earthly chemicals; and they would find plenty of phosphorus in the brain of Charlie Williams, not to speak of his pockets, which were never searched. Again we may save ourselves the trouble of a learned analysis of the phenomena by recalling that Williams presently dissolved partnership with Herne, and entered into an alliance with Rita; and that in 1878 the precious pair were seized during a performance, and searched, at Amsterdam. Rita had a false beard, six handkerchiefs, and a bottle of phosphorized oil. Williams had the familiar false black beard and dirty drapery of "John King," and bottles of phosphorized oil and scent.

The Spiritualist reader here impatiently observes that I am merely picking out a few little irregularities in the early days of the movement. Far from it. I am scientifically studying the preparatory stages of one of the classic manifestations of the movement: the materializations of Florence Cook, which are vouched for by Sir W. Crookes, Sir A. C. Doyle, and, apparently, all the leaders of the movement. If the Spiritualist wishes, like other people, honestly to understand "Katie King," he or she must read this part of the story which I am giving, and which is generally omitted (though it may be read in any history of the movement).

Florence Cook was a pretty little Hackney girl of sixteen when Herne and Williams began. She attended séances at their house in Lamb's Conduit Street, and she was so impressed that she became a pupil of Herne. She and her father seem to have understood each other very well, and she very shortly began to give, to paying guests, materialization-séances in their house at Hackney. Florence went one better than Mrs. Guppy and Herne. There was a lamp in the room—at the far side of the room—and you saw faces plainly at the opening in the cabinet. As her "power" developed, the ghost began to leave the cabinet and walk about the room and talk to the

sitters. Florence remained bound with rope in the cabinet while "Katie King" stalked abroad. You did not see her, it is true, but you had her word for it. She was not bound by the spectators—nor by herself, of course. She was bound by the spirits. A rope was put on her lap, the curtains were drawn, and presently you discovered Florrie, "securely" bound and in a trance, in the cabinet. The curtains were drawn again when the ghost, in flowing white drapery, walked the room.

Meantime, and at a very early date, a Manchester Spiritualist named Blackburn privately engaged to give Florrie an annual fee if she would not take money at the door; so she became an "unpaid" and highly respectable medium. Jewellery is, of course, not money, and Florrie exacted jewellery (as the Spiritualist Volckmann found and said in the London Press at the time, when he wanted to attend) from would-be sitters through her father. It is said that she looked, in features, remarkably like a Jewess.

Her fame reached the ears of a brilliant young scientist, Professor W. Crookes, and he invited her to materialize at his house. She soon laid aside all dread of the scientific man. In three niggardly little letters, which he never republished, Crookes described in 1874 the wonderful things done at his house. While Florrie lay in an improvised cabinet, or behind a curtain, the beautiful and romantic and quite different maiden, Katie King, walked about his room. She played with Crookes's children, and told them stories about her earthly life in India long ago. She talked affably to his guests, and took his arm as she walked. There was not the least doubt about her solidity. The wicked sceptic who suggests that Katie King was a muslin doll or a streak of light has certainly not read Crookes's letters. He felt her pulse, he sounded her heart and lungs, he cut off a tress of her lovely auburn hair, he took her in his arms, and he—well, he breaks off here and simply asks us what any man would do in the circumstances? We assume that he found that she had lips and warm breath like any other maiden.

Florence Cook's opinion of scientific men would to-day be priceless. I will say, on behalf of Sir W. Crookes, that he never obtruded this sacred experience on the public. He "accidentally" destroyed all the negatives and photographs he had taken of Katie King. He forbade friends, to whom he had given copies, ever to publish them. The three short letters he wrote to the *Spiritualist* (February 6, April 3, and June 5, 1874—I have, of course,

read them) are now rare. He wrote them out of chivalry, because a rival Spiritualist, Volckmann (who married Mrs. Guppy), got admission to the Hackney sanctuary (by a present of jewellery) and exposed Florence (December 9, 1873). He saw at once that she was impersonating the spirit, and he seized it. Other Spiritualists present, supporters of Florrie, tore him off, and turned out the lamp; and five minutes later Florence was found, bound and peacefully entranced, in her cabinet. In the hubbub that followed Professor Crookes gave his modest testimonial to Florrie's virtue. Spiritualists generally accepted her version, and she continued to make ghosts until 1880, when Sir George Sitwell and Baron von Buch exposed her in precisely the same way.

No Spiritualist can quarrel with me for dwelling on this famous materialization. It is supposed to be the mostly firmly authenticated in the whole movement. Sir W. Crookes said, quite late in life, that he had "nothing to retract"; and every Spiritualist who quotes his high authority endorses the materialization of Katie King. The majority of the public to-day will merely conclude that some scientific men are worse witnesses on such matters than dockers, and that the disgust of scientific men like Sir E. Ray Lankester and Sir Bryan Donkin has a very solid foundation. Even at the time there were leading Spiritualists like Sergeant Cox who regarded the affair with bewilderment and suspected that all materializations were fraud.

What can be said for Sir W. Crookes? He alleges that the medium and the ghost were unmistakably different persons. Katie King was taller than Florrie. But Florence Cook, like her contemporary, Miss Showers, was seen to walk on tip-toe, and alter her stature, when she was the ghost. Sir W. Crookes nowhere says that he took the elementary precaution of measuring ghost and medium *with their dresses drawn up to their knees*. He says that the lock of hair which Katie gave him as a memento was auburn, and Florrie's hair was very dark brown. But we do not doubt that on the *last occasion* the ghost was *not* Florence Cook. Other differences he finds, in a dim light, are negligible. If the modern Spiritualist really believes Sir W. Crookes, as he professes to do, he must come to this ultra-miraculous conclusion: The spiritual powers in this case did not merely take *some* matter out of Florence Cook's body, but they took more than the whole substance of it, because Crookes says that Katie was taller and broader than Florrie! And, to cap this supreme miracle, he on one occasion saw ghost and

medium together, and apparently Florrie was as solid as ever! The spirits had in this case multiplied nine stone into eighteen or nineteen.

After twenty years of religious controversy I am a patient man, but I decline to argue with any one who doubts that Florrie Cook (four times caught in fraud, and a pupil of Herne) impersonated the ghost.

Mr. F. Podmore saw the photographs which Professor Crookes took. He says that ghost and medium are the same person. Crookes himself was nervous, in spite of Florrie's charms, and he begged to be allowed to see ghost and medium plainly together. The artful Florence could not manage that in his house. Once she let him look at her, lying on the ground, but he saw no face or hands; and a bundle of clothes and a pair of boots are not quite clearly a living person. He pressed again. Florence—he tells us this very naively—borrowed his lamp (a bottle of phosphorized oil) and tested its penetrating power, and then told him he should see both ghost and medium in *her* house. He went, and we are not surprised that he saw them.

If any Spiritualist of our time really doubts that on this occasion there were *two* girls, I invite him to read carefully Sir W. Crookes's account of the famous farewell scene. Katie proclaimed that her mission was over (she had converted a scientific man), and this was to be her last appearance. Florrie (who was in a trance, of course) wept, vainly implored her to visit this earth again, and sank, broken-hearted, to the floor. Katie directed Crookes—who stood, mute, with his phosphorus lamp in the middle of this pretty comedy—to see to Florrie, and, when he turned round again, Katie King had vanished for ever. That is to say, she had not been re-absorbed in the medium's body, as Spiritualist theory demands, but had *gone in the opposite direction while his back was turned!*

Now there you have the most wonderful, classic, historic materialization in the whole Spiritualist history. It is attested by a distinguished man of science. It is endorsed by all the Spiritualist leaders of our time. And it is piffle from beginning to end. The evidence would not justify a man in drowning a mouse. The control was ridiculously inadequate. The imposture was palpable. If Sir W. Crookes had taken the scientific precaution of spreading a few tacks on the carpet, or waxing a bent pin in the ghost's chair, he would have heard the Hackney dialect at its richest. It was

reserved for two Oxford undergraduates to show Sir W. Crookes how to investigate ghosts. They seized "Marie," Florrie's next spirit, in 1880; and they found they had in their arms the charming Florence, in her *lingerie*. Crookes had never searched the ample black velvet dress she used to wear.

It is hardly worth while running over all the ghostly frauds since then, but a word about Florrie's friend and contemporary, Miss Showers, will be found instructive. Miss Showers was a really unpaid medium; though she received a good deal in the way of jewellery and other presents from admirers of her fair and aristocratic ghost, "Lenore Fitzwarren." She was a general's daughter, and above suspicion. No one dreamed of searching her. On one occasion she allowed Florence Cook to peep into her cabinet; and Florence—hawks do not pick out hawks' eyes—assured the public that she plainly saw Miss Showers and "Lenore," and even a second ghost, simultaneously. But, alas for the fair Lenore! Sergeant Cox, who was very sceptical, had Miss Showers at his country-house in 1874; and Miss Cox, a born daughter of Eve, tried to draw the curtain and peep into the cabinet. Miss Showers fought for her curtain, and the ghostly headdress fell off, and the game was up.

This was only four months after the exposure of Florence Cook. The two most certainly genuine and respectable mediums in England were unmasked within four months. R. D. Owen's "Katie King" had been exposed in America in the previous year, the last sad year of the old man's life.

One by one the others followed. In spite of darkness, in spite of solemn promises extracted from sitters not to break the circle or seize the ghost, the materializers were all exposed. One man shot a ghost with ink, and the ink was found on the medium. Stuart Cumberland squirted cochineal on a ghost, and the medium could not wash it away. One American with a gun had a shot at a ghost. At another place tin-tacks were strewn on the floor, and the spirit's language was painful to hear. In 1876 Eglinton was exposed by Mr. Colley; he had in his trunk the beard and draperies of his ghost "Abdullah." In 1877 Miss Wood was caught at Blackburn, and Dr. Monck was caught and sent to jail. In 1878 Rita and Williams were caught, with all their tawdry ghost-properties, at Amsterdam. Spiritualists were getting a little nervous, though as a rule they accepted every excuse. The medium had

acted "unconsciously," or under the influence of evil spirits. Sir A. C. Doyle boasts that it is Spiritualists who weed out frauds. On the contrary, they have shown a very grave willingness to accept the flimsiest excuses and reinstate the medium. Miss Wood was exposed, for instance, in 1877. They at once admitted her defence, that she had been quite unconscious in impersonating the ghost, and she went on. In 1882 a sceptical sitter seized the "pretty little Indian girl" who came out of the cabinet while Miss Wood was entranced in it; and the Indian girl-ghost was Miss Wood walking on her knees, swathed in muslin.

Ah, but this is ancient history, your Spiritualist friend says. Listen! About fifteen years ago, when I was already making that inquiry into Spiritualism which Spiritualists say I have never made, I was told by a group of London Spiritualists, all cultivated men and women, that it was useless to go the round of the mediums who advertised in *Light*, since they were "all frauds." I was told that the one genuine medium in London was a certain F. G. F. Craddock, who performed in a studio at the back of Mr. Gambier Bolton's house. The minor phenomena I saw did not impress me, and I asked to be allowed to see these wonderful materializations of Mr. Craddock. Three ghosts—a nun, a clown, and a Pathan—walked the room (successively) while Craddock sat (unseen) in a trance. I saw pictures of these materialized forms, and was told that they were accurate. But before I could get admission Craddock left, and he began to hold sittings for his own profit at Pinner. And on March 18, 1906, the "ghost" was seized, in the usual way, and found to be Craddock. On June 20 (see the *Times* of June 21) Craddock was fined ten pounds, and five guineas cost, at Edgware Police Court, on the charge "that he, being a rogue and a vagabond, did unlawfully use certain subtle craft, means, or device, by palmistry or otherwise, to deceive the said Mark Mayhew and others." He had been controlled as carelessly as F. Cook was in 1874. He had smuggled in masks and drapery, and impersonated his ghosts.

After all, Sir A. C. Doyle may say, in his blunt way, this was 1906. I do not know if he knows it—he seems to have an exceedingly limited knowledge of his own movement—but *Craddock is giving materialization-séances in or near London to-day*; and prominent Spiritualists know it, and condone it, on the ground that *some* of his phenomena are genuine.

The imposture has continued to flourish in all parts of the Spiritualist world since 1906. In 1907 it was the turn of Marthe Beraud, of whom I will say more presently. In 1908 exposure fell upon Miller, the most famous of the American materializing mediums. Such was his repute that the French Spiritualists invited him to Paris, and were delighted with him. The figures which appeared while he sat *before* the cabinet were suspiciously like dolls, but there was no mistake about the "beautiful girl" (in dull, red light) who came out, and offered her hand, when Miller was (presumably) inside the cabinet. But when the spirits announced that it was improper to strip and search him, and when they said that, though he was an "unpaid" medium, they must make him a nice little present before he went back to San Francisco, there was a chill in the Spiritualist world. And when he produced the ghosts of Luther's wife and Melanchthon, when they found bits of tulle and a perfumed cloth in the cabinet after a séance, they sent Miller back to America without his present.

This fiasco, which agitated the Spiritualist world in the beginning of 1909, had not yet been forgotten when, in October of the same year, Frau Anna Abend and her husband were arrested by the police at Berlin. Frau Abend was the leading German medium. Strings of motor-cars stretched before her door of an afternoon. For several years she and her husband had duped and fascinated Berlin by their accurate knowledge of the dead you wished to see. You heard on every side, what you hear on every side in London today: "I was *quite* unknown to the medium," and "She could not *possibly* know by natural means what the spirits told me." The police thought otherwise. They found in her cabinet tulle enough to drape six ghosts; and they found in her house quite a detective-bureau of information about dead folk and possible sitters, and a secret address to which she had the flowers sent which her spirits would produce as "apports." The whole machinery of her information and trickery was laid bare. Was she ruined? Not a bit of it. She and her husband got off on technical grounds, and the Spiritualists showered congratulations on them and set them up again. [6]

In 1910 our Spiritualist journal, *Light*, which is so zealous to root out fraud, announced that a really genuine materializing medium had appeared in Costa Rica. It seemed a safe distance away, but Professor Reichel, of France, had actually been to Costa Rica and found it a flagrant imposture at

the very time when *Light* was confirming the faith of English Spiritualists with the glorious news.

Ofelia Corralès, the medium in question, was the daughter of a high civic functionary of San José; an *unpaid* medium, you notice. As soon as Reichel arrived he found that the wonderful manifestation which the Spiritualist journals of the world had announced was well known locally to be a hoax. The ghost was a servant-girl, who was recognized by everybody, smuggled in at the back door. Ofelia, under pressure, admitted this. Her "spirit-control," she explained, could not "materialize," so directed her to bring in this girl, who resembled her "in the last incarnation but one." Sometimes her mother took the part, and she was one night embraced by an ardent Costa Rican sitter. Reichel assisted at some of her performances, but the girl declined to materialize a ghost. What she did get was a chorus of ghostly voices in the dark. It says something for the robustness of Professor Reichel's psychic faith that, though the music was "rotten," though the whole family was suspect and all the members of it were present, though he caught the girl cheating and her "ghost" was an acknowledged imposture, he believed that this music was a "genuine" phenomenon! He was not going to make a journey to Costa Rica for nothing.

To English Spiritualists this case ought to be particularly interesting, because among the gentle Ofelia's admirers in San José was an Englishman, Mr. Lindo, and it was he who sent the outrageous account to *Light*. According to him—and he was present—they all saw Ofelia floating in the air. Now, Reichel had taken with him some phosphorized paper, and by the light of this he saw that Ofelia was standing on a stool. In fact, she fell off the stool, and was ignominiously exposed. What is worse, Reichel says (*Psychische Studien*, April, 1911, p. 224) that he had expressly warned Lindo, who used his name, that he "would not be mixed up with such a burlesque," and that the minutes of the sittings were grossly exaggerated by Ofelia's father. So much for first-hand Spiritualist testimony in *Light*. The French *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* gave an equally false account. The German *Psychische Studien* alone called it "a conglomerate of stupidity and lies." It certainly was; but when the whole truth was known *Light* mildly described it as "a girlish prank." It was calculated and shameless fraud.

A few months later it was the turn of Lucia Sordi, a famous Italian medium, a young married woman of the peasant class, assisted by her two girls. Her marvels put Eusapia Palladino in the shade. The guests were not merely touched, but bitten! A man's hat was brought from the hall and put on his head. The cat was brought in through the solid walls. The table was not merely lifted up, but carried into the hall. Professor Tanfani and other scientific men were taken in. Four "materialized spirits" seemed to be in the room at once, while Lucia was bound to her chair. They fastened her in a crate, and it made little difference. In 1911 Baron von Schrenck-Notzing went to Rome and exposed her. She could get out of any bandages. But when the War broke out she was still occupying the leisure hours of certain Italian professors.

Meantime, Dr. Imoda, of Turin, university teacher of science, was investigating the marvels of Linda Gazerra. Linda was not exactly an unpaid medium, but she was the cultivated daughter of a professional man. Being a lady and a good Catholic, she could not, of course, be stripped and searched. So she did wonderful things, which Imoda gravely watched and described and photographed for three years. Her "control" was "Vincenzo," a young officer who had been killed in a duel; and a terrible chap he was to choose so respectable and pious a medium. Things simply flew about when he was at work. At other times she "apported" birds and flowers, and the ghosts that materialized beside her—you could plainly see both her and the ghost—were very pretty, though remarkably flat-faced, and fond of muslin. As Linda's hands were controlled by the sitters, it did not matter that she insisted on absolute darkness until she pleased to say "Foco" ("Light") and let you take a photograph. She had a three years' run. Then Schrenck-Notzing studied her at Paris in the spring of 1911. She treated him to a "witches' Sabbath," he says. But he soon found that her feet were not where a lady ought to keep her feet. He felt a spirit-touch, grasped the touching limb, and found that he had the virtuous Linda's foot. Then he sewed her in a sack, and the spirits were powerless. Her materializations and tricks were simple. She brought her birds and flowers and muslin and masks (or pictures) in her hair (which was largely false, and never examined) and her underclothing, and she, by a common trick, released her hands and feet from control to manipulate them.

This Baron Schrenck, you think, was a terrible fellow at exposures. Unhappily, our last instance must be the exposure of his own medium, Eva C. This will fitly crown the chapter for two reasons. First, because Sir A. C. Doyle recommends her to us as a genuine materializing medium of our own times. He says in the Debate that, while Spiritualists have been much "derided" for claiming that spirits build up temporary forms out of the medium's body, "recent scientific investigation shows that their assertion was absolutely true. (Cheers.)" I quote the printed Debate (p. 32), and it will be recognized that here at least I am not shirking my opponent's strongest evidence, for Sir A. C. Doyle at once explains that he means the case of Eva C. He gave his own (quite inaccurate) version of the facts, and, to the delight of his supporters, he went on:—

Don't you think it is simply the insanity of incredulity to waive that aside? Imagine discussing what happened in 1866 ... when you have scientific facts of this sort remaining unanswered.

So, you see, I was very heavily punished in that contest, and I have to try to redeem my "insanity"; but perhaps the reader will remember what Sir A. C. Doyle forgot, that he had stipulated that I should open the debate and *deal with his books*. No doubt I was quite free to take other evidence also, but I had an idea that, since this evidence was published in 1914 and Sir Arthur's books were published in 1918 and 1919, he had not mentioned it because he disdained it.

The other reason why the case of Eva C. is important is because it shows us modern scientific men at work. In the earlier days of the movement faking was easy. No one searched a medium, especially a lady medium. She could have yards of butter-cloth or muslin and even dolls or masks under her skirts. Even now the ordinary medium is not searched, as a rule. A friend of mine went recently to a materializing medium near London—it is all going on still—and was allowed to feel the medium over his clothes. He could easily tell that the man had yards of muslin wrapped round his body, but he said nothing, and he got his money's worth; a man dressed in muslin, in a bad light, being recognized by Spiritualists as a deceased relative. Most materializations are still the medium in a mask or beard and muslin. In some cases, in very poor light, the ghost is merely a white rag, a picture, or even a faint patch of light from a lantern, or a phosphorized streak.

Now we come to the "scientific facts." Half the professors and other scientific men quoted as adherents by modern Spiritualist writers and speakers are not Spiritualists at all. Flammarion, Ochorowicz, Foa, Bottazzi, Richet, de Vesme, Schrenck-Notzing, Morselli, Flournoy, Maxwell, Ostwald, etc., are not, and never were, Spiritualists. Most of them regard Spiritualism as childish and mischievous. But they believe that mediums have remarkable psychic powers, and they admit levitations and (in many cases) materializations. They think that a mysterious force of the living medium, not spirits, does these things, and they talk of a "new science." I agree with them that the idea of spirits strolling along from the Elysian fields to play banjos and lift tables and make ghosts for us is rather peculiar, but I am not sure that *their* idea is much less peculiar. However, they promise us research under scientific conditions, and they say that they have got materializations under such conditions. "Eva C." is the grand example.

Who is this mysterious lady? I have already let the reader into the secret. Sir A. C. Doyle may justly plead that he does not read German; and the French version of her exploits is, he may be surprised to hear, very different from Baron Schrenck's fuller version in German, and very wrong and misleading. But does Sir Arthur never read the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*?

As long ago as July, 1914, it contained a very good article on Marthe Beraud, which tells most of the facts (except about her morals), and quite openly disdains these wonderful photographs which have made such an impression on Sir A. C. Doyle. From that article, which betrays, in the official organ of the Society, almost the same "insanity of incredulity" as I did, he would have learned things that might have saved him from the worst "howler" of the Debate. It tells that "Eva C.," as was well known all over the continent in 1914, was Marthe Beraud, the medium of the "Villa Carmen materializations" in Algiers in 1905. It gives a lengthy report on the case by an Algiers lawyer, M. Marsault, who knew the family at the Villa Carmen intimately, and often saw the performances; and this report contains an explicit confession by Marthe that she had no abnormal powers whatever. To excuse herself she said that there was a trap-door in the room, and "ghosts" were introduced by others. That was a lie, for there was no trap-door; and those who obstinately wished to believe in the ghosts

rejected the whole of Marsault's weighty evidence on the ground that *he* said there was a trap-door!

I have before me photographs of the Algiers ghost and of Eva C.'s ghost. They plainly show Marthe dressed up as a ghost, in the familiar old way, while Professor Richet gravely photographs her, and Sir Oliver Lodge recommends these things to our serious notice. However, Marthe found Algiers unhealthy after this, and she returned to France and set up in the materializing trade. Mme. Bisson found her and adopted her, and changed her name; and Baron von Schrenck-Notzing settled down to a three years' study of her marvellous performances. It was on the strength of his book and photographs that Miss Verrall in 1914 (in the *Proceedings S. P. R.*) gave a verdict not much different from my own. She found some evidence of abnormal power, and a great deal of fraud. I see no evidence whatever of abnormal *psychic* power if—it is not clear—this is what Miss Verrall means. Yet Sir A. C. Doyle, who seems to know nothing about the matter beyond Mme. Bisson's worthless work, puts the facts before a London audience in the year 1920 in the language I have quoted.

In the beginning Marthe plainly impersonated the ghost, as Baron Schrenck admits. He believes that she did it unconsciously. The sooner that excuse for fraudulent mediums is abandoned the better. She was quite obviously *not* in a trance, though she pretended to be, throughout the whole three years. For smaller "ghosts" (white patches, streaks, arms, etc.) she used muslin, gloves, rubber—all sorts of things. As a rule, she knew when they were going to let off the magnesium-flare and photograph her. She had had ample time behind the curtain to arrange her effects. In one photograph, taken too suddenly, she has a white rag on her knee, which would look like a hand in the red light, and her real hand is holding the "ghost" over her head! After that Baron Schrenck sadly admitted that she used her hands. Mme. Bisson does not; so Sir Arthur does not know this. In another photograph she is supposed to accept a cigarette in a materialized third hand. It is obviously her bare foot, and, if you look closely, you see that her "face" is a piece of white stuff pinned to the curtain. She is really leaning back and stretching up her foot. The book reeks with cheating.

After a time she began to stick or paste on the cabinet or the curtain pictures cut out of the current illustrated papers, and daubed with paint, provided

with false noses, or adorned with beards and moustaches. President Wilson has a heavy cavalry moustache and a black eye; but the glasses, collar, tie, and tie-pin, and even the marks of the scissors, are unmistakable. Baron Schrenck was forced to admit that dozens of pinholes were found (not by him) on the cabinet-wall, and that the pins must have been smuggled in, deceptively, in spite of a control which he claimed to be perfect. In fact, poor Baron Schrenck was driven from concession to concession until his case was very limp. Of all these things Sir A. C. Doyle knew nothing; and, although he had the portrait of President Wilson in his hands at the Queen's Hall, only disguised by a moustache and a few daubs of paint, he assured the audience he believed that it was the ectoplasm of the medium's body moulded by spirit forces into a human form!

The point of interest to us is to find how the medium concealed her trappings. No medium was ever more rigorously controlled, yet the fraud is obvious. The answer shows that you can almost never be sure of your medium. She was stripped naked before every sitting and *sewn* into black tights. Her mouth and hair were always examined. Occasionally her sex-cavity was examined. South African detectives have told me how this receptacle is used for smuggling diamonds, and, as Marthe was rarely examined there by a competent and reliable witness, she probably often used it. Dr. Schrenck admits that the outlet of her intestinal tube was scarcely ever examined until very late in the inquiry, and an independent doctor gave positive reason to suspect that she used this. There is only one photograph in the book that shows a ghost which, tightly wrapped up (and nearly all show plain marks of folding, as Baron Schrenck admits), might be too large for such concealment; and the careful reader will find that on these occasions there was no control at all! They were impromptu sittings, suddenly decided upon by Marthe herself.

There is strong reason to believe that usually she swallowed her material and brought it up at will from her gullet or stomach. More than a hundred cases of this power are known, and there is much positive evidence that Marthe was a "ruminant." She sometimes bled copiously from the mouth and gullet, and she used the mouth much to manipulate the gauzy stuff. When I mentioned this well-known theory of Marthe Beraud Sir Arthur laughed. He said that he doubted if I had read the book I professed to have

read, because Marthe had a net sewn round her head, which "disproved" my theory. He summoned me to retract. He said I had "slipped up pretty badly."

Well, the theory was not mine, but that of a doctor who had studied Marthe, and who has little difficulty in dealing with the net. Had it not been the end of the debate, however, our audience would have heard a surprising reply. They would have learned that the net was used only in *seven* sittings out of hundreds, and that the medium then compelled them to abandon it. They would have learned that the net, instead of "not making the slightest difference to the experiments," as Sir A. C. Doyle says, made *four* out of these *seven* sittings completely barren of results! And they would have further learned that when the net was on, and Marthe could not use her mouth, she stipulated that the back of her clothing should be left open.

Just one further detail of this sordid imposture. I said that on one occasion Marthe allowed the very title of the paper out of which she cut her portraits, *Le Miroir*, to appear in the photograph, and gave it a spiritual meaning. Now, that is Mme. Bisson's version. But Baron Schrenck's version is in flagrant contradiction, and an examination of the photographs proves that he is right. The words were caught, *accidentally*, by a camera placed in the cabinet, and the excuse was concocted the next day!

Enough of these miserable "materializations." They are always dishonest. Every materializing medium has been found out. Almost since the birth of the movement there have been, and are to-day, hundreds of these men and women, paid and unpaid, who have masqueraded as ghosts, or duped their sitters in a dull red light with muslin and butter-cloth and phosphorized paper, with dolls and masks and stuffed gloves and stockings and rubber arms. If Spiritualists would persuade us that they are scrupulously honest, they must drive the last of these people out of their fold, and they must expunge every reference to these materializations from their literature. When we get such phenomena with a medium who has been searched by competent and independent witnesses, whose body-openings have been sealed and clothing changed, in a cabinet set up by independent inquirers, with *each* hand and foot controlled by a separate man, or in a good light, we may begin to talk. Never yet has the faintest suggestion of a phenomenon been secured under such circumstances.

FOOTNOTE:

[6] I take this from the German psychic journal, *Psychische Studien* Nov., 1909.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF RAPS AND LEVITATIONS

I now pass at once to a class of Spiritualistic manifestations which would be put forward by any well-educated occultist as the most authentic of all. Reference was made a few pages back to a large group of scientific and professional men who believe in what they call "mediumistic phenomena." They are not Spiritualists, and it is one of the questionable features of recent Spiritualist literature that they are often described as such. Thus the astronomers Flammarion and Schiaparelli are quoted. But Flammarion says repeatedly in his latest and most important book (*Les forces naturelles inconnues*, 1907) that he is not and never was a Spiritualist (see p. 581), and he includes a long letter from Schiaparelli, who disavows all belief even in the phenomena (p. 93). Professor Richet, who believes in materializations, is not a Spiritualist. Professor Morselli, who also accepts the facts, speaks of the Spiritualist interpretation of them as "childish, absurd, and immoral." The long lists of scientific supporters which the Spiritualists publish are in part careless or even dishonest.

But such professors as Richet, Ochorowicz, de Vesme, Flournoy, etc., and men like Flammarion, Carrington, Maxwell, etc., do believe that raps and other physical phenomena are produced by abnormal powers of the medium. They believe that when the medium sits in or before the cabinet, in proper conditions, the floor and table are rapped, the furniture is lifted or moved about, musical instruments are played, and impressions are made in plaster, although the medium has not done it with his or her hands or feet. As I said, these scientific men scorn the idea that "spirits" from another world play these pranks. They look for unknown natural forces in the medium. They *think* that they have excluded fraud. We shall see. Meantime, the assent of so many scientific men to the phenomena themselves gives this class of experiences more plausibility than others.

Most of these men base their opinion upon the remarkable doings of the Italian medium, Eusapia Palladino, and we shall therefore pay particular attention to her. But Spiritualists rely for these things on a very large

number of mediums. In fact, some of our leading English Spiritualists do not believe in Palladino at all, having detected her in fraud. We must therefore first examine the evidence put before us by Spiritualists.

We begin with the story of the Fox family in America in 1848, which admittedly inaugurated modern Spiritualism. Since Spiritualists commemorate, in 1920, the "seventy-second" anniversary of the foundation of their religion, I will surely not be accused of wasting time over trivial or irrelevant matters in going back to 1848. As, however, this is not a history, I must deal with this matter very briefly.

In March, 1848, a Mr. and Mrs. Fox, of Hydesville, a very small town of the State of New York, had their domestic peace disturbed by mysterious and repeated rappings, apparently on their walls and floors. Swedenborgians and Shakers had by that time familiarized people with the idea of spirit, and the neighbours were presently informed that the raps took an intelligent form, and replied "Yes" or "No" (by a given number of raps) to questions. The Foxes stated that the raps came from the spirit of a murdered man, and later they said that they had dug and found human bones. These raps were clearly associated with the two girls, Margaretta (aged fifteen) and Katie or Cathie (aged twelve). A third, a married elder sister, named Leah—at that time Mrs. Fish, and later Mrs. Underhill—came to Hydesville, and, at her return to Rochester, took Margaretta with her. Leah herself was presently a "medium." The excitement in rural America was intense. Mediums sprang up on every side, and the Foxes were in such demand that they could soon charge a dollar a sitter. The "spirits," having at last discovered a way of communicating with the living, rapped out all sorts of messages to the sitters. In a few years table-turning, table-tilting, levitation, etc., were developed, but the "foundation of the religion" was as I have described in 1848.

Towards the close of 1850 three professors of Buffalo University formed the theory that the Fox girls were simple frauds, causing the supposed raps by cracking their knee joints. At a trial sitting they so placed the legs and feet of the girls that no raps could be produced. A few months later a relative, Mrs. Culver, made a public statement, which was published in the *New York Herald* (April 17, 1851), that Margaretta Fox had admitted the fraud to her, and had shown her how it was done. Neither of these checks

had any appreciable effect upon the movement. From year to year it found new developments, and it is said within three years of its origin to have won more than a million adherents in the United States, or more than five times as many as it has to-day.

Our Spiritualists may find it possible, in their solemn commemoration of 1848, to smile at the Buffalo professors and Mrs. Culver, but I have yet to meet a representative of theirs who can plausibly explain away what happened in 1888. Margaretta Fox married Captain Kane, the Arctic explorer, who often urged her to expose the fraud, as he believed it to be. In 1888 she found courage to do so (*New York Herald*, September 24, 1888). She and Katie, she said, had discovered a power of making raps with their toe-joints (not knee-joints), and had hoaxed Hydesville. Their enterprising elder sister had learned their secret, and had organized the very profitable business of spirit-rapping. The raps and all other phenomena of the Spiritualist movement were, Mrs. Kane said, fraud from beginning to end. She gave public demonstrations in New York of the way it was done; and in October of the same year her younger sister Cathie confirmed the statement, and said that Spiritualism was "all humbuggery, every bit of it" (*Herald*, October 10 and 11, 1888). They agreed that their sister Leah (Mrs. Underhill), the founder of the Spiritualist movement and the most prosperous medium of its palmiest days, was a monumental liar and a shameless organizer of every variety of fraud. That a wealthy Spiritualist afterwards induced Cathie to go back on this confession need not surprise us.

So much for "St. Leah"—if she is yet canonized—and the foundation of the Spiritualist religion in 1848. We need say little further about raps. Dr. Maxwell, the French lawyer and medical student who belongs to the scientific psychic school which I have noticed, gives six different fraudulent ways of producing "spirit-raps." He has studied every variety of medium, including girls about the age of the Fox girls, and found fraud everywhere. In one case he discovered that the raps were fraudulently produced by two young men among the sitters; and the normal character of these men was so high that their conduct is beyond his power of explanation. He has verified by many experiments that loud raps may be produced by the knee- and toe-joints, and that even slowly gliding the finger or boot along the leg of the table (or the cuff, etc.) will, in a strained and darkened room, produce the

noises. In the dark, of course—Dr. Maxwell roundly says that any sitting in total darkness is waste of time—cheating is easy. The released foot or hand, or a concealed stick, will give striking manifestations. Some mediums have electrical apparatus for the purpose.

If any Spiritualist is still disposed to attach importance to raps, we may at least ask for these manifestations under proper conditions. Since spirits can rap on floors, or on the medium's chair, let the table be abolished. It usually affords a very suspicious shade, especially in red light, in the region of the medium. Let the medium be plainly isolated, and bound in limb and joint, and let us then have these mysterious raps. It has not yet been done.

The same general objection may be premised when we approach the subject of levitation and the moving of furniture generally. Levitation is a more impressive word than "lifting," but the inexpert reader may take it that the meaning is the same. The "spirits" manifest their presence to the faithful, not by making the table or the medium "light," but by lifting up it or him. It is unfortunate that here again the spirits seem compelled by their very limited intelligence to choose a phenomenon which not only looks rather like the pastime of a slightly deranged Hottentot, but happens to coincide with just the kind of thing a fraudulent medium would be disposed to do in a dim light. However, since quite a number of learned men believe in these things, let us consider them seriously.

And, with the courage of honest inquirers, let us attack the strongest manifestations of this power first. Such are the instances in which the medium himself—spirits respect the proprieties and do not treat lady-mediums in this way—is lifted from the ground and raised even as high as the ceiling. When I say that ladies are not treated in this frivolous way, the informed reader will gather at once that I decline to take serious notice of the once famous levitation of Mrs. Guppy. Dr. Russel Wallace was quite convinced that this lady was "levitated" on to the table, in the dark, and she was no light weight. But we shall be excused from examining his statement if we recall what the lady claimed in 1871. Herne and Williams, both impostors, were giving a séance in Lamb's Conduit Street, and their "spirit-controls" said they would "apport" the weighty Mrs. Guppy. Three minutes later, although the doors were locked, and her home was three miles away, she was standing on the table. She had a wet pen in her hand, and she

explained tearfully to the innocent sitters that she had been snatched by invisible powers from her books and taken through the solid walls. People like Russel Wallace still believed in Mrs. Guppy, but I assume that there is no one to-day who does not see in this case a blatant collusion of three rogues to cheat the public. I assume that the same contempt will be meted out to the claim of the Rev. Dr. Monck, who, not to be outdone, stated shortly afterwards that *he* had been similarly transported from Bristol to Swindon.

Probably the modern reader will be disposed to dismiss with equal contempt the claim that Daniel Dunglas Home was, in the year 1869, wafted by spirit-hands from one window to another, seventy feet above the ground, at a house in Victoria Street. But here I must ask him to pause. This is one of the classical manifestations, one of the foundations of Spiritualism. Sir A. C. Doyle says that the evidence here is excellent. Sir William Barrett maintains that the story is indisputably true. Sir William Crookes says that "to reject the recorded evidence on this subject is to reject all human testimony whatever." It is a Spiritualist dogma.

I have shown in the debate with Sir A. C. Doyle that this dogma is based on evidence that will not stand five minutes' examination. Not one of these leading Spiritualists can possibly have examined the evidence. No witness even *claims* to have seen Home wafted from window to window. Lord Adare is the only survivor of the three supposed witnesses, and, when he saw some Press report of my destructive criticism in the Debate, he sent to the *Weekly Dispatch* a letter that he had written at the time. He seemed to think that this letter afforded new evidence. The interested reader will be amused to find that this letter is precisely the evidence I had quoted in the Debate, for it was published forty years ago.

No one professes to have seen Home carried from window to window. Home told the three men who were present that he was going to be wafted, and he thus set up a state of very nervous expectation. Sir W. Barrett, who tells us that "nothing was said beforehand of what they might expect to see," says precisely the opposite of the truth. Both Lord Crawford and Lord Adare say that they were warned. Then Lord Crawford says that he saw the shadow on the wall of Home entering the room horizontally; and as the moon, by whose light he professes to have seen the shadow, was at the most

only three days old, his testimony is absolutely worthless. Lord Adare claims only that he saw Home, in the dark, "standing upright outside our window." [7] In the dark—it was an almost moonless December night—one could not, as a matter of fact, say very positively whether Home was outside or inside; but, in any case, he acknowledges that there was a nineteen-inch window-sill outside the window, and Home could stand on that.

So there is not only not a shred of evidence that Home went from one window to another, but the whole story suggests trickery. Home told them what to expect, and he pretended, in the dark, that he was a "spirit" whispering this to them. He noisily opened the window in the next room. He came into their room, from the window-sill, laughing and saying (in spite of the historic solemnity of the occasion!) that it would be funny if a policeman had seen him in the air. When Lord Adare went into the next room, and politely doubted if Home could have gone out by so small an aperture, Home told him to stand some distance back, and then swung himself out in a jaunty fashion, as a gymnast would. In fine, it is well to remember that this was the same D. D. Home who had defrauded a widow of £33,000, and had been, in the previous year (1868), branded in a London court as a fraud and an adventurer.

After this we need not linger long over the other "levitations" of Home, or allow ourselves to be intimidated by the bluster of Sir A. C. Doyle and Sir W. Barrett. Sir Arthur tells us that "there are altogether on record some fifty or sixty cases of levitation on the part of Home"; that "Professor Crookes saw Home levitated twice"; and that "as he floated round the room he wrote his name above the pictures." It is a pity that Sir A. C. Doyle does not tell people that Home did all these wonderful things in the dark, and that in most cases the people present merely had Home's word for it that he was "floating round the room." The whole evidence for these things has been demolished so effectually by Mr. Podmore in his *Newer Spiritualism* (chs. i and ii) that I need say little here.

No reliable witness, giving us a precise account of the circumstances, has ever claimed that he saw Home off the ground and clear of all furniture. Sir W. Crookes says that he saw Home, in poor light, rise six inches for a space of ten seconds. It is a poor instalment of miracle; but I am obliged to add

that Crookes was at the other side of the room, and he confesses that he did not see Home's feet leave the ground! Crookes says that on one occasion he was allowed to pass his hands under Home's feet; but he tells this wonderful exploit twenty-three years after the event (in 1894), and he does not give precise indications where the hands were when he examined the feet. Mr. John Jones saw Home rise in 1861; but he does not say that he saw Home's hands, and he admits that his muscles were so taut that he calls them "cataleptic." It is equally true that Home wrote his name above the pictures; but no one had examined the spots before the séance, and no one could see if he stood on anything to reach them during the séance, as it was pitch dark. The only apparently good case is an occasion when a sitter says that, in the dark, he saw Home's figure *completely* cross the rather lighter space of the window, feet first, and then cross it again head first. But it happens that on this occasion there are two witnesses, and the less rhetorical of the two expressly says that the shadow on the blind was at first only "the feet and part of the legs," and then (after Home had *announced* that the spirits were turning him round) only "the head and face." Any gymnast could do that. The whole of these recorded miracles reek with evidence of charlatanry. The lights were always put out, and Home in nearly all cases *said* that he was rising, and then *told* them that he was floating about various parts of the room.

Still worse is the evidence for Home's occasional "elongation." The picture of Sir W. Crookes gravely measuring the height of this brazen impostor, as he alternately draws himself in and stretches out, is as pathetic as the picture of him standing with a bottle of phosphorus in a bedroom at Hackney while two girls make a fool of him. It is just as pathetic that men like Sir A. C. Doyle and Sir W. Barrett assure the public that they believe these things, when they have, apparently, not examined the evidence. To believe that in the course of a few seconds certain spiritual powers, who cannot unravel for us the smallest scientific problem, can so alter that marvellous world of cells and tissues which make up a man's body as to make him even six inches taller, is to believe in a miracle beside which the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea is child's play. Yet distinguished men of science and medical men assure the public that they believe this, and believe it on evidence that has been riddled over and over again.

It was a still earlier fraud, Gordon, who began this trick of mounting furniture in the dark and saying that the spirits bore him up; but the "evidence" is not worth glancing at. One might as well ask us to examine seriously the evidence for the "elongation" of Herne, Peters, Morse, and all the other impostors of the time, or for the spiritual transit of Mrs. Guppy and Dr. Monck. Let us rather see what sort of evidence is furnished in recent times.

It appears that the spirits no longer levitate the mediums themselves. Although the power is said to be developing as time goes on, the age of these impressive floatings round pitch-dark rooms is over. The only instance I have read in the last twenty years is that of Ofelia Corralès, of Costa Rica, who unfortunately fell off the stool she was standing on. We have now to be content with the levitation of tables and the dragging of furniture towards the medium.

Again let us, in order not to waste time, address ourselves at once to the classical case of Eusapia Palladino. Your common or garden medium, with his uncritical audience, has a dozen ways of tilting and lifting tables and pulling furniture about the room. To press on with the hands or thumbs (with four fingers "above the table" to edify the audience) and lift with the knees is easy. The same thing can be done by pressure against the inside of the legs of the table. The foot is still more useful, for the table is generally light. A confederate is even more useful. The more artistic medium wears a ring with a slot in it, and has a strong pin in the table. While his hands seem to be spread out above the table, he catches the head of the pin in the slot of his ring, and—the miracle occurs. Other mediums have leather cuffs inside their sleeves, with a dark piece of iron or a hook projecting to catch the edge of the table.

But we will take Palladino, who was examined by scores of scientific men, many of whom to this day believe that at least a large part of her "phenomena" were genuine. The average man hesitates immediately when he hears that *everybody* admits that part of her performances were fraudulent. She was a "grey" medium, Sir A. C. Doyle says. But he, and so many others, assure you at once that this is quite natural. She had real mediumistic powers; but these decay after a time, while the public still clamours for miracles, and the poor medium is strongly tempted to cheat. I

have already said that Sir Arthur is here even more inaccurate than he usually is. He says that she was "quite honest" for the first fifteen years, as any person who studies her record will admit. Let us briefly study it.

Eusapia Palladino was an Italian working girl, an orphan, who married a small shopkeeper of Naples. She remained throughout life almost entirely illiterate, but she came in time to earn "exorbitant fees" (Lombroso's daughter says) by her séances. She had begun to dabble in Spiritualism, and lift tables, at the age of thirteen, but she did little and was quite obscure until 1888, when Professor Chiaia, of Naples, took her up. He challenged Lombroso to study her, and in 1892 a group of Italian professors investigated her powers at Naples. That is the beginning of her public career, and her performances varied little. She sat with her back to the cabinet—unlike other mediums, she sat outside it—and her chief trick was to lift off the ground the light table in front of her while the professors controlled her hands and feet. It was the ghost of "John King" who did these things, she said; and we remember "John King" as a classic ghost of the early fraudulent mediums. He rapped on the table and raised it off the floor; he dragged furniture towards the medium, especially out of the cabinet behind her; he flung musical instruments on the table, and prodded and pulled the hair of the sitters; he made impressions of hands and faces in plaster; and he even brought very faint ghosts into the room at times.

Lombroso and other professors regarded these things as genuine or due to an abnormal power of the medium (not to ghosts). In the end of his life, in fact, Lombroso announced that he had come to believe in the immortality of the mind, though he still regarded this as material. His daughter, Gina Ferrero, tells us that at this time he was a physical wreck, and his mental vitality was very low.^[8] However, the professors of 1892 said that they did not detect fraud. The reader of their report may think otherwise. They put Eusapia, for instance, on a scale, and "John King" took seventeen pounds off her weight. Any person can perform that miracle by getting his toe to the floor while he is on the weighing machine; and the professors gravely note that, whenever they prevented Eusapia's dress from touching the floor, she could not reduce her weight! They note also that she cannot raise the table unless her dress is allowed to touch it.

In the same year, 1892, Flammarion invited her to Paris. He says frankly that he caught her cheating more than once. One of her miracles was to depress the scale of a letter-balance by placing her hands on either side of it, at some distance from it. Flammarion found that she used a hair, stretched from hand to hand. His colleague, the astronomer Antoniadi, who was called in, said that it was "fraud from beginning to end."

In 1894 Professor Richet, assisted by Mr. Myers and Sir O. Lodge, examined her at Richet's house, and found no fraud. But Dr. Hodgson insisted that she released her hands and feet from control and used them, and Myers invited her to Cambridge in 1895. The result is well known. In great disgust they reported that she cheated throughout, and that not a single phenomenon could be regarded as genuine. This was, on the most generous estimate, seven years after the beginning of her public career; and Myers, the most conscientious and respected of English Spiritualists, reported that she must have had "long practice" in fraud. Yet Sir A. C. Doyle tells the public that she was "quite honest" for the first fifteen years.

Her admirers were angry, and they continued to guarantee her genuineness. She became the most famous and most prosperous medium in the world. In 1897 and 1898 she was again in France, and Flammarion detected her in fraud after fraud. She released her hands and feet constantly from control. From 1905 to 1907 she was rigorously examined by the General Psychological Institute of Paris. They reported constant trickery and evasion of tests. Sitters were not allowed to put a foot *on* her right foot because she had a painful corn on it. One of her hands must not be *clasped* by the control because she was acutely sensitive to pain in that hand. She will not allow a man to stand near and do nothing but watch her. She wriggles and squirms all the time, and releases her hands and feet. She learns that, in a photograph they have taken of one high "levitation" of a stool, it is plainly seen to be resting on her head, so she allows no more photographs of this. And so on. Professor G. le Bon got her at his house for a private sitting in 1906. He was able to instal an illumination behind her of which she knew nothing, and he plainly caught her releasing and using her hand.

In 1910 the Americans tried her. At one sitting Professor Münsterberg was carefully controlling her left foot, as he thought, when the table in the cabinet behind her began to move. But one man had stealthily crept into the

cabinet under cover of the dark, and he seized something. Eusapia shrieked—it was her left foot!^[9] Then the professors of Columbia University took Eusapia in hand, and finished her. They had special apparatus ready for use, but they never used it. In a few sittings they discovered that she was an habitual cheat, and they abandoned the inquiry in disgust.

These are the main points in Eusapia's official record. They suffice to damn her. She cheated from the start to the finish. Her moans and groans and wriggles habitually enabled her to release her hands and feet from the men who were supposed to control them. Nothing is more notorious in her career than that. She pretended that "John King" did everything, yet she used constantly to announce that "some very fine phenomena would be seen to-night." She pretended to be in a trance, yet she habitually called out "E fatto" ("It's done") when something had been accomplished, in the dark, two feet away from her. She was alive to every suspicious movement of the sitters, and controlled the light and the photographers. The impressions of faces which she got in wax or putty were always *her* face. I have seen many of them. The strong bones of her face impress deep. Her nose is relatively flattened by the pressure. The hair on the temples is plain. It is outrageous for scientific men to think that either "John King" or an abnormal power of the medium *made* a human face (in a few minutes) with bones and muscles and hair, and precisely the same bones and muscles and hair as those of Eusapia. I have seen dozens of photographs of her levitating a table. On not a single one are her person and dress entirely clear of the table. In fine, at every single sitting, from beginning to end, the observers were distracted by the "ghost." They were prodded and pinched and pushed, and their hair and whiskers were pulled. It seems a pity that they did not refuse to continue unless "John King" desisted from this frivolity. It was Eusapia spoiling their vigilance.

Believers in Eusapia would point to some dozens of things in her record that these professors, and even conjurers like Carrington, could not explain. I am quite content to leave them unexplained. We are under no obligation to explain them or else accept Spiritualism. There is, as Schiaparelli said, a third alternative: agnosticism. If the majority of Eusapia's tricks were at one time or other seen to be done by fraud, the presumption is that the rest were fraud. There are scientific men who seem to lose their common sense in these inquiries. You might put a conjurer before them in broad daylight, and

they will not see how he does a single one of his tricks. But when, in a bad light, a lady conjurer or medium does something which they cannot explain they appeal to abnormal powers or ghosts. It is neither science nor common sense.

Towards the close of Eusapia's career another powerful Italian peasant-woman, Lucia Sordi, began to interest the professors. She outdid Eusapia in some matters. While she sat bound with cords in the cabinet, a decanter of wine was lifted from the table, and a glass put to the lips of each sitter. She was eventually exposed, and I will not linger on her. She could get out of any bonds; and she had two confederates always, in the shape of her young daughters.

Most recent of all are the phenomena of the "Goligher circle" of Belfast. A teacher of mechanics, Mr. Crawford, has greatly strengthened the faith by recording their wonderful exploits in his *Reality of Psychic Phenomena* (1916) and *Experiments in Psychical Science* (1919). Sir A. C. Doyle is enthusiastic about them, as is his wont. Even Sir W. Barrett tells us that "it is difficult to believe how the cleverest conjurer, with elaborate apparatus, could have performed" what he witnessed. Decidedly, here is something serious. Yet I intend to dismiss it very briefly. The "circle" consists of seven members of the Goligher family, and they are all mediums. In other words, there were fourteen hands and fourteen feet to be watched, in a red light (the worst in the world for the eye), and this young teacher of science flatters himself that he controlled them all, and meantime attended to a lot of scales and other apparatus. We are asked to believe this after four or five professors repeatedly failed to control the hands and feet of one woman (Eusapia). Moreover, they were permitted to *hold* Eusapia's hands and feet, but Crawford was not permitted to touch the feet of his medium. He gives no photographs, except of his superfluous scales and tables. The Goligher family, he says, were most anxious to have photographs taken, but the "spirits" said it would injure the medium.

When Sir W. Barrett tells the public that "the cleverest conjurer, with elaborate apparatus," could not do these things, he talks nonsense of which he ought to be ashamed. There is nothing in the two books that requires any apparatus at all, or anything more than practice. Raps were common. They have been since 1848. Mr. Crawford talks of "sledgehammer blows" and

"thunderous noises." As the mediums were never searched, the raps may have been exceptionally loud, but Mr. Crawford naïvely gives one detail which puts us on our guard. He one night brought a particularly sensitive phonograph. The noises that night were "terrific," he says. He took the record to the offices of *Light*, and the editor of that journal can do no more than say that the noises were "clearly audible" (p. 32). So, when Mr. Crawford tells us of strong men being unable to press down the levitated table, we will take a pinch of salt.

The "table" (really a light stool) usually lifted weighed two pounds. Sir A. C. Doyle assured his audience that this was lifted as high as the ceiling. On the contrary, Mr. Crawford expressly says that it never rose more than four feet; which is, I find by "scientific" experiment, the height to which a young lady, sitting on a chair, could raise such a stool on her foot. A most remarkable coincidence. It is a further remarkable coincidence that the young lady's weight increased, when an object was levitated, by just the weight of that object, less about two ounces which some other person took over (a steadying finger, for instance). It is an even more remarkable coincidence that, when Mr. Crawford asked for an impression of the ghostly machinery which made the raps, the mark he got on paper was "something of an oval shape, about two square inches in area" (p. 192); which is singularly like a young lady's heel. Similarly, when he asked for an impression in a saucer of putty, the mark he describes—and carefully omits to photograph for us—is precisely the mark of a young lady's big toe with a threaded material on it. It is further curious that this remarkable psychic power, which can lift a ten-pound table, could not lift a *white* handkerchief a fraction of an inch; which prompts the painful reflection that a dark foot might be visible if it touched a white handkerchief.

Mr. Crawford's books are really too naive. He asked Kathleen, by way of control experiment, to show him if she *could* raise the stool on her foot; and he asks us to believe that her very obvious wriggles and straining prove that this was not the usual lifting force. He puts her on a scale, and asks the "ghosts" to take a large amount of matter out of her body. He is profoundly impressed when her weight decreases by 54½ pounds; and he asks us to believe that ghosts have taken 54½ pounds of flesh and fat out of the fair Kathleen and "laid it on the floor." A simpler hypothesis is that she got her toe to the floor, as Eusapia did. Mr. Crawford ought to leave ghosts for a

while, and take a course of human anatomy and physiology. His mechanical knowledge enables him to sketch a diagram of a "cantilever," constructed out of the medium's body, and reaching from it to the centre of the table, a distance of eighteen inches, or the length of Kathleen's leg from knee to foot. But how in the name of all that is reasonable this cantilever is worked from the body end, without wrenching the young lady's "innards" out of joint, passes the subtlest imagination. The "spirits" were consulted as to the way they did it. By a final peculiar coincidence it transpired that they knew just as much about science as Kathleen Goligher; and that was nothing.

This is a very long chapter, but the phenomena it had to discuss are the most serious in Spiritualist literature, and I was eager to omit nothing which is deemed important. Let me close it with a short account of an historical occurrence, which is at the same time a parable. We are often told that the medium was "physically incapable" of doing this or the other. Here is an interesting illustration of human possibilities.

In 1846 all Paris was busy discussing "the electric girl." Little Angélique Cottin, a village child of thirteen summers, a very quiet and guileless-looking maid, exuded the "electric fluid" (ghosts were not yet in fashion) in such abundance that the furniture almost danced about the room. When she rose from her chair it flew back, even if a man held it, and was often smashed. A heavy dining-table went over at a touch from her dress. A chair held by "several strong men" was pushed back when she sat on it. The Paris Academy of Sciences examined her, and could make nothing of her. The chairs she rose from were sent crashing against the wall, and broken. But one night, when the crowd gathered about her to see the marvels, a wicked old sceptic watched her closely from a distance. Only that afternoon a heavy dining-table, with its load of dishes, had gone over. The child saw the sceptic's eye, yet wanted to entertain the crowd. There was a struggle of patience between sceptic and child for *two hours*, and at last age won. He saw her move, and demanded an examination; and they found the bruise on her leg caused by knocking over the heavy table. It was all over. She had developed a marvellous way of using the muscles of her legs and buttocks instantaneously and imperceptibly. This was, says Flammarion, "the end of this sad story in which so many people had been duped by a poor idiot." He is wrong on two points. The child was by no means an idiot; and this was

only the beginning, not the end. We do well to remember what this child of thirteen could do.[\[10\]](#)

FOOTNOTES:

[\[7\]](#) The account which he gives in the *Dispatch* (March 21, 1920) is precisely the same as his account (which I quoted verbatim in the Debate) in his *Experience of Spiritualism with D. D. Home*, pp. 82-3.

[\[8\]](#) *Cesare Lombroso* (1915), p. 416. Much is suppressed in the English translation of his book.

[\[9\]](#) Mr. Hereward Carrington, who believes in the genuineness of Eusapia's powers, makes light of this. He misses the main point. In the minutes of the sitting, which he gives, it is expressly stated by the controllers at this point that they have both Eusapia's hands and feet secure. So we cannot trust such minutes when they say that the control was perfect.

[\[10\]](#) Flammarion, *Les forces naturelles inconnues*, pp. 299-310.

CHAPTER IV

SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS AND SPIRIT PICTURES

Before me, as I write, are two spirit photographs which have gone at least part of the round of the Press, and confirmed the consoling belief in thousands of hearts. One is a photograph of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and behind him, peeping over his shoulder, is a strange form which has, he says, "a general but not very exact resemblance to my son." The other photograph is supplied by the Rev. W. Wynne. It bears the ghostly faces of Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone, with whom Mr. Wynne had been acquainted; and the text says that the plate was exposed for Mr. and Mrs. Wynne and received these ghostly imprints. Both these photographs came from "the Crewe Spiritual Circle," which has done so much in recent years to strengthen the faith.

Let me first make a few general remarks on spirit photography. Everybody to-day has an elementary idea what taking a photograph means. A chemical mixture, rich in certain compounds of silver, is spread as a film over the glass plate which you buy at the stores. The rays of light—chiefly the ultra-violet or "actinic" rays—which come from the sun (or the electric lamp) are reflected by a body upon this plate, through the lenses of the camera, and form a picture of that body by fixing the chemicals on the plate. The lens is essential in order to concentrate the rays and give an image, instead of a mere flood of light. The object which reflects the light—whether it be the ordinary light or the actinic rays—must be material. Ether does not reflect light, for light is a movement of ether.

Spiritualists have such vague ideas as to what can and cannot happen that they overlook these elementary details altogether. Sometimes they ask us to believe that a medium can get the head of a ghost on a plate, without a camera, by merely placing his or her hand on the packet containing the plate. Even if there were a materialized spirit present, it could make no *image* on the plate unless the rays were properly concentrated through lenses. But the whole idea of spirits hovering about and making images on

photographic plates because a man called a medium puts his hand on the camera is preposterous. That would be magic with a vengeance! Even if we suppose that the spirits have material bodies—ether bodies would not do—which reflect only the actinic rays, and so are not visible to the eye, the idea remains as absurd as ever. To say that the invisible material body of Mr. Gladstone (if anybody is inclined to believe in such a thing) only reflects the rays into the camera at Crewe when Mr. Hope and Mrs. Buxton, the mediums, put their hands on the camera, and do not reflect light at all unless these mediums touch the camera, is to utter an obvious absurdity. The ghosts are either material or they are not.

We must look for a simpler explanation. Now, when we examine Sir A. C. Doyle's spirit photograph, we find at once that the candour of that earnest and conscientious Spiritualist gives us a clue. He tells us how he bought the plate, examined the camera, and exposed and developed the plate with his own hands. "No hands but mine ever touched the plate," he says impressively. We shall see presently that that need not impress us in the least. What is important is that Sir Arthur adds: "On examining with a powerful lens the face of the 'extra' I have found such a marking as is produced in newspaper process work." Very few of the general public would understand the significance of this, but I advise the reader to take an illustrated book or journal and examine a photograph in it with a lens (which need not be powerful). He will see at once that the figure consists of a multitude of dots, and wherever you find an illustration showing these dots it has been at some time printed in a book or paper. During a lantern lecture, for instance, you can tell, by the presence or absence of these dots, whether a slide has been reproduced from an illustration or made direct from the photographic negative.

Sir A. C. Doyle is candid, but his Spiritualist zeal outruns his reason. He goes on to say:—

It is *very possible* that the picture ... was conveyed on to the plate from some existing picture. However that may be, it was most certainly supernatural, and not due to any manipulation or fraud.

This is an amazing conclusion. It is not merely "possible," but certain, that the photo, which he says resembles his son, had been *printed* somewhere

before it got on to his plate. The marks are infallible. It is further practically certain that, when the son of so distinguished a novelist died on active service, his photograph would appear in the Press. It is equally certain that mediums, knowing well that Sir Arthur and Lady Doyle would presently seek to get into touch with their dead son, would treasure that photograph. When I add that, as I will explain presently, there is no need at all for the spirit photographer to touch the plate, the reader may judge for himself how much "supernormal" there is about the matter.

Let us glance next at the Gladstone ghost. We are not told if it showed process marks, but, of course, they need not always be looked for. It might be taken direct from a photograph in the case of so well known a couple as the Gladstones. But here again there is a significant weakness. When you turn the photograph upside down, you discover that the photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Wynne are on the lower half of the plate, and inverted! You have to come to this remarkable conclusion, if you follow the Spiritualist theory, that either the highly respectable Mr. and Mrs. Wynne or the perfectly puritanical Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone were *standing on their heads!* For my part, I decline to believe that Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone have taken to such frivolity in the spirit land. I prefer to think that the spirit photographer has bungled.

But how could it be done if the plate was never in the hands of the photographer? In the early days of Spiritualism faking was easy. You put on an air of piety, and your sitter implicitly trusted you. It was then quite easy to make a ghost, as every photographer knows. Expose a plate for half the required time to a young lady dressed as a ghost, then put the plate away in the dark until a sitter comes and give it a *full* exposure with him. He is delighted, when the plate is developed, to find a charming lady spirit, of ghostly consistency, beaming upon him. Double development, or skilful manipulation of the plate in the dark room, will give the same result.

This is how the trick was done in the sixties and seventies. A London photographer, Hudson, made large sums by this kind of trickery. It was easily exposed—any person who has dabbled in photography knows it—and often the furniture or carpet behind the ghost could be seen through it.

At last there was a very bad exposure which for a time almost suspended the trade. At Paris there was a particularly gifted photographer medium named Buguet. Not only were his ghosts very artistic, but Spiritualists were able to identify their dead relatives on the photographs. Buguet came to London and did a roaring trade. But early in 1875 the police of Paris carried Buguet off to prison and searched his premises. They found a headless doll or lay figure, and a large variety of heads to fit it. At first Buguet had had confederates who used to creep quietly behind the sitter and impersonate the ghost. Then he used to take a half-exposure photograph of his doll, and so dispense with confederates. He had a very smart clerk at the door who used, in collecting your twenty francs, to get from you a little information about the dead relative you wanted to see. Then Buguet rigged up and dressed a more or less appropriate doll, gave it a half-exposure, and brought the same plate to use for his sitter.

One feature of the trial of Buguet should be carefully borne in mind. Spiritualists are very fond of assuring us that the spirit voice or message or photograph they obtained from a medium was "perfectly recognizable." They scout any suggestion that they could be mistaken. Do they not know the features of their dead son or daughter or wife? During the trial of Buguet scores of these Spiritualists entered the witness-box and swore that they had received exact likenesses of their dead relatives. But Buguet, hoping to get a lighter sentence, confessed that the same group of heads had served every purpose, and the witnesses in his favour were all wrong![\[11\]](#)

Buguet got a year in prison, and for a time trade was poor. But new methods were invented, and spirit photographers are again at work all over the world, and have been for decades. In country places the old method may still be followed. Generally, however, the sitter brings his or her own plate, and is then supposed to be secured against fraud. The next development was easy enough. A prepared plate was substituted for the plate you brought. This trick in turn was discovered, and sitters began to make secret marks on the plates they brought, in order to identify them afterwards. Then the machinery of the ghost was rigged up in the camera itself, and you might bring your own plate and mark it unmistakably with a diamond, if you liked. The ghost appeared on it when it was developed.

There were several ways of doing this. The first was to cut out the figure of the ghost in celluloid or some other almost transparent material and attach it to the lens. When this trick leaked out, a very tiny figure of the ghost, hidden in the camera, was projected through a magnifying glass (a kind of small magic-lantern) on to the plate when it was exposed in the camera. As time went on, sitters began to insist on examining the camera, and these tricks were apt to be discovered. I remember an honest and critical Spiritualist telling me, about ten years ago, that he offered a certain spirit-photographer (who is still at work) five pounds for a spirit-photograph, if the sitter were permitted to see every step of the process. The photographer agreed; but when my friend wanted to examine the camera he at first bluffed, and then returned the money, saying that that was carrying scepticism too far! He had the ghost in his camera.

Your modern Spiritualist friend smiles when you tell him of these tricks. They are prehistoric. To-day you are allowed to examine the camera, bring your own plate, expose it and develop it yourself. The logic of the Spiritualist is here just as defective as ever. Because he has not on this occasion discovered certain forms of trickery which are now well known, he concludes that there was *no* trickery. As if trickery did not evolve like anything else! Spiritualists were just as certain twenty years ago that there was no possibility of fraud because they brought their own marked plates; but they were cheated every time.

There are still several ways of making the ghost. Where the sitter is careless, or an enthusiastic Spiritualist, the old tricks (substitution of plates, etc.) are used; but there are new tricks to meet the critical. The ghost may be painted in sulphate of quinine or other chemicals on the ground-glass screen. Such a figure is invisible when it is dry. There may be a trick dark-slide, with a plate which will appear in front of yours. If the photographer develops it for you, he can skilfully get a ghost on it by holding another plate against yours (pretending to see how it is developing) in the yellow light. If you develop it yourself, you use *his* dish, which is often an ingenious mechanism. It has glass sides or a glass bottom, and, while the whole thing is covered up during development, secret lights impress the ghost on it. An actual case of this sort was exposed in *Pearson's Weekly* on January 31, 1920.

When the Spiritualist airily assures us that he has guarded against all these things (some of which could not be seen at all) we have to remember that Spiritualist literature teems with cases in which, we are told, "all precautions against fraud were taken," yet sooner or later the fraud is discovered. But the possibilities are not yet exhausted. I once saw a remarkable photograph which Sir Robert Ball had taken of the famous old ship, the *Great Eastern*. Along the side of it, in enormous letters, was the name "Lewis"; yet this name was totally invisible to the naked eye when one looked at the ship. A coat of paint had been put over the name—the ship had been used by Lewis's as an advertisement—and concealed it from the eye, yet the sensitive plate registered it. No scrutiny of the camera or the studio or the dark room would reveal conjuring of that sort. In fine, there is the possibility of some compound of radium, or radio-paint, being used at one or other stage in the process.

No sensible man will pay serious attention to spirit photographs until one is taken in these conditions; neither plates nor any single part of the apparatus shall belong to or be touched by the medium. The spirit photographer shall be brought to an unknown studio, and shall not be allowed to do more than, under the eye of an expert observer, lay his hand, at a sufficient distance from the lens, on the outside of a camera which does not belong to him. That has not been done yet. Until it is done fraud is certainly not excluded; and any man who uses the medium's own premises and apparatus is courting deception.

That the ghost on a photograph often resembles a dead relative of the sitter will surprise no sensible person. It is well known that mediums collect such photographs, as well as information about the dead. Mr. Carrington describes in his *Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism* the elaborate system they have. They have considerable knowledge of likely sitters in their own town. In fact, I have clearly enough traced in some cases that they *first* gathered information about a man, and *then* got an intermediary to persuade him to visit them. He, of course, tells everybody afterwards that the medium "could not possibly" know anything about him. Sometimes a Spiritualist takes the precaution of going to a spirit photographer in a distant town. If he is quite able to conceal his identity, he will get nothing, or only a common or garden ghost. But he makes an appointment for a sitting in a few days to try again, and gives his name and address; and the next mail takes a letter to

a medium in his town asking for information and photographs. As I have previously said, when the Berlin police arrested Frau Abend and her husband they found an encyclopædic mass of information about possible sitters.

A case, with which I may conclude this section, is given by Dr. Tuckett in his *Evidence for the Supernatural* (pp. 52-3). Mr. Stead was once delighted to find the ghost of a "brother Boer" on a photograph, and the clairvoyant photographer mystically informed him that he "got" the name "Piet Botha," and gathered that he had been shot in the Boer War. Mr. Stead was jubilant, and the Materialist was nowhere, when he learned that Piet Botha *had* been shot in the war. Who in England knew anything about Piet Botha and his death? But the wicked sceptic got to work, and he presently discovered that on November 9, 1899, the *Graphic* had reproduced a photograph of Piet Botha, who had been shot in the war! A magnificent case fell completely to pieces.

Spirit-drawings and paintings have drawn out just the same ingenuity on the part of the mediums. A favourite and impressive form is to let the sitter choose a blank card and see that it *is* blank. Then the medium tears off the corner and hands it to the sitter, so that he will recognize his own card at the close. The lights are completely extinguished, the card is laid on the table, and when the gas is re-lit a very fair picture (still wet) in oil is found to have been painted on the card. David Duguid persuaded thousands of people of this marvel in the later decades of the nineteenth century. It was represented that he was merely a cabinet-maker who, in 1866, came under the control of the spirits of certain Dutch painters, and was used by them. I learned long ago in Scotland that the statement that he had never practised drawing or painting was untrue. It is, in any case, probable that he had torn the corners off the little paintings he had prepared in advance, and that it was *these* corners which he palmed off on the sitter. In the dark he substituted his painting for the blank card, and the corner naturally fitted. The fact that the paint was "still wet" need impress nobody. A touch of varnish easily gives that impression.

Innumerable tricks have been invented by American mediums for fooling the Spiritualist public in this respect, and in many cases it taxes the ingenuity of an expert conjurer to find out where the fraud lay. Mr.

Carrington gives a long series of frauds which he has at one time or other studied. One medium offers you an apparently blank sheet of paper, and, although nothing more suspicious than laying it under an innocent-looking blotting-pad can be seen, and there is certainly no substitution, a photograph appears on it while you wait. If you happen to be one of those people whom the medium had had in mind as a possible sitter, or whom he (through an intermediary) induced to come to him, it may be a photograph of your dead son. The photograph was there, invisible, all the time. It had been taken on a special paper (solio paper), and bleached out with bi-chloride of mercury. The blotting-pad was wet with a solution of hypo, and this suffices to restore the photograph.

In other cases the medium, with solemn air, enters his cabinet and draws the curtain. There is a fantastic theory in the Spiritualist world that this cabinet, or cloth-covered frame (like a Punch and Judy show), prevents the "fluid" or force which the medium generates from spreading about the room and being wasted. Nearly all these convenient theories and regulations come from the spirits through the mediums; that is to say, are imposed by the mediums themselves. The closed cabinet, like charity, covers a multitude of sins. In the case of the spirit-painting it may have a trap-door or other outlet, through which the medium hands the blank canvas to a confederate and receives the previously painted picture.

Another medium shows you a blank canvas, and, *almost* without taking it out of your sight, produces an elegant, and still wet, oil painting on it. The painting was there from the start, of course, but a blank canvas was lightly gummed over it, and all the conjuring the medium had to do was to strip off this blank canvas while your attention was diverted. Mediums know that their sitters are profoundly impressed if the paint is "still wet." I have heard Spiritualists stubbornly maintain that this proves that the painting had only just been done, and done by spirit-power, since no man could do it in so short a time. It is a good illustration of the ease with which they are duped. The picture may have been painted a week or a month before. Rub it with a little poppy oil and you have "wet paint."

Mr. Carrington's *Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, one of the richest manuals of mediumistic trickery, has a number of these picture-frauds. A painting is, when thoroughly dry, covered with a solution of water and zinc-

white. It is then invisible, and you have "a blank canvas." The picture comes out again by merely washing it with a sponge. In other cases a painting is done in certain chemicals which will remain invisible until a weak solution of tincture of iron is applied; and it may be applied to the back of the canvas. The medium, Carrington suggests, begs the sitters to sing "Nearer, my God, to Thee," to drown the noise, while his confederate creeps behind the canvas and sprays it with the solution. The picture dawns before their astonished eyes.

Perhaps the best illustration is one that Carrington gives in his *Personal Experiences*, to which I must send the reader for the full story. Two spinster-mediums of Chicago had a great and profitable reputation for spirit-painted photographs. I take it that their general air of ancient virtue and piety disarmed sitters, who are apt to think that a *fraudulent* medium will betray himself or herself by criminal features. You took a photograph of your dead friend, and asked that the spirits might reproduce it in oils. The medium studied it, and made an appointment with you at a later date. Perhaps the medium then studied it again, and made a further appointment. On the solemn day the medium held a blank canvas up to the window before your eyes, and gradually, first as a dim dawn of colours, then as a precise figure, the picture appeared on the canvas. Carrington suggests that she held up to the window two canvases—a thin blank canvas a few inches in front of the prepared picture. By deftly and slowly bringing these together with her fingers she brought about the illusion; and only a little ordinary sleight of hand was required to get rid of the blank canvas.

These illustrations will suffice to show the reader what subtle and artful trickery is used in this department of Spiritualism. He will know what to think when a Spiritualist friend, who could not detect the simplest conjuring trick, shows him a spirit-photograph and says that he took care there was no fraud. The ordinary members of the Spiritualist movement are as honest as any, but their eagerness—natural as it is—puts them in a frame of mind which is quite unreasonable. The trickery of this class of mediums has been developing for nearly sixty years, and it has to find new forms every few years as the older forms are exposed. The mediums have become expert conjurers and even, in some cases, expert chemists—or they have expert chemists in collusion with them—and it is simply foolish for an ordinary person to think that he can judge if there has been fraud. We must have at

least one elementary safeguard. No part of the apparatus employed must belong to the medium or be manipulated by him; and the photograph must not be taken on his premises. Every Spiritualist who approves a photograph taken under other conditions is courting deception and encouraging fraud.

And instead of finding even the leading Spiritualists setting an example of caution in face of the recognized mass of fraud in their movement, we find them exhibiting a bewildering hastiness and lack of critical faculty. Most readers will remember how Sir A. C. Doyle sent to the *Daily Mail* on December 16, 1919, a photograph of a picture of Christ which had, he said, been "done in a few hours by a lady who has no power of artistic expression when in her normal condition." The picture was, he said, "a masterpiece"; so wonderful, in fact, that "a great painter in Paris" (not named, of course) "fell instantly upon his knees" before such a painting. It was "a supreme example" of a Spiritualist miracle. The sequel is pretty well known. On December 31 the artist's husband wrote a letter to the *Daily Mail*, of which I need quote only one sentence:—

Mrs. Spencer wishes definitely to state once and for all that her pictures are painted in a perfectly normal manner, that she is disgusted at having "psychic power" attributed to her, and that she does not cherish any ludicrous and mawkish sentiments about helping humanity by her paintings.

FOOTNOTE:

[\[11\]](#) I might add that Mrs. Gladstone is not at all recognized by her own son in Mr. Wynne's photograph. The other figure seems to me certainly a reproduction of a photograph or bad picture of Gladstone.

CHAPTER V

A CHAPTER OF GHOSTLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Spiritualism began in 1848 with the humble and entirely fraudulent phenomena of raps. Within three years there were hundreds of mediums in the United States, and a dollar per sitter was the customary fee for assisting at one of the services of the new religion. It soon became widely known that raps could be produced by very earthly means, and in any case the rivalry of mediums was bound to develop new "phenomena." As in all other professions, originality paid; and as the wonderful discovery was quickly made that darkness favoured the intensity and variety of the phenomena, the spirit power began to break upon humanity in a bewildering variety of forms. In this chapter we will examine a number of these accomplishments which our departed fellows have learned on the Elysian fields.

D. D. Home is still the classical exponent of some of these accomplishments. Indeed, there is one of his phenomena which no medium of our time has the courage to reproduce, and, since this phenomenon is expressly endorsed by Sir William Barrett in his recent work, *On the Threshold of the Unseen* (1917), we shall be accused of timidity and unfairness if we omit to consider it. It is said that on several well-authenticated occasions—so Sir W. Barrett assures the public—Home took burning coals in his hands, thrust his hands into the blazing fire, or even put his face among the live coals. What is the evidence which Sir W. Barrett, knowing that the general public has no leisure to investigate these things, endorses as satisfactory?

The reader who has patience enough to consider these extraordinary claims in detail will find the evidence collected and examined in Mr. Podmore's *Newer Spiritualism* (chapters i and ii). It is just as weak and unsatisfactory as the evidence for Home's levitations, which we have already examined. The first witness is a lady, Mrs. Hall, who had the advantage of a profound belief that Home could do anything whatever, and that the idea of fraud was

worse than preposterous in connection with so holy a man. Home's demure expression and constant utterances of piety and virtue, which seem to Mr. Podmore "inconceivably nauseous," made a deep impression on Mrs. Hall and the other ladies whom Home used generally to have next to him when he was performing his wonders. Now, this lady tells us that on July 5, 1869, he took a large live coal from the fire, put it on her husband's head, and drew his white hair over it. He left it there for four or five minutes, and then gave it to Mrs. Hall to hold. She says that it was "still red in parts," but she was not burned.

It would follow that Home was so charged with supernatural power that he could communicate a large measure of it to Mr. Hall's head or Mrs. Hall's hands—a feat unique in the history of Spiritualism. We need not go so far. There is nothing in Mrs. Hall's narrative to prevent us from supposing that Home put some non-conducting substance on her husband's head *before* he put the coal on it. Any person can pick a live coal out of the fire if a part of it (as is common) is *not* alive. Some can go further. I can stick my fingertips in my live pipe without being burned. Some smokers can pick up a small live coal and light their pipes with it. Probably all the coals which Daniel picked from the fire were "dead" in parts. It is clear that this particular coal was not glowing, as Mrs. Hall states that her husband's white hair showed "silvery" against it. If the coal had glowed, the hair would show *black* against it. Probably Home lifted up the hair round, and not on, it; and after five minutes part of it would be cool enough to lay on Mrs. Hall's hand.

Sir William Crookes is the next witness: a great scientist, but—we cannot forget it—the man who was easily duped by a girl of seventeen. He says that he accompanied Home to the fire, and saw him put his hands in it. That is anything but the scientific way to give evidence. We want an exact description of the state of the fire, the light, etc. But notice this next sentence: "He very deliberately pulled the lumps of hot coal off, one at a time, with his right hand, and touched *one* which was bright red." So the "lumps" among which he had put his hands were *not* bright red; and we are left free to suppose that the *one* which he touched was not bright red all over. Home then took out a handkerchief, waved it about in the air, and folded it on his hand. He next took out a coal which was "red in one part" and laid it on the handkerchief without burning it. The story smacks of

charlatanry from beginning to end. Crookes ought at least to have known better than to suppose that a handkerchief "gathered power" by being waved about. It more probably gathered a piece of asbestos from Home's pocket.

The other pretty stories of Home's fire-tricks may be read in Podmore. Juggling with fire is an ancient practice. It is very common among savages. Daniel Home, with his select and private audience, had excellent conditions for doing it. In bad light he did even more wonderful things than those I have quoted; that is to say, if we take the record literally, which we may decline to do. Crookes, like some other investigating professors, was short-sighted. No wonder that Daniel loved him.

Let us pass on to the musical accomplishments of the spirits; and here again the gifted Daniel was one of the pioneer mediums. He induced the spirits to play an accordion while he held it with one hand; and his hand held it by the end farthest removed from the keys. Unfortunately, the spirits laid down the condition that he must hold it out of sight, underneath the table, and our interest is damped. We know something from other mediums of the ways of doing this. While you are putting the accordion under the table you change your hand from the back end to the key end of the accordion. Then you can get the bellows to play by pushing it against something or using a hook at the end of a strong thread or catgut. It is well to remember that Home was a good musician. Possibly he played a mouth-organ while the professor was looking intently at the accordion.

But Home was put to a severe test, we are told. Sir W. Crookes made a cage (like a waste-paper basket) to go under the table, and Home was told to let the accordion hang in this. He could certainly not now use his second hand or his feet, yet it "played." But, as Mr. Podmore, most ingenious of critics, points out, no one saw the *keys* move. The music may have come from a musical box in Home's pocket, or placed by him on the floor. The degree of light or darkness is not stated. The opening and shutting of the accordion could be done by hooks, or loops of black silk. So with the crowning miracle, when Home withdrew his hand, and the accordion was seen suspended in the air, moving about in the cage (under the dark table). It was probably hooked on to the table.

Before we pass on to other ghostly musicians, let us notice another feat of Home's which Sir William Crookes records here. He placed a board with one end on the table and the other on a spring balance. It was so shaped (with feet at each end) that an enormous pressure would have to be exerted on it at the table-end if the balance were to be appreciably altered. Yet a light touch of Home's fingers caused the scale to register six pounds. Podmore points out that this experiment had been gradually reached. Home knew the conditions, and had made his preparations. The light was poor, and a loop of strong silk thread at the far end of the board, pulled from some part of his person, would not be noticed. We shall see far more remarkable feats than this.

A pretty variation of musical mediumship was next introduced by Mrs. Annie Eva Fay, another American fraud with whom Sir W. Crookes made solemn scientific experiments. Florrie Cook was a chicken in comparison with Annie Fay, and she triumphantly passed all the professor's tests. She came to London in 1874, and everybody soon went to see and hear the "fascinating American blonde" at the Hanover Square Rooms.

Mrs. Fay's most characteristic séance was when she sat in the middle of a circle of sitters, a bell and a guitar beside her. Her husband, "Colonel" Fay, was in the circle, but, as they held each other's hands, it was presumed that he could do nothing to help her if he wished. Mrs. Fay then began to clap her hands. The lights were extinguished, and, although Mrs. Fay continued to clap her hands loudly, so that you could be sure she was not using them, the bell was rung, the tambourine played, the sitters' beards were pulled, and so on. This was easy. When the gas was put out, Mrs. Fay no longer slapped her left hand against her right, but against her forehead or cheek—perhaps slapped the Colonel's face for a variation—and had the right hand free for business. No doubt the Colonel also released a hand, as we have seen Eusapia Palladino do, and joined the band.

When this trick was realized, Mrs. Fay used to allow herself to be bound with tapes to a stake erected on the stage. A few minutes after the lights were put out the band began its ghostly, but not very impressive, music. Sometimes a pail was put beside her, and it was raised by invisible hands (in the dark) on to her head. When the light was restored Mrs. Fay was discovered still bound to the stake, the knots and seals intact. By an

accident at one of her performances Mr. Podmore was enabled to see how she did it, and the secret has long been known. The tapes supplied had to be fastened in such a way that she could with great speed slip them up her slender arms and get into a working position. Maskelyne also exposed her, and trade fell off so badly that she made him an offer, by letter, to go on his stage and, for payment, show how all the tricks were done. She had by that time converted hundreds to Spiritualism.

There were various other forms of the musical performance. One medium used to sit in sight of the audience with a sitter holding his hands. A cloth was then put over them both, from the neck downward, the lights extinguished, and the usual band began. He had released one hand, by the familiar trick, and reached behind him for the instruments.

The medium, Bastian, also played instruments in the dark. At Arnheim, where he was edifying the Dutch Spiritualists, he was suspected, and it was arranged to ignite some inflammable cotton by an electric current from the next room. The next time a ghostly hand played the guitar above the heads of the sitters, the signal was given, and the flash lit the room. The guitar fell hastily to the table, and Bastian's hand retreated rapidly to its right place. His English Spiritualist admirers accepted his explanation that it was a "materialized" hand that was seen shrinking back into his body. One medium strummed his guitar with a long pencil which he took with his teeth out of his inner coat-pocket and held with his teeth. Others had telescopic rods or "lazy tongs" hidden about them, and used these in the dark.

The binding of mediums with cords or tapes is a "precaution against fraud" which was thoroughly exposed fifty years ago. Many of Sir A. C. Doyle's own admirers were pained when he announced to the world his belief in the genuineness of the performance of two Welsh colliers, the Thomas brothers. Their "manifestations" were prehistoric. More than fifty years ago spectators were invited to tie up the mediums, and as long ago as 1883 Mr. Maskelyne was exhibiting the trick. The Davenport brothers, the latest American marvels, had toured England. Most people will remember how they were held up at Liverpool by some one tying the rope in knots with which they were not familiar. The spirits failed entirely to play the tambourine when the tying-up was properly done, and the instrument was

put out of reach of the medium's mouth. As usual, it had been said for months that fraud was "absolutely excluded."

Later mediums found the solution of this difficulty. The medium kept a sharp knife-blade within reach of his teeth, and, when knots proved too stubborn, he cut the rope and freed himself. He had a spare rope in his clothes and fastened himself—or was bound by a confederate—before the lights went up. People thought that they could prevent this by sealing the knots. It was useless. The medium had chewing gum of the same colour as sealing-wax, and the seals were imitated with this. These desperate shifts are, however, rarely necessary. While he is being tied the medium catches a loop of the rope with his thumb, and this gives him plenty of slack to use. I have seen a medium laced tight into a leather arm-case, and get out behind the curtain in three minutes. He had caught a loop of the lace with his thumb, and the rest was tooth work.

It was therefore little wonder that when the Thomas brothers were brought from the valleys of South Wales to London their ancient miracles would not work. A recent convert to Spiritualism, Mr. S. A. Moseley, describes their work on their native heath (or hearth) with the same awe and simplicity as Sir A. C. Doyle had done. Many of us knew the history of Spiritualism, and smiled. They were brought to London by the *Daily Express* in 1919, and here, where sceptics abounded and the need of convincing evidence was at its most acute, "White Eagle" (the Red Indian spirit who controls Will Thomas) and all his band of merry men were powerless. Will Thomas was properly bound, the tambourine and castanets were put out of reach, and his brother was isolated. All that happened—the throwing of a badge-button and a pair of braces to the audience—is within the range of possibilities of the human mouth.

Let us now turn to another bright and classical page in the history of Spiritualism: the experiments of Professor Zöllner with the medium Slade. Sir A. C. Doyle granted in the Debate, with an air of generosity, that Slade "cheated occasionally," but he insisted that Slade's phenomena in the house of Professor Zöllner were genuine. Now, as long as Sir A. C. Doyle does this kind of thing, as long as he assures his readers that he will not build on any medium who has been convicted of fraud and then builds on such a medium, as long as he tells his readers (who will not check the facts) that a

medium who was exposed over and over again merely "cheated occasionally," it is no use for him to assert that he is trying to purge Spiritualism of fraud. Slade was a cynical impostor from beginning to end of his career.

I will show in the next chapter but one how Slade confessed his habitual fraud as early as 1872, how he was exposed and arrested in London in 1876, and how he was exposed again in Canada in 1882 and in the United States in 1884. A word about the last occasion will suffice for my purpose here. Henry Seybert, a Spiritualist, left a large sum of money to the University of Pennsylvania on the condition that the University authorities would appoint a commission to examine into (among other things) the claims of Spiritualism. They did; and it was the most unlucky inspiration the ghosts of the dead ever conveyed. Very few mediums would face the professors, and those who did were shown to be all frauds. Slade was one of these, and the Pennsylvania professors, wondering how any trained man could be taken in by so palpable a fraud, sent a representative to Leipsic to investigate the experiences of Professor Zöllner and the three other German professors who had endorsed Slade. The gist of his report was that of the four professors one (Zöllner) was in an early stage of insanity (he died shortly afterwards), one (Fechner) was nearly blind, the third (Weber) was seventy-four years old, and the fourth (Scheibner) was very short-sighted, yet did *not* (as Sir A. C. Doyle says) entirely endorse the phenomena!

I have not been able to discover evidence that Zöllner's mind was really deranged, but he certainly approached the inquiry with a theory of a fourth dimension of space, and was most eager to get his theory confirmed by the experiments. The key to the whole situation is, therefore, lack of sharp control. Slade had been conjuring for years, and was an expert in substitution. He had a purblind audience, and he astutely guided the professor until the conditions of the experiment suited him. He knew beforehand, as a rule, what apparatus Zöllner would use, and he duplicated his wooden rings, thongs, etc. An excellent study of his tricks in detail will be found in Carrington's *Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*. Sir A. C. Doyle speaks of the shattering of a screen in Slade's presence as an indisputably superhuman feat. But before the séance no one had thought of looking to see if the screen had been taken to pieces and lightly tied together by a black thread which Slade could pull asunder at will!

Slade was a very bad selection by Sir A. C. Doyle. No prominent medium was ever so frequently exposed as he. In addition to the exposures I have mentioned, Dr. Hyslop, Mrs. Sidgwick, and other leading Spiritualists riddled his pretensions to supernormal power. In the end he took to drink and died in an asylum. Yet Sir A. C. Doyle assures his followers, in his *Vital Message*, that he never builds on a discredited medium.

Let us turn now to Stainton Moses, the snow-white medium. Moses was a neuropathic clergyman who in 1872 left the Church and became a teacher. About the same time he discovered mediumistic powers. He died ultimately of Bright's disease, brought on by drink. His audience, as I said before, consisted only of a few intimate friends who never doubted his saintliness or thought for a moment of fraud. He worked always in the dark, or in a very bad light; and his doings are mainly described by his trustful friend and host, Mrs. Speer. This would dispense any serious student from troubling about his phenomena; but let us see if they throw any light on his character. Mr. Carrington says that the things reported are unbelievable, yet that we cannot think of fraud in connection with Moses. Podmore also tries hard not to accuse him of *conscious* fraud, and hints that he was irresponsible. The reader may choose to think otherwise.

The spirits performed every variety of phenomena through Stainton Moses. Like Home, and only a few of the quite holiest mediums, he was occasionally lifted off the ground; or, which is, of course, the same thing, he said that he was. Raps were common when he was about. Automatic writing of the most elevating (and most inaccurate) description flowed from his pencil. Lights floated about the room; and once or twice he dropped and broke a bottle of phosphorus in the dark. Musical sounds were repeatedly heard, as in the case of the Rev. Dr. Monck, who had a little musical box in his trousers. The sitters were sprayed with scent. The objects on the dressing-table in his room were arranged by invisible hands in the form of a cross. Wonderful messages about recently deceased persons were sent through him; and the details could later be found in the papers. In fine, he was a remarkably good medium for "apports"—that is to say, the bringing into the circle by the spirits of flowers and other objects. Statuettes, jewels, books, and all kinds of things (provided they were in the house and could be secreted about the person) were "apported."

The evidence for these things is particularly poor, but I am a liberal man. I do not doubt them. Each one of them, separately, was done by other mediums. It is the rich variety that characterizes Moses. Let him sleep in peace. The credulity and admiration of his friends seem to have made him lose the last particle of sense of honour in these matters. These things are common elementary conjuring from beginning to end.

Apports are a familiar ghostly accomplishment, and the way they are done is familiar. Mme. Blavatsky was wonderful at apports. Who would ever dream of proposing to search Mme. Blavatsky? And who would now be so simple as to think of spirits when the medium was not searched? The person of Mme. Blavatsky was as sacred from such search as the person of the Rev. Stainton Moses or of the charming and guileless Florrie Cook. Indeed, it is only in recent times that a real search of the medium has been demanded, and the accounts of weird and wonderful objects "apported" under other conditions merit only a smile. Mrs. Guppy, secured from search by her virtue and the esteem of Dr. Russel Wallace, went so far as to apport live eels. Eusapia Palladino one day "apported" a branch of azaleas in Flammarion's house; and he afterwards found an azalea plant, which it exactly fitted, in her bedroom. Another day her spirits showered marguerites on the table; and the marguerites were missed from a pot in the corridor. Anna Rothe, the Princess Karadja's pet medium, was secretly watched, and was caught bringing bouquets from her petticoats and oranges out of her ample bosom; and the spirits did not save her from a year in gaol. She had a whole flower-shop under her skirts when she was seized.

But we will not run over the whole silly chronicle of "apports." Two recent instances will suffice. One is the Turin lady, Linda Gazerra, of whom I have spoken on an earlier page. She was too virtuous to strip, and let down her hair, even in the presence of a lady. So Dr. Imoda, a scientific man who consented to accept her on these terms, was fooled for three years (1908-11). She had live birds caged in the large mass of her hair (natural and artificial), and all sorts of things in her *lingerie*.

About the same time, an Australian medium, Bailey, made a sensational name throughout the Spiritualist world by his "apports." The spirits brought silks from the Indies (until the brutal customs official claimed the tariff), live birds, and all sorts of things. He was taken so seriously in the

Spiritualist world that Professor Reichel, a rich French inquirer, brought him to France for investigation. Sure enough, although he was searched, the spirits brought into the room two little birds "from India." But his long hesitations and evasions had aroused suspicion, and on inquiry it was proved that he had bought the birds, which were quite French, at a local shop in Grenoble. How had he smuggled them into the room? I give the answer (as it is given by Count Rochas, his host) with reluctance, but it is absolutely necessary to know these things if you want to understand some of the more difficult mediumistic performances. The birds were concealed in the unpleasant end of his alimentary canal. Professor Reichel gave him his return fare and urged him to go quickly; and the Australian Spiritualists received him with open arms, and listened sympathetically to his stories of French brutality.

Of "apports," therefore, we say the same as of "materializations." The medium shall be stripped naked, have all his or her body-openings muzzled, be sewn in prepared garments, and placed in a prepared and carefully searched room. When Spiritualists announce the appearance of an eel or a pigeon or a bouquet, or even a copy of *Light*, under those conditions, we will begin to consider the question of apports.

Luminous phenomena "are easily simulated," says Dr. Maxwell. Most people will agree to this candid verdict of so experienced and so sympathetic an investigator. Tons of phosphorus have been used in the service of religion since 1848. It has taken the place of incense. The saintly Moses twice had a nasty mess with his bottle of phosphorus. Herne was one night tracing a pious message in luminous characters (with a damp match) when there was a crackle and flash; the match had "struck." The movement abounds in incidents which are, in a double sense, "luminous."

Certain sulphides may be used instead of phosphorus, and in modern times electricity is an excellent means of producing lights at a distance. Chemicals of the pyrotechnic sort are also useful. One must remember that behind the thousands of mediums, whose fertile brains are constantly elaborating new methods of evading control, are manufacturers and scientific experts who supply them with chemicals and apparatus. One often hears Spiritualists laugh at this suggestion as a wild theory of their

opponents. Any impartial person will acknowledge that it is more probable than improbable. But positive proof has been given over and over again.

Quite recently Mr. Sidney Hamilton described in *Pearson's Weekly* (February 28, 1920) an "illustrated printed catalogue of forty pages" which he had with great difficulty secured. It was the secret catalogue of a firm which supplies apparatus to mediums. The outfit includes "a self-playing guitar," a telescopic aluminium trumpet (for direct voice), magic tables, luminous objects, and even "a fully materialized female form (with face that convinces) ... floats about the room and disappears ... Price £10." For eight shillings this firm supplies the secret how to turn one's vest inside out, without changing coat, while one is bound, and the knots sealed, in the cabinet. For two pounds ten you get an apparatus which will levitate a table so effectively that "two or three persons cannot hold the table down." In short, there is, and has been for decades, a trade supply of apparatus and instructions for producing the whole range of "physical phenomena," and any person who pays serious attention to such things is not very particular whether he is deceived or not.

I may close the chapter with a case of spirit sculpture, which is recorded by Truesdell in his *Bottom Facts of Spiritualism*. By this trick, he says, Mrs. Mary Hardy converted one of those professors whose names adorn the Spiritualist list. A pail of warm water, with several inches of paraffin floating on its surface, was weighed and put under the table. After a time a hand moulded most accurately in wax was found on the floor beside the pail, and it was found that the weight of the contents of the pail had decreased by precisely the weight of the hand. A convincing test, surely! But the professor had forgotten to allow for the evaporation of the warm water. The hand had been made in advance, by moulding the soft paraffin on the medium's hand, and hidden under Mrs. Hardy's skirt. It was transferred by her toes to the floor under the table.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUBTLE ART OF CLAIRVOYANCE

Spiritualists distinguish between physical phenomena and psychic phenomena. The use of this distinction is obvious. When a man reads some such history of the movement as Podmore's, and then the works of Truesdell, Robinson, Maskelyne, Carrington, and others who have time after time exposed the ways of mediums, he is very ill-disposed to listen to stories of materialization, levitation, spirit photographs, spirit messages, spirit music, spirit voices, or anything of the kind. He knows that each single trick has been exposed over and over again. So the liberal Spiritualist urges him to leave out "physical" phenomena and concentrate on the "psychic." It is a word with an aroma of refinement, spirituality, even intellect. It indicates the sort of thing that respectable spirits *ought* to do. So we will turn to the psychic phenomenon of clairvoyance.

Here at once the reader's resolution to approach the subject gravely is disturbed by the recollection of a recent event. Many a reader would, quite apart from the question of consolation, like to find something true in Spiritualism. He may feel, as Professor William James did, that the mass of fraud is so appalling that, for the credit of humanity, we should like to think that it is the citizens of another world, not of ours, who are responsible. He may feel that, if it is all fraud, a number of quite distinguished people occupy a very painful position in modern times. He would like to find at least something serious; something that is reasonably capable of a Spiritualist interpretation. But as soon as he approaches any class of phenomena some startling instance of fraud rises in his memory and tries to prejudice him. In this case it is the "Masked Medium."

A recent case in the law courts has brought this to mind. In 1919, when the *Sunday Express* was making its grave search for ghosts, in order to rebuke the materialism of our age, it offered £500 for a materialization. A gentleman, who (with an eye on the police) genially waived the money offer aside, offered to bring an unknown lady and present a materialization, and some startling feats of clairvoyance in addition. A sitting was arranged,

and the lady, who wore a mask, gave a clairvoyant demonstration that could not be surpassed in all the annals of Spiritualism. Her ghost was rather a failure; though Lady Glenconnor, who has the true Spiritualist temperament, recognized in it an "initial stage of materialization." But the clairvoyance was great. The sitters, while the lady was still out of the room, put various objects connected with the dead (a ring, a stud, a sealed letter, etc.) in a bag. The bag was closed, and was put inside a box; and the lady, who was then introduced, described every object with marvellous accuracy. Sir A. C. Doyle said that the medium gave "a clear proof of clairvoyance." Mr. Gow said that he saw "no normal explanation."

And it was fraud from beginning to end, as everybody now knows. Clairvoyance must be distinguished from prophecy, which Spiritualists sometimes claim. Prediction means the art of seeing things which do not exist, and it is therefore not even mentioned in this book. Clairvoyance means the art of seeing things through a brick wall (or any other opaque covering). Now this was an admirable piece of clairvoyance. Even Spiritualists present were suspicious, because the lady was quite unknown. Yet they could not see any suggestion of fraud or any "normal explanation." Did they turn back upon their earlier experiences of clairvoyance, when the fraud was confessed, and ask if those also may not have been due to trickery? Not in the least. Everything is genuine until it is found out—and, sometimes, even afterwards.

Mr. Selbit, the conjurer who really conducted the performance, is naturally unwilling to give away his secret. He acknowledged immediately after the performance, as Mr. Moseley describes in his *Amazing Séance*, that he had fooled the audience. The masked lady was an actress with no more abnormal power than Sir Oliver Lodge has. Mr. Stuart Cumberland suggested at the time that, when the assistant went to the door to call the medium, he handed the box to a confederate and received a dummy box. He thought that the medium would then have time to study and memorize the contents of the real box (including a sealed letter in dog-German) before she entered the room. From the account, which is not precise enough, I can hardly see how she would have time for this. But Mr. Selbit acknowledged that a dummy box *was* substituted. He says that a person entered the room in the dark, took the box from the table and substituted a dummy, and afterwards impersonated the ghost. This is most important for us. The room

had been searched, and such acute observers as Mr. Stuart Cumberland and Superintendent Thomas, of Scotland Yard, were on the watch; yet a confederate got into the room. After this an ordinary Spiritualist séance is child's play. A long and minute description of the objects in the bag, which must have been spelled letter by letter in parts, on account of the difficult wording of the sealed letter, was in some way telegraphed or communicated to the girl under the eyes of this watchful group. It would be scarcely more marvellous to suppose that Mr. Selbit, after studying the contents of the box, took her place before their faces and they never knew it!

The reader will not fail to see why I have minutely pointed out the features of this recent case. It is, in the first place, an example of "psychic," not "physical," phenomena; and it was conjuring pure and simple. It was, further, "most successful and convincing," as Sir A. C. Doyle pronounced; yet there was not a particle of abnormal power about it. Finally, it was done in the presence of three keen critics, as well as of leading Spiritualists; yet the fraud was not discovered. To invoke the "supernormal," after this, the moment some ordinary individual fails to detect fraud, is surely ludicrous.

Now let me put another warning before the reader. It is notorious that Spiritualists are particularly, even if innocently, apt to mislead in their accounts of their experiences. Unless the experience is recorded on paper at once, it is almost worthless; and even then it is often quite wrong. There is such a thing as "selection" in the human mind. When two people, a Spiritualist and a sceptic, see or read the same thing, their minds may get quite a different impression of it. The mind of the Spiritualist leaps to the features of it which seem to be supernormal, and slurs or ignores or soon forgets the others. The mind of the sceptic does the opposite. You thus get quite inaccurate accounts from Spiritualists, though they are often quite innocent. One once asked me to explain how a medium, two hundred miles from his home, in a place where no one knew him, could tell his name and a good deal about him. By two minutes' cross-examination I got him to admit that he had been working for some weeks in this district and was known to a few fellow-workers. No doubt one of these had given a medium information about him, and then induced him to visit her. These indirect methods are very effective.

A very good example is Sir A. C. Doyle himself. In the debate with me he made statement after statement of the most inaccurate description. He said that Eusapia Palladino was quite honest in the first fifteen years of her mediumship; that he had given me the names of forty Spiritualist professors; that the Fox sisters were at first honest; that I did not give the evidence from his books correctly; that Mr. Lethem got certain detailed information the first time he consulted a medium; that in Mme. Bisson's book you can see ectoplasm pouring from the medium's "nose, eyes, ears, and skin"; that Florrie Cook "never took one penny of money"; that in the Belfast experiment the table rose to the ceiling; and so on. His frame of mind was extraordinary. But I will give a far more extraordinary case which will make the reader very cautious about Spiritualist testimony.

About forty years ago, when the old type of ghost story was not yet quite dead, Myers and Gurney, who were collecting anecdotes of this sort, received a particularly authentic specimen. It was a personal experience of Sir Edmund Hornby, a retired Judge from Shanghai. A few years earlier, he said, he had one night written out his judgment for the following day, but the reporter failed to call for a copy. He went to bed, and some time after one o'clock he was awakened by the reporter, who very solemnly asked him for the copy. With much grumbling Sir Edmund got up and gave him the copy. He remembered that in returning to bed he had awakened Lady Hornby. And the next morning, on going to court, he learned that the reporter had died just at that hour, of heart disease (as the inquest afterwards found), and had never left the house. He had been visited by the reporter's spirit.

Here was an experience of most exceptional weight. Who could doubt either the word or the competence of the Chief Judge of the Supreme Consular Court of China and Japan? The story was promptly written up in the *Nineteenth Century* ("Visible Apparitions," July, 1884), and sceptics were confounded. But a copy of the *Nineteenth Century* reached Shanghai, where the incident was said to have taken place, and in the same monthly for November there appeared a letter from Mr. Balfour, editor of the *North China Herald* and the *Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*. It proved, and Sir E. Hornby was compelled to admit, that the story was entirely untrue. It was a jumble of inaccuracies. The reporter had died between eight and nine in the morning, not at one, and had slept peacefully all night. There had

been no inquest. There was no judgment whatever delivered by Sir E. Hornby that morning. There was not even a Lady Hornby in existence at the time! Sir Edmund Hornby sullenly acknowledged the truth of all this, and could mutter only that he could not understand his own mistake.

After this awful example we think twice before we take the testimony of Spiritualists at its face value. Sir A. C. Doyle, in particular, is especially guilty of such confusions, to the great advantage of his stories. During the Debate, as I said, he told of a wonderful Glasgow clairvoyante, who was consulted by a Mr. Lethem (a Glasgow J.P.), who had lost a son in the War. She at once told Mr. Lethem, Sir Arthur says, his son's name, the name of the London station at which he had said farewell, and the name of the London hotel at which they had stayed. This sounded very impressive indeed. But I happened to have read Mr. Lethem's articles (*Weekly Record*, February 21 and 28, 1920), and I have them before me. Mr. Lethem was a well-known man in Glasgow, and was known to be "inquiring." Now it was *eight months* after his son's death that he met this clairvoyante, yet all she could tell him was his son's name and appearance. It was, he confesses, "not much" and "not strictly evidential." It was at a *later* sitting that she gave the other details. Sir A. C. Doyle has fused the two sittings together and made the experience more impressive. The medium had time to make inquiries. There is a further detail which Sir A. C. Doyle does not tell. The brother of the dead officer asked, as a test question, the name of the town where they had last dined together. It took "more than a year" to get an answer to this!

Thus a quite commonplace and easily explained feat of a medium is dressed up by Sir A. C. Doyle as supernormal. He does this repeatedly in his books. In the *New Revelation* he says, quoting Sir Oliver Lodge's Raymond, that a medium described to Sir Oliver a photograph of his son, "no copy of which had reached England, and which proved to be exactly as *he* described it." Here he has done the same as in the case of Mr. Lethem—fused together several successive sittings. The first medium consulted by Sir Oliver Lodge made only a very brief statement. It was wrong in three out of four particulars; and the fourth was a very safe guess (that Raymond had once been photographed in a group). The particulars which so much impressed Sir O. Lodge were given much later, and by a lady medium; and by that time there were plenty of copies of the photograph in England! Sir O. Lodge gives the various dates.

Sir William Barrett and Sir O. Lodge are just as slipshod. I have amply shown this in the case of Lodge in my *Religion of Sir O. Lodge* (and *Raymond* is even worse than the books I analysed), and Sir W. F. Barrett's *On the Threshold of the Unseen* is just as bad. I have previously said how he tells his readers that it would take "the cleverest conjurer with elaborate apparatus" to do what the Golighers do at Belfast; and I showed that one limb of one member of the circle of seven mediums would, with the help of a finger or two perhaps, explain everything. Sir William also says (p. 53) that the London Dialectical Society "published the report of a special committee" strongly in favour of Spiritualism. On the contrary, the London Dialectical Society expressly refused to publish that egregious document. He says (p. 72), in describing the Home levitation case, that "nothing was said beforehand of what they might expect to see," and "the accounts given by each [witness] are alike." These statements are the reverse of the truth. The book contains many such instances.

Here is another, which is expressly concerned with the greatest of all "clairvoyantes," Mrs. Piper, and the most critical Spiritualist of modern times, Dr. Hodgson. In the Debate Sir A. C. Doyle introduces him (p. 21) as "Professor Hodgson, the greatest detective who ever put his mind to this subject." He is fond of turning the people he quotes into "professors." It makes them more weighty. Hodgson was never a professor, but he was an able man, and he exposed more than one fraud like Eusapia Palladino. But I have been permitted to see a letter which puts Dr. Hodgson himself in the category of over-zealous and unreliable witnesses; and as this letter is to be published in the form of a preface to the second edition of Dr. C. Mercier's book on Spiritualism, I am not quoting an anonymous document.

Mrs. Piper, the great American clairvoyante, the medium whose performances are endorsed as genuine even by men who regard Spiritualism as ninety-eight per cent. fraud, began her career as a "psychic" in 1874. At first she was controlled, in the common Spiritualist way, by "an Indian girl." Then the great spirits of Bach and Longfellow and other illustrious dead began to control her. Next a deceased French doctor, "Phinuit," took her in hand, and she did wonderful things. But when people who were really critical began to test Phinuit's knowledge of medicine, and inquire (for the purpose of verification) about Phinuit's former address on earth, he hedged and shuffled, and then retired into obscurity, like the

Indian girl and Longfellow. Her next spirit was "Pelham," a young man who modestly desired to remain anonymous. For four years "George Pelham," a highly cultivated spirit, gave "marvellously accurate" messages through Mrs. Piper, and the world was assured that there was not the slightest doubt about his identity. He was a very cultivated young American who had "passed over" in 1892.

Mr. Podmore, who, in spite of his high critical faculty, was taken in by this episode, thinks that telepathy alone can explain the wonderful things done. He does not believe in ghosts. Mrs. Piper's "subconscious self," he thinks, creates and impersonates these spirit beings, and draws the information telepathically from the sitters. But he says that the impersonation was so "dramatically true to life," so "consistently and dramatically sustained," that "some of G. P.'s most intimate friends were convinced that they were actually in communication with the deceased G. P."[\[12\]](#) It is true that when the dead G. P. was asked about a society he had helped to form in his youth he could give neither its aim nor its name, and Podmore admits that Mrs. Piper hedged very badly in trying to cover up her failure. But on other occasions the hits were so good that we have, if we do not admit the ghost theory, to take refuge in telepathy and the subconscious self.

There is no need even for this thin shade of mysticism. Podmore was misled by Hodgson's account. "G. P." meant, as everybody knew, George Pellew. Now a cousin of Pellew's wrote to Mr. Clodd to tell him that, if he cared to ask the family, he would learn that all the relatives of the dead man regarded Mrs. Piper's impersonation of him as "beneath contempt." Mr. Clodd wrote to Professor Pellew, George's brother, and found that this was the case. The family had been pestered for fifteen years with reports of the proceedings and requests to authenticate them and join the S. P. R. They said that they knew George, and they could not believe that, when freed from the burden of the flesh, he would talk such "utter drivel and inanity." As to "intimate friends," one of these was Professor Fiske, who had been described by Dr. Hodgson as "absolutely convinced" of the identity of "G. P." When Professor Pellew told Professor Fiske of this, he replied, roundly, that it was "a lie." Mrs. Piper had, he said, been "silent or entirely wrong" on all his test questions.[\[13\]](#)

I am, you see, not choosing "weak spots," as Sir A. C. Doyle said, and am not quite so ignorant of psychic matters, in comparison with himself, as he represented (*Debate*, p. 51). I am taking the greatest "clairvoyante" in the history of the movement, and in precisely those respects in which she was endorsed by Dr. Hodgson and the American S. P. R. and Sir O. Lodge and all the leading English Spiritualists. She failed at every crucial test. Phinuit, who knew so much, could not give a plausible account of his own life on earth, or how he came to forget medicine. When Sir O. Lodge presented to Mrs. Piper a sealed envelope containing a number of letters of the alphabet, she could not read one of them, and declined to try again. She could not answer simple tests about Pellew. She gave Professor James messages from Gurney after his death (1888), and James pronounced them "tiresome twaddle." When Myers died in 1901 and left a sealed envelope containing a message, she could not get a word of it. When Hodgson died in 1905 and left a large amount of manuscript in cipher, she could not get the least clue to it. When friends put test questions to the spirit of Hodgson about his early life in Australia, the answers were all wrong.

Mrs. Piper fished habitually and obviously for information from her sitters. She got at names by childishly repeating them with different letters (a very common trick of mediums), and often changed them. She made the ghost of Sir Walter Scott talk the most arrant nonsense about the sun and planets. She was completely baffled when a message was given to her in Latin, though she was supposed to be speaking in the name of the spirit of the learned Myers, and it took her three months to get the meaning (out of a dictionary?) of one or two easy words of it. She gave a man a long account of an uncle whom he had never had; and it turned out that this information was in the *Encyclopædia*, and related to another man of the same name. In no instance did she ever give details that it was *impossible* for her to learn in a normal way, and it is for her admirers to prove that she did *not* learn them in a normal way, and, on the other hand, to give a more plausible explanation of what Dr. Maxwell, their great authority, calls her "inaccuracies and falsehoods."

The truth is that the phenomenon known as "clairvoyance" rests just as plainly on trickery as the physical phenomena we have studied. Margaretta Fox explained decades ago how they used to watch minutely the faces of sitters and find their way by changes of expression. "I see a young man,"

says the medium dreamily, with half-closed but *very* watchful eyes. There is no response on the face of the sitter. "I see the form of a young woman—a child," the medium goes on. At the right shot the sitter's face lights up with joy and eagerness, and the fishing goes on. Probably in the end, or after a time, the sitter will tell people how the clairvoyant saw the form of her darling child "at once."

In some cases the medium is prepared in advance. Carrington tells us that he was one day strongly urged to give a man, who thought that he had abnormal powers, a sitting. He decided at least to give him a lesson, and made an appointment. The man came with friends at the appointed hour, and they were astonished and awed when Carrington, as a clairvoyant, told them their names and other details. He had simply sent a man to track his visitor to his hotel and learn all about him and his friends. Other cases are just as easy. When Sir O. Lodge and Sir A. C. Doyle lost their sons, the whole mediumistic world knew it and was ready. But mediums gather information about far less important sitters, because it is precisely these cases that are most impressive. It is quite easy to get information quietly about a certain man's dead relatives, and then find an intermediary who will casually recommend him to see Mrs. ——. I do not suggest that the intermediary knows the plot, though that may often be the case.

In other cases the medium tells very little at the first visit. The "spirit" is dazed in its new surroundings. It takes time to get adjusted and learn how to talk through a medium. And so on. You go again, and the details increase. You have, of course, left your name and address in making a fresh appointment. Some clever people go anonymously. Lady Lodge went thus and heard remarkable things; but Sir O. Lodge admits that her companion greatly helped the medium by forgetting herself and addressing her as "Lady Lodge." You may leave your coat in the hall, and it is searched. When Truesdell consulted Slade in New York, he wickedly left in his overcoat pocket a letter which gave the impression that his name was "Samuel Johnson." The first ghost that turned up was, of course, "Mary Johnson."

Still more ingenious was the "clairvoyance" of the famous American medium Foster, one of the impostors who duped Robert Dale Owen and for years held a high position in the movement. While he was out of the room

you wrote on bits of paper the names of your dead relatives or friends, and you then screwed up the bits of paper into pellets. Foster then came in, and sat near you. He dreamily took the pellets in his hand, pressed them against his forehead, and then let them fall again upon the table. Slowly and gradually, as he puffed at his everlasting cigar, the spirits communicated all the names to him.

Such tricks can be fathomed only by an expert, and they ought to warn Spiritualists of the folly of thinking that "fraud was excluded." Truesdell, the great medium hunter, the terror of the American Spiritualist world in the seventies, had a sitting with Foster and paid the usual five dollars. He was puzzled, and consented to come again. On the second occasion Foster could tell him, clairvoyantly, the name of his hotel and other details. He had had Truesdell watched in the usual way. At last the detective got his clue. Foster's cigar was continually going out, and in constantly re-lighting it he sheltered the match in the hollow of his hands. Truesdell concluded that he was then reading the slips of paper, and the rest was easy. In pressing the pellets to his forehead Foster substituted blank pellets for them and kept the written papers in his hand. So the next time Truesdell went, and Foster had touched one of the six pellets and read it, Truesdell snatched up the other five pellets and found them blank. Foster genially acknowledged that it was conjuring, but he continued as a priest of the Spiritualist movement for a long time afterwards.

Another clairvoyant feat is to read the contents of a sealed envelope, provided the contents are not a folded letter. We shall see in the next chapter how the contents of a folded and sealed letter are learned. I speak here of the simple clairvoyant practice of taking a sealed envelope which contains only a strip of written paper, pressing it to the forehead and reading the contents. You need not pay half-a-guinea to a Bond Street clairvoyante for this. Sponge your envelope with alcohol (which will soon evaporate and leave no trace) and you can "see through it."

Some readers may expect me to say a word here about "clairaudience." The only word I feel disposed to say is that it is one of the worst pieces of nonsense in the movement. Clairvoyance means to read the contents of a sealed letter, or to see spirits which ordinary mortals cannot see. It is half the stock-in-trade of the ordinary medium. You pay your guinea or half-

guinea, and the gifted lady sees your invisible dead friends and describes them. Sometimes she is quite accurate, "on information received." Generally the performance is a tedious medley of guesses and grotesque inaccuracies. As is known, Mr. Labouchere quite safely promised a thousand-pound note to any clairvoyante who would see the number of it through a sealed envelope. The French Academy of Science had invited clairvoyants, and thoroughly discredited the claim, years before.

Yet the imposture goes on daily, all over England and America, and some now offer the novelty of "clairaudience," or hearing spirit voices which we ordinary mortals cannot hear. It is the same fraud under another name. When some clairaudient comes along who can hear the spirits of Myers, and so many other deceased Spiritualists answer the crucial questions they have never yet answered, we may become interested. Until then a new addition to this world of cranks, frauds, decadents, and nervous invalids is not a matter of much importance.

FOOTNOTES:

[12] *The Newer Spiritualism*, p. 180.

[13] Mr. Clodd, as will be read in the preface to the second edition of Dr. Mercier's book, sent a copy of this letter to *Light*. The editor declined to publish it. So Sir A. C. Doyle may justly plead that he knew nothing about it. Will he ask why?

CHAPTER VII

MESSAGES FROM THE SPIRIT-WORLD

Clairvoyance, strictly speaking, is supposed to be an abnormal power of the medium: a range of vision, a fineness of sense, that we less gifted beings do not possess. But the performance is very apt to resolve itself into a claim that the medium sees invisible spirits and is communicating with them. Of real clairvoyance—of a power to read a closed book or a folded paper or see a distant spot—no instance has ever yet been recorded that will pass scrutiny. Many scientific men, as I said, who do not believe in spirits do believe in the abnormal powers of mediums. They would like to get a proof of clairvoyance, but they are unable to offer us one. The wonderful stories told of the gift in Spiritualist circles vanish, like the stories about Home and Moses, the moment the critical lamp is turned upon them.

We are therefore reduced to the Spiritualist claim that a medium really receives information from spirits, and we have to see on what sort of evidence this is based. Now there is an aspect of this question which even the leading Spiritualists do not face very candidly. More than twenty years ago it was felt, and rightly felt, by Spiritualists that at least a long step forward would be made if they left sealed or cipher-messages at death, and communicated the contents or the key of these from "beyond." It is well known how Myers left with Sir Oliver Lodge a sealed message of this description. A month after his death he "got into touch" with Lodge through the medium Mrs. Thompson. Unhappily he had forgotten all about the message, and even about the Society for Psychical Research! Next the supremely gifted Mrs. Verrall got into touch with Myers. By this time—it was the end of 1904—Myers had had time to get adjusted, and was talking more or less rationally through Mrs. Verrall. If there had not been a very material test in reserve, Sir O. Lodge and his friends would have sworn that the messages were from the spirit of Myers. As it was, they were so confident that on December 13, 1904, they solemnly opened the precious envelope. They were struck dumb when there was not the least

correspondence between Mrs. Verrall's message from Myers and the message he had left in the envelope.

Miss Dallas tries, in her *Mors Janua Vitæ*, to soften the blow, but her pleas are useless. The final failure utterly stultifies all the days and months of supposed messages. And this is not the only case. Hodgson had adopted a similar test, and it was a ghastly failure. Other Spiritualists left sealed messages when they died, and not a syllable of one of them has been read. Our Spiritualists *do not* get into communication with the dead. This is negative evidence, but it is far more impressive than any of the rhetorical and inaccurate accounts of experiences which they give us. It is precise and unmistakable. Every Spiritualist who dies now knows that this is the supremely desired test, yet we have twenty years of complete, unmitigated failure. Men like Sir O. Lodge tell us that they recognize the personality of Hodgson beyond mistake in the messages they get through mediums; but the one sure test, the getting of the key to the cipher-messages which Hodgson left behind, is an absolute failure. It would become our Spiritualists to strike a more modest note, and not assure the ignorant public, as Sir A. C. Doyle does, that the time for proof has gone by and it is for their opponents now to justify themselves. The experience of the last twenty years has been deadly to Spiritualist pretensions.

The truth is that here again Spiritualists had been led into their belief, that messages from the spirit-world were easy and common, by a vast amount of mediumistic trickery. The earliest method was by raps, and we have seen that since 1848 this performance has been a matter of trickery. The next way was to rap out messages with a leg of the table, which was merely a variation of the table-lifting we have studied. These forms are so often used by amateur mediums that it is necessary to recall our warning that the distinction between paid and unpaid mediums is not of the least use. Carrington, Maxwell, Podmore, and Flammarion give numbers of instances of cheating by men and women of good social position. Carrington tells of an American lawyer who deliberately—not as a joke—made his friends believe that he could make a poker stand upright and do similar abnormal phenomena. He did his tricks by means of black threads. Podmore gives a similar case in England. Flammarion tells us of a Parisian doctor's wife who cheated flagrantly in order to get credit for abnormal powers. This sort of prestige has as much fascination for some people as money has for others.

The professional mediums, however, early developed in America the trick of receiving messages from spirits on slates, and this is fraud from beginning to end. The supreme artist in this field was Henry Slade, whom Sir A. C. Doyle regards as a genuine intermediary between the lofty spirits of the other world and ourselves. As Truesdell's account of the way in which he unmasked Slade as early as 1872 contains one of the richest stories in the whole collection of Spiritualist anecdotes, one would have thought that a story-teller like Sir A. C. Doyle could not possibly have forgotten it. From it we learn that Slade was from the outset of his career an adroit and brazen and confessed impostor.

Truesdell paid the customary five dollars, and received pretty and edifying, but inconclusive, messages from the spirits. Incidentally he detected that the spirit-touches on his arms were done by Slade's foot, to distract his attention; but he could not see the method of the slate-trick. However, as the main theme of the messages was an exhortation to persevere in his inquiries (at five dollars a sitting to the medium), he made another appointment. It was on this occasion that he left a misleading letter in his overcoat in Slade's hall, and found the spirits assuming that he was "Samuel Johnson, Rome, N.Y." But before Slade entered the room, or while Slade was going through his overcoat-pockets, *he* rapidly overhauled Slade's room. He found a slate with a pious message from the spirits already written on it, signed (as was usual) by the spirit of Slade's dead wife, Alcinda. Beneath the message Truesdell wrote "Henry, look out for this fellow—he is up to snuff! Alcinda," and replaced the slate. Slade came in, and gave a most dramatic performance. In his contortions, under the spirit-influence, he drew the table near to the hidden slate, and "accidentally" knocked the clean slate off the table. Of course, he picked up the *prepared* slate. His emotions can be imagined when he read the words which Truesdell had written on it. After a little bluster, however, he laughingly acknowledged that he was a mere conjurer, and he told Truesdell many tricks of his profession. [\[14\]](#)

This was in 1872. Four years later Slade came to London, where Sir E. Ray Lankester and Sir Bryan Donkin again exposed him. Sir E. Ray Lankester snatched the slate before the message was supposed to be written on it, and the message was already there. He prosecuted Slade, who was sentenced to three months' hard labour. He had charged a guinea a sitting. But a few words had been omitted from the antiquated form of the charge (which I have

previously given in the case of Craddock), and before Slade could be again prosecuted he fled to the continent. There, we saw, he duped a group of purblind professors, and he returned to America in higher repute than ever. In 1882 an inspector of police at Belleville, in Canada, snatched the slate just as Sir E. Ray Lankester had done, and exposed him again. He escaped arrest only by a maudlin appeal for mercy; and on his return to the States he succeeded in persuading the Spiritualists—who solemnly stated this in their organ, the *Banner of Light*—that the man exposed at Belleville was an impostor making use of his name! In 1884 he faced the Seybert Committee, and its sharp-eyed members saw and exposed every step in his trickery. Eventually, as I have said, he lived in drink and misery, developed Bright's disease, and died in the common asylum. Such was the man whom Sir A. C. Doyle seriously regards as the chosen instrument of his spiritual powers.

The Seybert Committee found two different kinds of writing on Slade's slates. Some messages were short and badly written, and they concluded that these were written by him with one finger while he held the slate under the table (as the custom was) to receive a spirit-message. Other messages were relatively long, well written, and dignified; and they regarded these as prepared in advance. Both points were fully verified. At one sitting they noticed two slates resting suspiciously against the leg of the table. These doubtless had messages written on them, and were to be substituted for the blank slate when this was supposed to be put under the table. Slade would then produce the sound of the spirits writing by scraping with his nail on the edge of the slate. On this occasion, however, Slade saw that they had their eyes on the slates and he dare not use them. But one of the members of the committee, determined to do his work thoroughly, carelessly knocked the two slates over with his foot, and the messages were exposed.

The reception of messages from the spirits on slates may linger in rural or suburban districts, but it has lent itself to such trickery, and been exposed so thoroughly, that mediums have generally abandoned it. For whole decades it was the chief way of communicating with the spirits, and weird and wonderful were the artifices by which the medium defeated the growing sense of caution of the sitters. In spite of the exposures of Slade, the English medium Eglinton adopted and improved his methods, and he was one of the bright stars of the Spiritualist world for twenty years. He was detected in fraud as early as 1876. At that time he gave materialization-séances, at

which the ghostly form of "Abdullah" appeared. Archdeacon Colley found the beard and draperies of Abdullah in his trunk. But exposure never ruins a medium in the Spiritualist world, and ten years later Eglinton was the most successful and respected medium in England, especially for slate-messages.

Hodgson more than suspected him, and he at last found a man, Mr. S. J. Davey, who was able to reproduce all his tricks. He wrote messages while he held the slates under the table, and he substituted prepared slates for clean slates under the noses of his sitters. Perhaps the most valuable part of his experience was this substitution, which is one of the fundamental elements of mediumistic trickery. Spiritualists—indeed, inquirers generally—honestly flatter themselves that they have taken care that there was no deception of this kind. Such confidence is foolish, as the professional conjurer does this kind of substitution under our eyes habitually, and we never see him do it. In order to make people more cautious Davey, with Dr. Hodgson's connivance, set up as a medium and gave sittings to Spiritualists. They afterwards sent accounts of their experiences to the Society for Psychical Research. They were, as usual, certain that there was no trickery, and that the messages were genuine. Davey then wrote correct accounts of what he had done, and it was seen that the accounts of the sitters were inaccurate and their observation faulty. Some of them indignantly retorted that Davey was a genuine medium, but found it more profitable to pose as a conjurer and exposé of mediums!

In a work specially devoted to this subject (*Spirit Slate Writing and Kindred Phenomena*, 1899) Mr. W. E. Robinson gives about thirty different fraudulent ways of getting spirit-messages. Indeed, many of these may be sub-divided, and you get scores of methods. One method, for instance, is to write a message with invisible fluid on paper, seal the apparently blank paper in an envelope, and then let the message appear and pretend that the spirits wrote it. Mr. Robinson gives thirty-seven different recipes for the "invisible ink," and sixteen of these require only heat, which is easily applied, to develop them. In other cases the inside of the envelope has been moistened with a chemical solution which develops the hidden writing. One medium used to put an apparently blank sheet of paper in a clear bottle and seal it. Here trickery seemed impossible, and the sitter was greatly impressed at receiving a pious message on the paper. But the message had

been written in advance with a weak solution of copper sulphate, and the bottle had been washed out with ammonia, which develops it.

In slate-messages much use is made of a false flap, or a loose sheet of slate which fits imperceptibly on one side of the framed slate. It conceals the message written on the slate, and is removed under the table or under cover of a newspaper. A sheet of slate-coloured silk or cloth is sometimes fitted on the slate, and it is drawn up the medium's sleeve or rolled into the frame of the slate. Invisible messages may be written on the slate with onion or lemon juice, and developed by lightly passing over them a cloth containing powdered chalk. Double-frame slates lend themselves to infinite trickery. Slates are provided by "the trade" with false hinges and all kinds of mechanism. But even when the sitter brings his own slates, as Zöllner did, and ties them up and seals them, the medium is not baffled. They are laid aside, for the spirits to write on at their leisure. At the first convenient opportunity the medium removes the wax, without spoiling the seal, by passing a heated knife-blade or fine wire beneath it, and, after untying the strings, heats the under-surface of the wax and sticks it on again.

Mediums found that sitters were greatly impressed if they heard the sound of the spirits writing on the slate. This was easily done by scraping with the finger nail, and cautious people wanted to have a security against fraud. One medium gave them adequate security. He held both hands above the table, yet writing was distinctly heard underneath it. The man had attached to the table a clamp holding a bit of slate-pencil, and against this he rubbed a pencil which was fastened to his trousers by loops of black silk. Others can use a pencil with their toes—I have seen an armless Bulgar girl use a pen with her toes as neatly as a good writer uses his fingers—and hold both hands above the table.

This trick is often used when a message is wanted in answer to a question and cannot be written in advance. The usual method is, however, to hold the slate under the table-top and write on it while it is held there. At first this was done by means of a tiny bit of slate-pencil slipped under the nail of the big finger. Slade soon found that this was suspected, and he made a point of keeping his nails short. The trade which is at the back of mediums then supplied thimbles with bits of pencil attached, which the medium could slip on to his finger as he put the slate under the table. Even thimbles with three

differently coloured chalks were made, and the innocent sitter would be invited to select his own colour for the spirits to write in. The most amazing tricks were developed. Robinson tells of a man who would let you bring your own slate and hold it against your own breast, and the message then appeared on it. He "tried" your slate when you brought it by writing on it with his pencil. But, of course, he sponged out all his writing before he handed the slate back to you, as you could see. He had a double pencil—slate at one end and silver nitrate at the other—and what he wrote with the latter was invisible until it was damped with salt-water. Well, the sponging (or damping) had been done with salt-water, and so the message (in silver nitrate) appeared as the slate dried against your breast.

When you thus allow the medium to use his own apparatus in his own room you need not be surprised at any result whatever. The sensible man will remember that behind the mediums is the same ingenious industry which supplies conjuring outfits. Mr. Selbit showed Mr. Moseley a typewriter, on an ordinary-looking table, which spelt out, by invisible fingers, a message in reply to your question. There was an electrical mechanism in the table, and an electrician in the next room controlling it by a wire through the hollow table-leg. But even without such elaborate mechanism mediums can baffle quite vigilant sitters. There was one who would allow you to examine his nails, yet he got slate-messages without putting the slate under the table. He had ground slate-pencil to dust, mixed it with gum, and then cut the mixture into little cubes or pellets. He simply stuck these on his trousers, and, *after* you had examined his nails, helped himself to one.

When the answers are given on paper a hundred other tricks are employed. First the medium must learn the question you are putting to the spirits. If you put it mentally, you will never get more than a lucky or unlucky guess, unless you happen to be one of those sitters for whom the medium was prepared. You need not fear telepathy. It must be admitted to-day that the evidence for telepathy or thought-transference is in as parlous a condition as the evidence for Spiritualism. After all the challenges and discussions not a single serious claim lies before us. Sir A. C. Doyle, it is true, tells (*Debate*, p. 28) quite confidently of Mr. Lethem getting an answer to his unspoken questions. But Sir Arthur, as usual, does not tell all the facts. The unspoken questions to which Mrs. Lethem, as a medium, gave "correct answers" were precisely the two test questions which Mr. Lethem had put to a medium

some time before! We may surely presume that he had confided that wonderful experience to the wife of his bosom.

No, there is no clear case of telepathy, or answers to unspoken questions, on record. The medium gets you to write your questions. Spirits are supposed to be more at home in reading such spiritual things as thoughts than in reading material scribbles; but your medium is not a spirit, and you will get no answer unless he knows the question. If you write your question on the pad which he kindly offers, it is easy. There is a carbon paper underneath, which gives him a duplicate. In one very elaborate case the carbon and duplicate were under the cloth, and were drawn off, when you had finished writing, through a hollow leg of the table into the next room. One medium developed the art of reading what you wrote from the movements of the top of your pencil. Others, like Foster, artfully stole your bit of paper and substituted dummies. But I will quote from Mr. Carrington a last trick which will give the reader a sufficiently large idea of the wonderful ingenuity which mediums use in these spirit messages.

He tells in his *Personal Experiences of Spiritualism* of a pair of Chicago mediums—the same Misses Bangs who painted spirit pictures before your eyes, as I have previously described—whose method was extraordinarily difficult to detect. You wrote a letter to a deceased person. You folded a blank sheet with this letter, and sealed them yourself in an envelope. This letter you handed to Miss Bangs as she sat at the table opposite you. After a long delay, but without her leaving the room, she restored the envelope (which had lain on the table under a blotter) to you intact, and you found a letter to you from your spirit friend written on the blank sheet you had enclosed.

Mr. Carrington admits that he can only guess the way in which this striking performance was done, but the reader who cares to read his full and interesting account will feel that his conjecture is right. The letter did not remain on the table. Under cover of the blotting pad and various nervous movements it was conveyed to the medium's lap, and from there to a shallow tray on the floor under the table. The medium, he noticed, sat close to a door which led into an adjoining room, and he believes that the tray was pulled by a string from under the table into the next room. An expert whom he afterwards sent to examine the house, under cover of a sitting,

verified his conjecture that there was space enough at the bottom of the door to pull a shallow tray through. In the next room it was easy for Miss Bangs No. 2 to open the letter, write the reply, and seal the envelope again. Even wax seals offer no difficulty to mediums. The letter was re-conducted to the table in the same furtive way. A desperate Spiritualist may say that his hypothesis is simpler than this. But there is one little difficulty. No such person had ever existed as the supposed dead relative to whom Mr. Carrington addressed his letter! He had hoaxed the hoaxer.

Here were two quiet and inoffensive-looking spinsters earning a good living by deceptive practices (this and the spirit-painting trick) which they had themselves, apparently, originated, and which taxed the ingenuity of an expert conjurer to discover. What chance has the ordinary inquirer, much less the eager Spiritualist, against guile of this description? A boy of sixteen can buy a box of conjuring apparatus for a guinea. It contains only tricks which have been scattered over the country for years. Yet in your own drawing-room he can, after a little practice, cheat your eyes every time, although you know that there is trickery, and are keenly on the look-out for it. What chance have you, then, against a man or woman who has been conjuring for twenty years? What chance have you in a poor light? What earthly chance have you in the dark? It is amazing how inquirers and Spiritualists forget this elementary truism. They tell you repeatedly, with the air of supreme experts in conjuring, that "there was no possibility of fraud." That is sheer self-deception. Even expert conjurers have been completely deceived by mediums, as Bellachini was with Slade (a confessed impostor) and Carrington was with Eusapia Palladino. The man who tells you that there was no fraud because he saw none is as foolish as the man who expects *you* either to explain where the fraud was or else embrace Spiritualism.

There is one other method of receiving messages which we must briefly notice. It is, to Spiritualists, the most impressive of all. The ghost of the dead *talks directly to you*. A "direct voice" medium is, of course, required, and some kind of trumpet is provided by the medium through which the spirit speaks to you. If you are known to the medium, or if you have a good imagination and are very eager, you can recognize the very accents of your dead wife or mother-in-law. But there is one disadvantage of this impressive phenomenon. It must take place in complete darkness; and we remember

the warning of that high and experienced psychic authority, Dr. Maxwell, that the man who seeks any kind of phenomena in complete darkness is wasting his time.

Spiritualist writers are amusing when they try to reconcile us to the conditions which their mediums have imposed on them. Are there not certain conditions for the appearance of all scientific phenomena, they ask us? Most assuredly. You cannot grow carrots without soil, and so on. Is not darkness a condition of certain scientific processes? Again, most certainly. The photographic plate must be prepared in the dark, or in a dull red light. Therefore.... That is just where the Spiritualist fails. If the darkness under cover of which the photographic chemist prepares his plates lent itself equally to cover fraud or to protect his operations, there would be a parallel. As it is, there is no parallel.

The red light of the photographer can serve only one purpose. When the medium uses it, there are two purposes conceivable. One is, on the Spiritualist theory, that white light may interfere with the "magnetism," or the "psychic force," or whatever the latest jargon is. The other conceivable purpose is that it may cover fraud. Everybody admits that the darkening of the planet since 1848 has covered "a vast amount of fraud," to use the words of Baron Schrenck. Few people admit that it has favoured real phenomena. It is therefore quite absurd to attempt to reconcile us to the darkness by the analogy of photographic operations. There is no analogy at all. In the one case the poor light certainly favours fraud, and does not certainly do anything else. In the other case the red light never covers fraud, but has a single clear purpose.

Red light, as I have said, is the most tiring for the eye of all kinds of light. The man who thinks that he can control the hands and feet of seven mediums in such a light cannot expect to be taken seriously. He can expect only to be taken in. But the man who pays any attention to phenomena for which the medium requires pitch darkness is even worse. Why not simply *imagine* that the dead still live, and save the guinea? You have not the slightest guarantee of the genuineness of the phenomena. Imagining that you can recognize the voice or the features is one of the oldest of illusions.

In the summer of 1912 our Spiritualists were elated by the discovery of a new medium of the most powerful type. Mrs. Ebba Wriedt came from that perennial breeding-ground of great mediums, the United States, where she had long been known. In 1912 she illumined London. Through her W. T. Stead was able once more to address Spiritualists *viva voce*. One recognized the familiar voice unmistakably. Scepticism was ludicrous. Did not a Serbian diplomatist talk to the spirit in Serb, which Mrs. Wriedt did not know, and answer for the genuineness of the phenomena? *Light* had wonderful columns on Mrs. Wriedt's marvels. She was, the editor of a psychic journal said, "the pride and the most convincing argument of the whole Spiritualist and Theosophical world." In admiring her powers, even the mutual hostility of Spiritualist and Theosophist was laid aside, it seems.

Norwegian Spiritualists were eager to avail themselves of this rare gift, and they asked if Norwegian spirits could speak through the great medium. After consulting the spirits—a cynic would say, after practising a word or two of Norwegian—Mrs. Wriedt replied in the affirmative, and boldly crossed the sea.

There is, of course, no intrinsic reason, on the Spiritualist theory, why spirits should be confined to the language of the medium. In "direct voice" they do not even have to use her vocal organs. A trumpet lies on the ground or the table, and the spirits lift it up and megaphone (very softly) through it. It is quite inexplicable to those of us who are mere inquirers why the spirits must always talk English in England, American in America, and so on. Even when they try, as in the case of the Thomas brothers, to talk their native American to us in England, the result is half bad American and half Welsh-English. It would be much more impressive to our hesitating generation if a half-dozen foreigners were brought to the sitting, and each had a real conversation—not a word or two—with a ghost of his own nationality. Somehow the spirits insist on speaking the language, and even the dialect, of the medium. We shall consider in the next chapter a few supposed variations from this unfortunate rule of spirit-intercourse.

Well, Mrs. Wriedt went to Norway, and confronted her new inquirers with all the solidity and confidence of the well-built American matron. Somehow, the vocabulary of the Norwegian dead, who came along, was very limited. They could say only "Yes" or "No" in Norwegian. Otherwise

the first séance was very good. To make up for their culpable ignorance of their native tongue the Norwegian ghosts scattered flowers about the dark room, gave ghostly music, and did other marvellous things. But there were two ladies and a professor—Frau Nielsen and Frau Anker and Professor Birkeland—who did not like this "Yes" and "No" business. It was scriptural, but not ladylike. So the professor held Mrs. Wriedt's hands very firmly at the second séance, and for twenty minutes the spirits were dumb. They always resent such things, as every Spiritualist knows. The trumpets lay on the floor, neglected and silent.

At length Professor Birkeland heard some very faint explosive sounds which his ears located in the trumpets or horns (in shape something like the old coach-horn). He looked steadily and saw them move slightly, a phosphorescent light in them making the movements clear. A good Spiritualist would have seen that this was the beginning of manifestations, and he would have paid close attention to the trumpets and relaxed his hard control of Mrs. Wriedt. The professor was, however, of the type which mediums call "brutal." He jumped up, switched on the electric light, and, before the Spiritualists could interfere, had snatched the two trumpets from the floor and bolted to the nearest analytic chemist. So the curtain fell on one more glorious act in the Spiritualist drama. Mrs. Wriedt had put in the trumpet particles of metallic potassium which, meeting the moisture she had also thoughtfully provided, explained the "psychic movements." Close examination disclosed that on other occasions she had used Lycopodium seeds to produce the same effect.

Professor Birkeland did not discover how the voices were produced, but they offer no difficulty. The trumpets were, he found, telescopic. Each consisted of three parts, and could stretch to nearly three feet. When some guileless lady, who is controlling the medium, allows a hand to stray in the usual way, the trumpet is seized, and it will give a "direct voice" over the heads of the sitters or close to any one of them. When the trumpet remains on the ground during the ghostly message, the medium has a rubber speaking-tube fitted to it. When no trumpet is provided at all, it makes no difference. The medium has thoughtfully brought one of these telescopic aluminium tubes in his trousers. It folds up to less than a foot. In some of the earlier cases, possibly still in some cases, the medium's little daughter, who sits demure and mildly interested on the couch before the light is

switched off, mounts the furniture in the dark, and obligingly impersonates the ghost.

No one would accuse Mr. Crawford, of Belfast, of being ultra-critical, yet his experience confirms my conclusions. His marvellous experiences with the pious Kathleen drew the attention of the Spiritualist world, and all sorts of mediums came to help. First he tried the clairvoyants. But they saw such weird and contradictory things that he was worried. None of them saw the wonderful "psychic cantilever" which he thought the spirits made to lift the table, but they all saw ghostly hands where he did not want them; and the worst of it was that the same spirits which had confirmed his theory of a cantilever, and even allowed him to take a photograph (which he has meanly refused to publish) of it, now joyously confirmed the quite different theory of the Spiritualist clairvoyants.

So he gave it up, and next tried a "direct voice" medium. He is fairly polite about the result. He got plenty of voices from all quarters—in total darkness. Not only did a voice come from the ceiling, but a mark was made on it. The medium's silk coat was frivolously taken off her by the ghosts, and flung on the lap of one of the sitters. Strangely, these things do not impress him as much as the raising of a two-pound stool to a height of four feet does. He drops dark hints that things were said about this "direct voice" medium. She was a big woman, and she was not searched; and telescopic aluminium tubes take up little room. Mr. Crawford put his little electrical register near her feet, and she was "annoyed and nervous." In short, Mr. Crawford seems to have formed the same opinion as any sensible person would in the circumstances. [\[15\]](#)

We have still to examine the claims of the automatic writers; but, after all this, the reader will not expect much. Never yet was a message received which could not have been learned by the medium in a normal way. The overwhelming mass of the messages which are delivered daily in every country are fraudulent. In an amusing recent work (*The Road to En-Dor*) two officers have shown us how easy it was to dupe even educated men by these professions of marvellous powers. The advantage is on the side of the conjurer every time, and the sitter has little chance. Let the mediums come before a competent tribunal. All sorts of inducements have been offered to them to do so, but they are very shy of competent investigators. In 1911 an

advertisement in the *Times* offered £1,000 to any medium who would merely give proof of possessing telepathic power, and there was not a single offer. This year Mr. Joseph Rinn, a former member of the American Society for Psychical Research and a life-long inquirer, has deposited with that Society a sum of £1,000 for any evidence of communication with the dead under proper conditions. There will again be no application. Mediums prefer a simpler and more reverent audience, even if the fees be smaller. But those who consult them under their own conditions, knowing that fraud has been practised under those conditions from San Francisco to Petrograd ever since 1848, must not talk to us about "evidence."

FOOTNOTES:

[14] The chapter should be read in Truesdell's racy book, which is now unfortunately rare, *Bottom Facts Concerning the Science of Spiritualism* (1883), pp. 276-307.

[15] These experiments are recorded in his *Experiments in Psychical Science* (1919), pp. 134-35 and 170-89.

CHAPTER VIII

AUTOMATIC WRITING

The Spiritualist—if any Spiritualist reader has persevered thus far—will be surprised to hear that many Rationalists censure me because I decline to admit that his movement is "all fraud." For heaven's sake, he will exclaim, let us hear something about our honesty for a change! Even the impartial outsider will possibly welcome such a change. How is it possible, he will ask, that so many distinguished men have given their names to the movement if it is all fraudulent?

Now let us have a word first on these supposed distinguished Spiritualists. During the debate with me Sir A. C. Doyle produced a tiny red book and told the audience that it contained "the names of 160 people of high distinction, many of them of great eminence, including over forty professors" (p. 19). He said expressly that "these 160 people ... have announced themselves as Spiritualists" (p. 20). The book was handed to me, and it will be understood that I could not very well read it and attend to my opponent's speech, to which I had to reply. But I saw at a glance several utterly destructive weaknesses. Several men were described as "professor" who had no right to the title. Several men were included who were certainly *not* Spiritualists (Richet, Ochorowicz, Schiaparelli, Flammarion, Maxwell, etc.). And in not one single case is a precise reference given for the words which are attributed to these men. My opponent regretted that chapter and verse were not "always" (this word is omitted from the printed Debate) quoted in his little book. As a matter of fact, "chapter and verse" (book and page) are *never* given, in any instance; and in the vast majority of the 160 cases not even words are quoted to justify the inclusion. He further said that he quite admitted that some of the "forty professors" in the book did not go so far as Spiritualists. But I have already quoted his words to the effect that they had "announced themselves as Spiritualists," and the same impression is undoubtedly conveyed by the book itself, the title of which is *Who Are These Spiritualists?*

I have the book before me, and any reader who cares to glance at the printed Debate and see what Sir A. C. Doyle said about it will be astonished when I describe it. The printed text gives 126 names, and 32 further names (many illegible) are written on the margins in Sir A. C. Doyle's hand. Only in 53 cases out of the 158 is any quotation given from the person named, and in not *one* of these cases are we told where the quotation may be verified. There are 27 (not 49, as Sir Arthur said) men described as "professors"; and of these several never were professors, and very few ever were Spiritualists. Sir A. C. Doyle has himself included Professor Morselli, who calls Spiritualism "childish and immoral." There are men included who died before Spiritualism was born, and there are twenty or thirty Agnostics included. Men like "Lord Dunraven, Lord Adare, and Alexander Wilder" are described, with the most amazing effrontery, as "some of the world's greatest authors." Padre Secchi, the pious Roman Catholic, is included. Thackeray, Sir E. Arnold, Professor de Morgan, Thiers, Lord Brougham, Forbes Winslow, Longfellow, Ruskin, Abraham Lincoln, and other distinguished sceptics are dragged in. For sloppy, slovenly, loose, and worthless work—and I have in twenty years of controversy had to handle a good deal—this little book would be hard to beat.

A list of distinguished Spiritualists could be accommodated on a single page of this book. A list of distinguished Rationalists in the same period (1848-1920) would take twenty pages. The truth is that in the earlier days of Spiritualism, when less was known than we now know about mediumistic fraud, a number of distinguished men were "converted." They were in every case converted by the impostors I have exposed in the course of this work—by Home, Florrie Cook, Mrs. Guppy, Eglinton, Slade, Morse, Holmes, etc. What is the value of such conversions? Who are the "distinguished" Spiritualists *to-day*? Sir A. C. Doyle, Sir O. Lodge, Sir W. Barrett, Mr. Gerald Balfour... The reader will be astonished to know that those are the only names of living men of any distinction that Sir A. C. Doyle dares to give, either in the text or on the margins of his book. What their opinion is worth the reader may judge for himself.

Let us pass on. I wrote recently in the *Literary Guide* that "there are hundreds of honest mediums." Some of my readers resented this as over-generous. Possibly they have only a vague idea of Spiritualism, and it is advisable for us to reflect clearly on the point. In the eyes of Spiritualists

every man or woman, paid or unpaid, who is supposed to be in any way in communication with spirits is a "medium." The word does not simply apply to men and women who, for payment, sit in cabinets or in a circle, and lift tables, play guitars, write on slates, produce ghosts, pull furniture about, tug the beards of sitters, and so on. I should agree with the reader that these people, paid or unpaid, and all mediums who operate in the dark or in red light, are probably frauds. That is a fair conclusion from the preceding chapters, in which I have exposed every variety of their manifestations, and from the history of Spiritualism.

This rules out all professional mediums and a large proportion of the amateurs. Perhaps the reader does not know, and would like to know, what a séance is like. As far as the "more powerful" (and more certainly fraudulent) mediums are concerned, I have already given a sufficient description. A cloth-covered frame or "cabinet" is raised at one end of the room, or a curtain is drawn across an alcove or corner. In this the medium generally (not always) sits, and the curtains are closed until the medium thinks fit to have them opened. The medium is sometimes hypnotized, and sometimes falls into a natural trance; it matters little, for the trance is invariably a sham, and the medium is wide awake all the time, though he simulates the appearance of a trance. The lights are lowered or extinguished. Generally a red-glass lantern or bulb (sometimes several) is lit. Then, after a time, which is occupied by singing or music (to drown the noise of the medium's movements), the ghost appears, or the tambourine is played, or the table is lifted, and so on.

These are the heavier and more expensive performances, and are constantly being exposed. The medium has apparatus in the false seat of his chair or concealed about his person. But the common, daily séance is quite different. You sit round a table or in a circle, or (if you will rise to the price) sit alone with the lady. The light may be good. The medium "sees" and describes spirit forms hovering about you. If you are one of the people whom the medium has, through an intermediary, attracted to the circle, you get some accurate details. If not, the medium begins with generalities and, studying your expression, feels her way to details. It is generally a waste of time. Friends of mine have gone from one to another medium in London, and they tell me that it is simply a tedious and most irritating way of convincing oneself that these people are all frauds.

But beyond these are hundreds, or thousands, of private individuals who discover that they are mediums. They take a pencil in their hands, fall into a passive, dreamy state, and presently the pencil "automatically" writes messages from the spirit world. Others use the planchette (a pencil fixed in a heart-shaped board which, when the medium's fingers are on it, writes on a sheet of paper) or the ouija board (in which the apex of the heart spells out messages by pointing rapidly to the letters of the alphabet painted on a larger board over which it travels). I have studied all three forms, and may take them together as "automatic writing."

The first question is whether this *can* be done unconsciously. If such messages are consciously spelt or written by the medium, it is, of course, fraud, because the messages purport to come from the dead. My own experience convinces me that even here there is a vast amount of fraud. The social status and general character of the medium do not seem to matter at all, as we have repeatedly seen. People get into the attitude of the child. "I can do what you can't do," you constantly hear the child say to its fellows. There is a good deal of the child in all of us. Prestige, distinction, credit for a rare or original power, is as much sought as money; and this motive grows stronger when the medium already has money. Everybody knows, or ought to know, the perfectly authentic story of Mozart's *Requiem*. A wealthy amateur, Count Walsegg, secretly paid Mozart to compose that famous Mass, and it was to be passed off by Walsegg as his own.

But while there is much fraud even in automatic writing, there are certainly hundreds of mediums of this description who quite honestly believe that they are spirit-controlled. Mr. G. B. Shaw's mother was an automatic artist of that class. I have seen some of her spirit drawings. A high-minded medical man of my acquaintance was a medium of the same type. The class is very numerous. Psychologically, it is not very difficult to understand. A pianist can play quite complicated pieces unconsciously or subconsciously. A writer, who cannot normally write decent fiction, may have wonderful flights of imagination in a dream. An expert worker can do quite complicated things without attention. Something of the same faculty seems to come in time to the automatic writer or artist. Consciousness is more or less—never entirely, perhaps—switched off from its usual connection with the hand, and the part of the brain-machine which is not lit by consciousness takes over the connection.

That this can be done in perfect honesty will be clear to every reader of Flammarion's book, *Les forces naturelles inconnues*. Flammarion never became a Spiritualist, but he was quite a fluent automatic writer in his youth. Victorien Sardou, the great dramatist, belonged to the same circle, and was an automatic draughtsman. Flammarion gives specimens of the work of both. Quite without a deliberate intention, he signed his automatic writing (on science) "Galileo."

I have no doubt that at the time both these distinguished men were strongly tempted to embrace the Spiritualist theory. These experiences, and the experiences of the séance, can be exceedingly impressive and dramatic. The man who has never been there is too apt to think that all Spiritualists are fools. I have been to séances, and I do not admit that. I am quarrelling with Spiritualists because they will not realize the possibilities and the actual abundance of fraud. But the séance is undoubtedly very impressive at times. I have held a serious conversation, in German and Latin, through an amateur medium of my own acquaintance, with the supposed spirit of a certain German theologian of the last century whose name (as given) was well known to me. I do not at all wonder that many succumb in sittings of this sort. But I found invariably that, if one resolutely kept one's head and devised crucial tests, the claim broke down. So it is with Flammarion and Sardou. What "Galileo" wrote in 1870 was just the astronomy of that time; and much of it is totally wrong to-day. Sardou, on the other hand, drew remarkable sketches of life on Jupiter; and we know to-day that Jupiter is red-hot!

This is a broad characteristic of automatic writing since it began in the fifties of the nineteenth century. At its best it merely reflected the culture of the time, which was often wrong. Stainton Moses, for instance, wrote reams of edifying revelation. But I find among his wonderful utterances about ancient history certain statements concerning the early Hindus and Persians which recent discoveries have completely falsified. He had been reading certain books which were just passable (though already a little out of date) fifty years ago. Among other things the spirits told him that Manu lived 3,000 B.C., and that there was a high "Brahminical lore" long before that date! So with Andrew Jackson Davis, the first of these marvellous bringers of wisdom from the spirit world. He had probably read R. Chambers's *Vestiges of Creation*, and he gave out weird and wonderful revelations about

evolution. In the beginning was a clam, which begot a tadpole, which begot a quadruped, and so on. Davis certainly lied hard when he used to deny that he had read the books to which his "revelations" were traced, but no one can deny his originality.

Then there was Fowler, an American medical student and pious amateur medium, who was regarded with reverence by the American Spiritualists. I invite the reader's particular attention to this man, as he is one of those unpaid individuals who are supposed (by Spiritualists) to have no conceivable motive for cheating. Yet he lied and cheated in the most original fashion. He told his friends that ghostly men entered his bedroom at nights, produced ghostly pens and ink, and left messages in Hebrew on his table. An expert in Hebrew found that the message was a very bad copy of a passage from the Hebrew text of *Daniel*. This did not affect the faith of Spiritualists, who put a piece of parchment in Fowler's room for a further message. They had a rich reward. They found next day a spiritual manifesto signed by no less than fifty-six spirits, including some of the statesmen who had signed the Declaration of Independence.

The frauds were very gross in those early decades. Franklin, Washington, even Thomas Paine, sent hundreds of messages from the "Summerland." As time went on, Socrates, Plato, Sir I. Newton, Milton, Galileo, Aristotle, and nearly everybody whose name was in an encyclopædia, guided the automatic writers. When one reads the inane twaddle signed with their names, one wonders that even simple people could be deceived. Dante dictated a poem of three thousand lines in the richest provincial American. One automatic writer wrote, under inspiration, a book of a hundred thousand words. It is estimated that there were two thousand writing mediums in the United States alone four years after the foundation of the movement.

Mrs. Piper was chiefly an automatic writer in the latter part of her famous career as a medium, but we need scarcely discuss further her accomplishments. In her later years she said that she did not claim to be controlled by spirits, and this is sometimes wrongly described as a confession of fraud. What she directly meant was that she did not profess any opinion as to the source of the knowledge she gave to sitters. She seemed to favour the theory of telepathy. When, however, we remember

that she spoke constantly in the name of spirits (Longfellow, Phinuit, Pelham, Myers, etc.), the plea seems curious. Those who believe that she was really in a sort of trance-state, and knew not what she was doing, may be disposed to accept Podmore's theory, that her subconscious personality dramatized these various spirits or supposed spirits. Some of us do not like this idea of trance. In the hundreds of exact records of proceedings with mediums that I have read, I have not seen a page that suggested a genuine "trance," but I have noted scores and scores of passages which showed that the medium feigned to be in a trance, but was very wide awake.

Mrs. Thompson is another clairvoyant and automatic writer who has been much appreciated by modern Spiritualists. It is well to recall that before 1898 she was a medium for "physical phenomena." She even brought about materializations. Then she met Mr. Myers, and her powers assumed a more refined form. Dr. Hodgson, that quaint mixture of blunt criticism and occasional credulity, had six sittings with her, and roundly stated that she was a fraud. The correct information which she gave him was, he said, taken from letters to which she had access, or from works of reference like *Who's Who*. In one case, which made a great impression, she gave some remarkably abstruse and correct information. It was afterwards found that the facts were stated in an old diary which had belonged to her husband. She herself produced the diary, and said that she had never read it; so, of course, everybody believed her. When Professor Sidgwick died, in 1900, his "spirit" used to communicate through her. She reproduced his manner, and even his writing (which she said she had never seen), very fairly; but she could give no communication from him of "evidential" value.

The impersonation of dead people by the "entranced" medium makes a great impression on Spiritualists. It is difficult to understand why. One medium quite convinced a friend of mine by such a performance. She sat, in the circle, in a trance one day, when she suddenly rose from her chair, stroked an imaginary moustache, and began to speak in a gruff voice. "He"—the young lady had become a cavalry man—explained in a dazed way that he had died at Knightsbridge Barracks on the previous day, and gave his name. Great was the joy of the elect on finding afterwards that a soldier of the name had died at Knightsbridge on the previous day.

It was quite childish. It is just by learning such out-of-the-way facts, as they easily can, and making use of them, that the mediums keep up their reputations. There was no reason whatever why the medium should not have learned of the death and made so profitable a use of it. Stainton Moses often did such things. One day he was possessed by the spirit of a cabman who said that he had been killed on the streets of London that very afternoon. By an unusual oversight the spirit did not give his name. It was afterwards found that the accident was reported in an evening paper which Stainton Moses *might* have seen just before the séance; and, by a curious coincidence, the reporter had not given the cabman's name. In other cases, where mediums had been invited to districts with which they were not familiar, yet they gave quite accurate details about local dead, it was found on inquiry that the information *might* have been gathered from the stones in the local cemetery.

A common retort of the Spiritualist, when you point out the possibility of the medium impersonating the dead, is that, "if she did so, she must be one of the cleverest actresses in England." You are asked, triumphantly, why the lady should be content with a few pounds a week as a despised medium, when she might be making five thousand a year on a stage. Any person who has seen these "trances" will know the value of their "dramatic" art. Almost anybody could do it. The medium makes from three to five pounds a week by such things, but if she tried the stage she would have, at the most, a minor part with fifty or sixty pounds a year. Spiritualists get their judgments weirdly distorted by their bias. I need only quote the extravagant language in which Sir A. C. Doyle refers to Mr. Vale Owen's trash or Mrs. Spencer's picture of Christ. He makes the miracle in which he wishes to believe.

Two particular cases of spirit messages by automatic writing have lately been pressed upon us, and we must briefly examine them. One is given in a book by Mr. F. Bligh Bond, called *The Gate of Remembrance*, which is recommended to us by Sir A. C. Doyle as one of the five particularly convincing works which he would have us read. He again fails to tell his readers that Mr. Bligh Bond draws a very different conclusion than his own from the facts. He has a mystical theory of a universal memory or consciousness, a sort of ocean into which the memories of the dead have flowed. He does not believe that the individual spirits of the dead monks of

pre-Reformation days came along and dictated their views through his automatic-writing friend.

Any person, however, who reads the book impartially will see no need for either the Spiritualist view or Mr. Bond's. The main point is that, through Mr. Bond's friend, Mr. John Alleyne, what purported to be the ghosts of the old monks of Glastonbury Abbey wrote quite vivid sketches of their medieval life in the Abbey and, particularly, suggested the position and general features of a chapel that was at the time unknown. As to the character or impersonation of the monks, which seems to Spiritualists so impressive, we are told by experts on medieval language that it will not sustain criticism. The language is quaint and pleasant to read, but it is not consistent either in old English or Latin. It is the language of a man who is familiar with medieval English and Latin, but does not speak it as his *own* language, and so often trips. It is, in other words, Mr. John Alleyne writing old English and medieval Latin, and stumbling occasionally.

As to the indication of a buried chapel, both this and the general impersonation of the old monks are intelligible to any man who has read the book itself, not Spiritualist accounts of it. Mr. Bond, an architect and archæologist, expected to be appointed to the charge of the ruins, and he and his friend Mr. Alleyne steeped themselves, all through the year 1907, in the literature of the subject. They read all that was known about Glastonbury, and lived for months in the medieval atmosphere. Then Mr. Alleyne took his pencil and began to write automatically. The general result is not strange; nor is it at all supernatural that he should have formed a theory about the lost chapel and conveyed this to paper in the guise of a message from one of the old monks.

The next work recommended to us is a short paper by Mr. Gerald Balfour called "The Ear of Dionysius" (published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*, vol. xxix, March, 1917). The writing medium, Mrs. Verrall, a Cambridge lady of a highly cultivated and refined type and an excellent classical scholar, found in her automatic "script" on August 26, 1910, a reference to "the Ear of Dionysius." Three years and a-half later another writing medium, Mrs. Willett, got one of those rambling and incoherent messages, which are customary, in reference to "the Ear of Dionysius." This seemed to be more than a coincidence, as Mrs. Willett is

no classical scholar. But Mr. Balfour candidly warns us that Mrs. Willett said that she had heard nothing about the earlier reference to the Ear of Dionysius in Mrs. Verrall's case. It would be remarkable if the fact had been kept entirely secret for three and a-half years, as some importance was attached to it in psychic circles, and we may prefer to trust Mr. Balfour's memory rather than Mrs. Willett's. He says that he feels sure that one day, in the long interval, Mrs. Willett asked him what the Ear of Dionysius was.

Mr. Balfour, however, believes that in the sequel we have fair evidence of spirit communication. The reader who is not familiar with these matters should know that a new test had been devised for controlling the origin of these messages. It was felt that if the "spirit" of one of the dead psychical researchers (who could no longer read or remember the sealed messages they had left) were to give an unintelligible message to one medium, a second unintelligible message to a second medium, and then the key to both to either or to a third medium, and if the contents of these messages were strictly withheld from the mediums (each knowing only her own part), a very definite proof of spirit origin would be afforded. Thus the ghost of Mr. Verrall or Mr. Myers might take a line of an obscure Greek poet, give one word of it to Mrs. Thompson, another to Mrs. Willett, and then point out the connection through Mrs. Verrall. Mr. Balfour claims that this was done in connection with the Ear of Dionysius. Mrs. Willett, who does not know Latin or Greek, got messages containing a number of classical allusions. Among them was one which no one could understand, and the key to this was some time afterwards given in the automatic writing of Mrs. Verrall.

The reader will now begin to understand the serious and respectable part of modern Spiritualism. I presume that these cultivated Spiritualists regard the "physical phenomena" of the movement and the ordinary mediums with the same contempt that I do. They know that fraud is being perpetrated daily, and that the history of the movement, since its beginning in 1848, has reeked with fraud. It is on these refined messages and cross-references that they would stake their faith.

But, while we readily grant that these things offer an arguable case and must not be dismissed with the disdain which we have shown in the previous chapters, we feel that the new basis is altogether insecure and inadequate. Two mediums get a reference to so remote and unlikely a thing

as "the Ear of Dionysius." When you put it in this simple form it sounds impressive; but we saw that there was an interval of three and a-half years, and we do not feel at all sure that people so profoundly interested, so religiously eager, in these matters would succeed in keeping the first communication entirely from the ears of medium No. 2. In point of fact, Mr. Balfour tells us that he has a distinct recollection of being asked by Mrs. Willett, during the interval, what the Ear of Dionysius was. Mrs. Willett denies it. We shall probably prefer the disinterested memory of Mr. Balfour. Now, the very same weakness is found even in the second part of the story. For any evidential value it rests on two very large suppositions:—

1. That one medium knew absolutely nothing about the most interesting and promising development which was for months agitating the minds of her own friends.
2. That another medium heroically refrained from reading up any classical dictionaries or works on the subject, and reserved her mind strictly for whatever information the spirits might give her.

One can scarcely be called hypercritical if one has doubts about these suppositions. There does not seem to be any room for the theory either of telepathy or of spirit communication.

The two experiences I have just analysed are selected by Sir A. C. Doyle as the most convincing in the whole of the work of the more modern and more refined Spiritualists. I need not linger over other experiences of these automatic writers. For the most part, automatic writing provides only vapid or inaccurate stuff which is its own refutation. In the early years, when Franklin, Shakespeare, Plato, and all the most illustrious dead wrote nonsense of the most vapoury description, the situation was quite grotesque. Nor is this kind of thing yet extinct. There are mediums practising in London to-day who put the sitter in communication with the sages and poets of ancient times. In the very best of these cases there is a certain silliness about the communications which makes them difficult to read. Even the spirits of Myers and Verrall seem to be in a perpetual Bank-Holiday mood, making naive little puns and jokes, and talking in the rambling, incoherent way that scholars do only in hours of domestic dissipation. There is a world thirsting (it is said) for proof that the dead still

live. Here are (it is said) men like W. T. Stead, Myers, Hodgson, Verrall, Sidgwick, Vice-Admiral Moore, Robert Owen, etc., at the "other end of the wire," as William James used to say. Yet, apparently, nothing can be said or done that quite clearly goes beyond the power of the mediums. The arrogance of the Spiritualists in the circumstances is amazing.

There are a dozen ways in which the theory could be rigorously tested. One has been tried and completely failed: the communication of messages which were left in proper custody before death. We shall, of course, presently have an announcement that such a message has been read. Some zealous Spiritualist will leave a sealed message, and will take care that some medium or other is able to read it. We may be prepared for such things. The fact is that half-a-dozen serious and reliable Spiritualists have tried this test, and it has hopelessly miscarried. Another test was that devised by Dr. Hodgson—to leave messages in cipher, though not sealed. This also has completely failed. A third test would be for one of these ghosts of learned Cambridge men, who are so fluent on things that do not matter, to dictate a passage from an obscure Greek poet through a medium who does not know Greek *at the request of a sitter*. It is a familiar and ancient trick for a medium to recite or write a passage in a foreign language. It has been learned beforehand. But let a scholar ask the spirit of a dead scholar to spell out through the ignorant medium *there and then* a specified line or passage within his knowledge. I have tried the experiment. It never succeeds. Another test would be for one of these ghostly scholars to dictate a word of a line of some obscure Greek poet (chosen by the sitter) to one medium (ignorant of Greek), and another word of the same line to another medium immediately afterwards, before there was the remotest possibility of communication.

A score of such tests could be devised. Three of the best writing mediums the Society for Psychical Research cares to indicate could be accommodated, under proper observation, in different rooms of the same building, and these tests carried out. We could invite the spirit to pass from medium to medium and repeat the message to all three, or give a part to each. Until some such rigorous inquiry is carried out, we may decline to be interested. I have before me several volumes of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. Candidly, they are full of trash and padding.

There is very little that merits serious consideration, and nothing that is not weakened by uncertainties, suppressions, and over-zealous eagerness.

In fine, what impresses any man who reads much of all the volumes of "revelation" which have been vouchsafed to us is the entirely *earthly* character of it all. The Spiritualist theory is that men grow rapidly wiser after death. Plato is two thousand years wiser than he was when he lived. Ptah-hotep is six thousand years older and wiser. Neither these, nor Buddha nor Christ nor any other moralist, has a word of wisdom for us. In fact, a theory has had to be invented which supposes that they move away from the earth to distant regions of the spirit-world as they grow older, and so cannot communicate. It is a pity they are not "permitted" to do so for propaganda purposes. But even those who remain in communication have learned nothing since they left the earth. No discovery has ever yet been communicated to us. In Spiritualist literature, it is true, there is a claim that certain unknown facts about the satellites of Uranus were revealed; but Flammarion makes short work of the claim. The communications *never* rise above the level of the thought and knowledge of living humanity: never even above the level of the knowledge available to the mediums. It is scarcely an "insanity of incredulity" to suppose that they originated there.

CHAPTER IX

GHOST-LAND AND ITS CITIZENS

About twenty years ago a writing medium, a sober professional man whose character would not be questioned, showed me a pile of his automatic "script." He sincerely believed that he had for several years been in communication with the dead. I glanced over many sheets of platitude and familiar moralizing, and then asked him to tell me how they described the new world in which the dead lived. He hesitated, and tried to convince me that this point, which seemed to me the most interesting of all, was unimportant. When I pressed, he said that it was a world so different from ours that the spirits could hardly convey a coherent description of it in our language. They had to be content with such vague phrases as that they "lived in houses of flowers."

That was the state of the "new revelation" twenty years ago. Long before that whole volumes of quite precise description of ghost-land had been written, but it was discredited. Andrew Jackson Davis had invented the name "Summerland," which Sir A. C. Doyle adopts to-day; but Davis's wonderful gospel had turned out to be a farrago of wild speculation, founded on an imperfect grasp of a crude, early stage of science. Then Stainton Moses and hundreds of other automatic writers had given us knowledge about the next world. A common feature of these early descriptions was that the dead lived in a quasi-material universe round about the earth and could visit the various planets and the sun at any time. In that case, of course, they could give most valuable assistance to our astronomers, and they were quite willing. Some said that there were living beings on the sun. As a matter of fact, one of our early astronomers had conjectured that there might be a cool, dark surface below the shining clouds which give out the light of the sun, and this "spirit" was following his lead. We know to-day that no part of the sun falls below a temperature of 7,000° C. Others described life on Jupiter and Saturn, and we now know that they are red-hot. Another medium, Helen Smith, attracted to herself a most romantic interest for years because she was controlled by the spirit of

a late inhabitant of the planet Mars, and we learned a marvellous amount of weird detail about life on Mars.

The thing was so obviously overdone, and Spiritualism was so generally discredited in the eighties on account of the very numerous exposures of mediums, that for a time revelations were less frequent. People fell back very largely on the older belief, that the dead are "pure spirits," living in an environment that cannot be described in our language, which is material. This, in point of fact, is a hollow and insincere pretext. Philosophers have been accustomed for two thousand years to describe the life of the spirit, and have provided a vocabulary for any who are interested in it. The truth is that ideas were changing, and mediums were not at all sure what it was safe to say.

Towards the close of the century there was some revival of Spiritualism, and there were fresh attempts to describe the beautiful world beyond the grave. Mediums were then in the "houses of flowers" stage. It sounded very pretty, but you must not take it literally. With the advance of the new century, mediums recovered all their confidence. It was at the beginning of the present century that physicists began to discover that matter was composed of electrons, and "ether" was the most discussed subject in the whole scientific press. Here was a grand opportunity. A world of ether would not be so crudely Materialistic as the earlier post-mortem world of the mediums. Yet it might be moulded by the imagination into a more or less material shape. It must be frankly admitted that the "pure spirit" idea is not attractive. Those who yearn to meet again the people they had known and loved are a little chilled at the prospect of finding only what seems to be an abstraction, a mere mathematical point, a thing paler and less tangible than a streak of mist. Ether was therefore gladly seized as a good compromise. Ghost-land was in the ether of space.

There had been, it is true, earlier references in Spiritualist revelations to "ether bodies," but it is chiefly since the series of discoveries in science to which radium led that the modern Spiritualist idea has been evolved. As usual, the spiritual revelations follow in the rear of advancing science. But in this case the automatic writers had a great advantage. They need only follow the lead of Sir Oliver Lodge, who, however curious his ideas of physiology may be, is certainly an authority on ether. He began by hinting

mysteriously that he saw "a spiritual significance" in ether. Following up that clue, the automatic writers have worked so industriously that we now know the "Summerland" more thoroughly than we know Central Africa or Thibet.

Buoyed up by the growing sentiment of agreement, as proved by the very profitable sales of his works, Sir Oliver Lodge, in *Raymond*, gave the world a vast amount of detail about the land beyond the grave. He did not guarantee it, it is true. That is not his way. But he assured the public that his mediums were undoubtedly "in touch" with his dead son, and the Spiritualist public must be pardoned if they understood that all the marvellous matter put out in the name of Raymond was to be taken seriously. The message was really ingenious. Raymond was, unhappily, not merely unable to give "direct voice" communications, as Sir A. C. Doyle's son is believed to have done, but he could not even directly communicate through Mrs. Leonard, the medium. He used as an intermediary the spirit of a child named "Feda"; and, of course, when one has to use a child—and such an irresponsible, lisping, foolish little child as "Feda"—as intermediary, you must not press the message literally in every part. The method had the advantage of pleasing Spiritualists, who found a complete confirmation of all their speculations about ghost-land, and at the same time disarming critics, because Raymond was not really responsible.

Many people did not fully realize this when they bore down heavily and contemptuously on the description of the next world which is given in *Raymond*. The deceased young officer had a "nice doggie," which he brought along with him when he strolled to the medium's shop to send a message to his distinguished father. Presently the medium added a "cat," though she said nothing about a cats'-meat man. Raymond had also what I believe young officers call "a bird"—a young lady acquaintance on spiritual terms. There were cows in the spirit meadows and flowers in the gardens. Our "damaged flowers," we are told, pass over to the other side and raise their heads once more gloriously. Why they flower if there are no bees, whether they have chlorophyll circulating in their leaves, whether the soil is sandy or clayey, etc., we are not told. The information comes in chance clots, as if Raymond were too busy with ethereal billiards to study the natural history of ghostland very closely. We are told to picture Raymond in a real suit of clothes. He was offered the orthodox white sheet, which every

right-minded spirit wears; but he had a British young man's repugnance to that sort of thing. So in the laboratories on the other side they made Raymond an ordinary suit, out of "damaged worsted" which we earthly wasters had no use for. For other young officers, with less refined tastes, they manufactured whisky-and-soda and cigars. "Don't think I'm stretching it," Raymond observed to his father, through "Feda" and Mrs. Leonard. The father does not say what he thought.

Now, it is, as I said, quite wrong for Spiritualists to plant all this upon the authority of Sir Oliver Lodge. Does he not warn us in a footnote that he has "not yet traced the source of all this supposed information"? It would not take most of us long to do so, but the remark at least leaves open a way of retreat for Sir Oliver Lodge. On the other hand, we must not blame Spiritualists too severely. He assures them that this lady, Mrs. Leonard, is in undoubted communication with his dead son, and one may question whether he is entitled to take one part of the lady's message as genuine and leave other parts open. At all events, this puerile and bewildering nonsense was put before the world in an expensive book by Sir Oliver Lodge, with his personal assurance that Mrs. Leonard was a genuine medium.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle next gathered details from scores of revelations of this kind—they fell upon us like leaves in Vallombrosa after Sir Oliver Lodge's bold lead—and built them into a consistent picture of "Summerland." It is an ether world. Each of us has a duplicate of his body in ether. This is quite in harmony with science, he says, because some one has discovered that "bound" ether—that is to say, ether enclosed in a material body—is different from the free ether of space. From this slight difference Sir A. C. Doyle concludes that there is a portion of ether shaped exactly like my body; then, by a still more heroic leap of the imagination, he gathers that this special ether has not merely the contour of my body, but duplicates all its internal organs and minute parts; and lastly—this is a really prodigious leap—he supposes that this ether duplicate will remain when the body dissolves. On that theory, naturally, every flower and tree and rock that ever existed, every house or ship that was ever built, every oyster or chicken that was ever swallowed, has left an ether duplicate somewhere.

Well, when you die, your ethereal body remains, and is animated by your soul just as the body of flesh was. A death-bed is, on the new view, a most remarkable scene. Men and women weep round the ghastly expiring frame, but all round them are invisible (ether) beings smiling and joyful. When the last breath leaves the prostrate body, you stand erect in your ethereal frame, and your ethereal friends gather round and wring your ethereal hand. Congratulations over, one radiant spirit takes you by the hand and leads you through the solid wall and out into the beyond. Presumably he is in a hurry to fit you with one of the "damaged worsted" suits. Sir Arthur stresses the fact that they have the same sense of modesty as we.

The next step is rather vague. One gathers that the reborn man is dazed, and he goes to sleep for weeks or months. Sleep is generally understood to be a natural process by which nerve and muscle, which have become loaded with chemical refuse, are relieved of this by the blood. What it means in ghostland we have not the least idea. But why puzzle over details where all is a challenge to common human reason? You awaken presently in Summerland and get your bearings. This is so much like the paradise described by Mr. Vale Owen that we will put ourselves under the guidance of that gentleman. I would merely note here a little inconsistency in the gospel according to St. Conan.

One of the now discovered charms of Summerland is that the young rapidly reach maturity, and the old go back to maturity. The ether-duplicate of the stillborn child continues to grow—we would give much for a treatise from Professor Huxley (in his new incarnation) on this process of growth without mitosis and metabolism—and the ether-duplicate of the shrunken old lady of eighty smoothes out its wrinkles, straightens its back, and recovers its fine contour of adipose tissue. But here a difficulty occurred to Sir A. C. Doyle. In his lectures all over the kingdom he has had to outbid the preacher. *I promise you*, he told bereaved mothers, that you shall see again just the blue-eyed, golden-haired child that you lost. He even says this in his book. With all goodwill, we cannot let him have it both ways. If children rapidly mature, mothers will not see the golden-haired child again.

At the risk of seeming meticulous, I would point out another aspect of the revelation on which more information is desirable. Golden hair implies a certain chemical combination which is well known to the physiologist. Blue

eyes mean a certain degree of thinness of pigment on the front curtains of the eye. Now, ether has no chemical elements. It is precisely the subtle substance of the universe which is not yet moulded into chemical elements. Are we to take it that Summerland is really a material universe, not an ether world?

As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has glowingly praised the revelations which have come through the Rev. Mr. Vale Owen, I turn to these for closer guidance, and I find that my suspicion is correct. The next world is a material world. Whether it has a different sun from ours is not stated, but it is a world of wonderful colour. Flowers of the most gorgeous description live in it perpetually. Whether they ever grew up or will ever decay, whether they have roots in soil and need water, the prophet has not yet told us. But the world is lovely with masses of flowers. People also dress like the flowers. They have beautifully coloured robes and gems (none of your "damaged worsted" for Mr. Vale Owen). In other words, light, never-fading light, is the grand feature of the next world. Since ether does not reflect light, it is obviously a material universe.

Music is the second grand element. Perhaps Mr. Owen would dispute this, and say that preaching is the outstanding feature. Certainly, everybody he describes preaches so constantly and so dully that many people will not like the prospect. Let us take it, rather, that music is the second great feature. They have great factories for musical instruments which make a mockery of Brinsmeads. The bands go up high towers and produce effects which no earthly musician ever dreamed of producing. It follows, of course, that the ghosts not only tread a solid soil, in which flowers grow, on which they build towers and mansions, but a very considerable atmosphere floats above the soil. Mr. Vale Owen, in fact, introduces streams and sheets of water; lovely lakes and rivers for the good ghosts and "stagnant pools" in the slums of ghostland. We will not press this. Mr. Owen forgot for a moment that it *never rains* in Summerland. But the atmosphere is an essential part of the revelation, as without it there will certainly be no music or flying birds. And an atmosphere means a very solid material world. Our moon, which weighs millions of billions of tons, is too light to possess an atmosphere and water. Consequently, there must be thousands of miles of solid rock and metal underfoot in ghostland.

It follows further that, since ghostland is very spacious, and since at least a billion humans (to say nothing of animals) have quitted this earth since the ape men first wandered over it, this other material universe must be very extensive. If all the inhabited planets in the universe have their Summerlands, or all pour their dead into one vast Summerland, one begins to see that modern science is a ridiculous illusion. We should not see the sun, to say nothing of stars a thousand billion miles away, or even remoter nebulæ. As to astronomical calculations of mass and gravitation....

I can sustain the comedy no longer. These "revelations" are the most childish twaddle that has been put before our race since the Middle Ages. They are the meanderings of imaginations on a level with that of a fifteen-year-old school-girl. One really begins to wonder if our generation is *not* in a state of senile decay, when tens of thousands of us acclaim this sort of thing as an outcome of superhuman intelligence. It is on a level with the "happy hunting grounds" of the Amerind. It is a dreamy parson's idea of the kind of world he would like to retire to, and continue to "do good" without getting tired. It is a flimsy, irresponsible, juvenile thing of paint and tinsel and gold-foil: the kind of transformation-scene in which we revelled, at the Christmas pantomime, when we were young. Our generation needs guidance if ever any generation of men did. Another great war would wreck the planet. The social soil heaves with underground movements. The stars are hidden from view. And people come before us with this kind of insipid puerility, and tell us it is "the greatest message ever offered to man."

Seriously, what it is can be told in few words. It is partly a fresh attempt to bring our generation back to religion. It is partly an attempt to divert working people from the politics and economics of *this* world. And it is partly a fresh outbreak of the unlimited credulity which every epidemic of Spiritualism has developed since 1848. There was such a phase in the fifties of the nineteenth century, when Spiritualism swept over the world. There was a second such phase in the seventies, when materializations began. This was checked by exposures everywhere in the early eighties, and not until our time has Spiritualism partly recovered. Now the vast and lamentable emotional disturbance of the War has given it a fresh opportunity, and for a time the flame of credulity has soared up again.

To come back to the question which forms the title of this book, the reader may supply the answer, but I will venture to offer him a few summary reflections. We do well to distinguish two classes of phenomena. Broadly, but by no means exactly, this is the distinction between psychical and physical phenomena. Messages on slates or paper from the spirit-world I would class with the physical phenomena. We have seen that they reek with fraud, and there is no serious claim that any of them are genuine.

The nearest we can get to a useful division is to set on one side a small class of mediums of high character who claim that, in trance and script, they are spirit-controlled.

Spiritualism is not based on these things. The thousands of enthusiastic Spiritualists of Great Britain and America know nothing about the "Ear of Dionysius" and the "cross-correspondences" of the Psychological Researchers. Their faith is solidly based on physical phenomena. They are taught by their leaders to base it on physical phenomena. Sir A. C. Doyle and Sir W. Barrett urge the levitations and other miracles of D. D. Home and Stainton Moses and Kathleen Goligher. Sir Oliver Lodge—who seems also to admit the preceding—asks us to consider seriously the performances of Marthe Beraud. Sir W. Crookes lets it be understood that to the day of his death he believed in "Katie King" and the spirit-played accordion. Professor Richet, and all those other professors and scholars whose names are fondly quoted by Spiritualists, rely entirely on physical phenomena. If you cut out all the physical-phenomena mediums of the nineteenth century, and all the ghost-photographs and "direct voices" of to-day, you have very little left. That is to say that Spiritualism is generally based on fraud.

Does it matter? Yes, it matters exceedingly. It matters more than it ever did before. The world is at a pass where it needs the clearest-headed attention and warmest interest of every man and woman in every civilization. Fine sentiments, too, we want; but not a sentimentality that palsies the judgment. Men never faced graver problems or had a greater opportunity. Instead of distraction we want concentration on earth. Instead of dreaminess we want a close appreciation of realities. There lies before our generation a period either of greater general prosperity than was ever known before, or a period of prolonged and devastating struggle. Which it shall be depends on our wisdom.

Is there any need to settle whether we shall live after death? The Spiritualist says that if we could convince men that their lot in that other world will be decided by their characters they will be more eager for justice, honour, and sobriety. But a man's position in *this* world is settled by his character. Justice, honour, and sobriety are laws of *this* world. Men would have perceived it long ago, and acted accordingly, but for the unfortunate belief that these qualities were arbitrarily commanded by supernatural powers. We need no other-worldly motives whatever for the cultivation of character. Indeed, so far as I can see, the man who gambles and drinks is more likely to say to the Spiritualist: "You tell me there is no vindictive hell for what I do here. You tell me there are no horses or fiery drinks in that other world. Then I will drink and bet while the opportunity remains, and be sober and prudent afterwards."

But the dead, the loved ones we have lost! Must we forfeit this new hope that we may see them again? Let us make no mistake. Half the civilized world has already forfeited it. Six million people in London never approach a church, and the vast majority of these believe no longer in heaven. So it is in the large towns of nearly every civilization. Yet the number of Spiritualists in the entire world is not one-tenth the number of "pagans" in London alone. And there is no weeping and gnashing of teeth. At the time of the wrench one suffers. Slowly nature embalms the wound, as she already draws her green mantle over the hideous wounds of France and Belgium. We learn serenity. Life is a gift. Every friend and dear one is a gift. It is not wise to complain that gifts do not last for ever.

The finest sentiment you can bestow on the memory of the dead is to make the world better for the living. Has your child been torn from you? In its memory try to make the world safer and happier for the myriads of children who remain. This earth is but a poor drab thing compared with what it could be made in a single generation. Hotbeds of disease abound in our cities, and children fall in scandalous numbers in the heat of summer or perish in the blasts of winter. Let the pain of loss drive us survivors into securing that losses shall be less frequent and less painful. Do not listen to those who say that critics crush the voice of the heart in the name of reason. We want all the heart we can get in life, all the strength of emotion and devotion we can engender. But let it be expended on the plain, and plainly profitable, task of making this earth a Summerland. Do that, as your leisure and your powers

permit, and, when the day is over, you will lie down with a smile, whether you are ever to awaken or are to sleep for ever.



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