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least partial membership, by virtue of his conversion, in the Body of Christ; the missionary would be saved from adopting in the name of morality a course of action towards the rejected wives which is of doubtful morality and which might not command the sanction of Christ; and the African would feel that at least the Church understood his difficulties and was prepared to go out to meet them. Above all, a great deal of hypocrisy and secret polygamy would be prevented. Since this suggested permissive polygamy would not apply to single or monogamous converts, nor to those baptized in infancy into the society of the Church, this *ad interim* ethic would not be of long duration. But, in the opinion of the writer, the Church would lose nothing by it, and gain much.

Our survey of the data has not led us to any startling conclusions. Church history, and an intimate knowledge of the African, are an insurance against allowing any easy entry into the Church; the Early Church was a rallying-point for heroes

because it offered a very definite Cross, and it would be fatal to a young Church to take away all its difficulties and to remove its Cross. But it seems to me to be not less but more Christian to make condemnation and full ethical teaching walk hand in hand with pardoning and understanding; and it may be questioned whether the male hierarchy of the Church officials has not rather forgotten the point of view of the women, in making the driving away of surplus wives an essential condition of baptism for a convert from polygamous paganism. Where the issue is whether or not a polygamous convert should discipline his over-exercised sexual instinct as his price for obtaining Christian baptism, the answer quite definitely is that he must do so, and that Christianity provides the power with which he is to do it; where the issue is whether undeserving women should suffer hardship and distress to allow him to be baptized, my own opinion is quite definite that an *ad interim* is permissible and moral.

Spiritualism regarded as a Religion.

BY THE REVEREND W. J. SPARROW SIMPSON, D.D., ILFORD.

SPIRITUALISM is fundamentally the reception by the living of messages sent from the departed. As such, it belongs to the province of scientific inquiry by the Society for Psychical Research. Upon the results of these investigations, asserted to be verified, there has arisen a new religion. Our concern is with this religion based on the psychical phenomena. A very vigorous advocacy of Spiritualism as the coming religion of the world has recently appeared from the pen of Mr. Arthur Findlay.

Half the volume consists of an attempt to demolish all the old religions of the world. The author aspires to clear the ground of what he regards as the mythological accumulation of the ages. Destructive efforts are chiefly concentrated against Christianity, partly on the plea that its principal doctrines can be paralleled in all sorts of primitive religions. Virgin births and Saviour deities are frequent occurrences in the childhood of the race. Christianity itself is asserted to have originated in an age of intense ignorance. The Doctrine of the Trinity is pronounced an absurdity. It is acknowledged that some people still feel the need of a personal Saviour. But that feeling is

treated as the product of an antiquated misconception of human capacity. It is confidently asserted that no supernatural occurrence, so far as our knowledge extends, has ever taken place in the history of the universe.

Accordingly, having, so he thinks, demolished the structure and ruined the foundations of all the historic religions of the human race, and having cleared away the mythological delusions, the author proceeds to construct a new edifice upon the vacant site. The new edifice is the Spiritualist religion, based, of course, on the asserted fact that communications have been received from spirits formerly resident on earth but now translated into the Beyond. This is declared to be the religion of the future. Its advocate looks forward confidently to a time when the principles of the Spiritualist religion will be universally received, and all the creeds and dogmas which surround orthodox religion everywhere will fade away, and mankind will be knit together by this one common belief.

The main principles of Spiritualism are that :
(1) The universe is governed by mind, commonly

called God. (2) That the existence and identity of the individual continues after the change called death. (3) That communications, under suitable conditions, take place between us here on earth and the inhabitants of the etheric world. (4) That our ethical conduct should be guided by the golden rule, given first to the world by the great Confucius—Whatever you would that others would do to you, do it also unto them. (5) That each individual is his own Saviour, and that he cannot look to some one else to bear his sins, and suffer for his mistakes. (6) That each individual reaps as he sows, and gravitates naturally to the place in harmony with his desires. (7) And finally, that the path of progress is never closed, and that there is no known end to the advancement of the individual. These are called the seven Principles of Spiritualism.

With regard to the experience awaiting the departed after death, the new revelation is said to be that 'the first stage beyond this earth is a kind of clearing station, where the different nations live together. Family life is most important; and the members await relatives of their generation to go on together to the next plane.'¹

Conan Doyle was not so sure of this. The communication received from the Unseen World, as he understood it, was that married people did not necessarily meet again, but those who loved each other did meet again.²

It is well to consider, if these pronouncements were genuine messages sent through by inhabitants of the Unseen, what value they would possess. They would certainly prove that survival after death was a reality in certain cases. But they would not prove that survival would be universal. That might be a reasonable inference, amounting to a probability, but it would not by any means be a certainty. Still less would it be the slightest proof of immortality. The fact that men survived the grave is no proof whatever that their survival ensures continued existence to all eternity. Survival might encourage a presumption in favour of that belief, but it could not belong to the region of experienced certainties. It is indeed the essential quality of the future that it is not and cannot be a matter of present experience.

That eminent student of Spiritualist phenomena, and sympathizer with such investigations, Sir William Barrett, warned the Spiritualist from forming conclusions about immortality which the premises of Spiritualism do not justify. 'Here let me remark that the inference commonly drawn

that spirit communications teach us the necessary and inherent immortality of the soul is, in my opinion, a mischievous error. It is true they show us that life *can* exist in the unseen, and—if we accept the evidence for identity—that some we have known on earth are still living and near us, but entrance on a life after death does not necessarily mean *immortality*, that is eternal persistence of our personality; nor does it prove that survival after death extends to *all*. Obviously no experimental evidence can ever demonstrate either of these beliefs, though it may and does remove the objections raised as to the possibility of survival.'³

No spiritualist, therefore, can reasonably criticise Christianity for involving an exercise of faith, or for assenting to propositions where demonstration cannot be attained. For when the Spiritualist accepts accounts of the Unseen State on the authority of communications received through a Medium from the Unseen World, he is himself just as certainly exercising faith. He is relying on the capacity of the departed to give him accurate information. He is also relying on assurances about the eternal duration of the soul which are impossible to verify by any tests or methods within the reach of science.

It is, therefore, useless to claim that Spiritualism makes religion no longer a matter of faith, but of actual experience and fact. For this is simply not the case. No doctrine of personal immortality, and of indefinite progress hereafter, can ever be to men in this life a matter of experience. It can only be a matter of faith. To attempt to make religion no longer a matter of faith is to attempt the impossible.⁴

There is a good deal of the information said to come from the World Unseen which, to judge from its quality, might well have been acquired by the speaker while still on earth. It does not display the other-worldliness and the spiritual insight which familiarity with the Beyond might fairly be expected to have created. Spiritualists have themselves complained that communications have come from very inferior specimens of the population in heavenly places, and have frankly acknowledged the necessity of a careful sifting and classification of the statements which have been received.

One of the pioneers of Spiritualism in England was asked by Conan Doyle why it was that some of the communications from the Unseen were foolish and some of them absolutely false. To this inquiry the pioneer replied that this present world

¹ Findlay, *The Rock of Truth*, 267.

² *The New Revelation*, 34.

³ *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, 287.

⁴ Conan Doyle, *ibid.* 51.

is full of weak and foolish people. So also is the next. These foolish and false replies proceed from inferior denizens of the Unseen World. The novelist owns that the explanation failed to satisfy him at the time. But he came to think it a rough approximation to the truth.

Lady Glenconner, while full of admiration for Spiritualism, criticised the inferior messages in very telling terms—'communication with entities who are, if we may judge by their remarks, of no higher soul-stature than many still in the body with whom we would not care to spend our time. These have our goodwill, but we do not desire their company. It is these who, with their comrades of the earth-plane, have done so much to depreciate the truth, and who have left the subject open to the rightly strong and just denunciation of the Church on the one hand, while on the other it is delivered over to the Press, which treats it with inexcusable levity.'¹

The information which the Seven Principles of Spiritualism contain can scarcely be called original. With the solitary exception of the theory that the dead possess an etheric body, which is in form and feature the exact counterpart of the physical, there seems very little in these Seven Principles which might not be derived from somewhat hazy recollections retained by an individual somewhat inadequately instructed in religion while living on earth. The idea that the universe is governed by mind, that personal identity continues after death, that individual immortality is true, and that each individual reaps what he sows, and will go to his own appropriate place, bear a striking resemblance to the average Englishman's conception of religion. It is little more than a rudimentary religion deprived of any adequate ideas of Deity, and with the supernatural reduced to its very lowest measure.

The chief characteristic of Spiritualism as here represented is that its concern is almost entirely with men, and has very little, in fact almost nothing, to do with Deity. It is indeed declared that the universe is governed by mind—commonly called God. This doctrine is, in fact, the first of the Seven Principles of the Spiritualist religion. But, after that announcement, Deity practically disappears. There is not the slightest trace of anything approaching communion with God. It is a religion in which the whole interest is concentrated on man, and man is made the real purpose of the universe, and the only object of attraction. There is no suggestion that God has any absorbing interest in man, or that man has anything more than a

¹ *The Wonders of the Saints*, 10.

distant purely speculative interest in God. All the conceptions of the great theistic religions are left out. Practically nothing remains but the immortality of man and the progress of man.

There is, however, another conception of religion which can hardly be left out of sight if regard is paid to history. The essence of religion is not man, but God. The purpose of religion is that God and man should be united. And there are many Spiritualists who certainly would not deny this.

There are, however, Spiritualists who assert that creeds and dogmas stifle the mind, and give the believers in them a sense of superiority. Nevertheless the Spiritualist is a believer in dogma himself. The immortality of every individual human person is a dogma; a dogma of a stupendous character; a dogma, moreover, which to many a modern doubter belongs to the order of things incredible, and which in any case can only be accepted by an act of faith.

There seems no obvious reason in the nature of things why a Spiritualist should restrict his religion to the information he receives through a medium from the Invisible World. Why should not truth come to him in other ways? Does the Spiritualist consider that all his knowledge of religion, and his moral ideals, have come to him through voices from the other world? Has he not derived some of them at least from the experience of men still living here on earth? The golden rule of doing to others as we would have them do unto us this Spiritualist writer attributes to Confucius. It is a rule which Confucius delivered while living here among men; not after he had become an inhabitant of the world invisible. Yet the author places this golden rule acquired from a teacher on earth among the seven principles of Spiritualism.

But if one of the seven main principles of the Spiritualist religion is derived from a Chinese moralist on earth, and not from a resident in Etheria (the Spiritualist name for Heaven), there seems no obvious reason why a Spiritualist should not also keep an open mind towards the possibility of acquiring other religious information from the experience of the human race while it was resident here on earth.

There is something strangely uncritical in a mentality which repudiates wholesale all the spiritual experiences of humanity in all the great historic religions, and then endeavours to establish a new world-religion exclusively on the basis of psychical research. Why this exclusiveness? An open mind should be prepared to own that truth may come from very different directions, not only

from one. And it is certainly a fact that many a genuine Spiritualist would not in the least agree with restricting religion to statements derived from one channel of information alone.

If the Spiritualist is willing to listen respectfully to Confucius, why is he not also willing to listen with at least equal respect to Jesus Christ? Yet a singular feature of this exposition of Spiritualism is that it shows no deference whatever to Jesus Christ. The writer asserts confidently that 'belief in Christ does not affect our destination in the least.' From what source is that assertion derived? Is it part of the new revelation derived from the invisible, or a private opinion of the author? We are not told. In either case it is assertion and not proof.

The attitude of individual Spiritualists towards Jesus Christ seems to differ very widely indeed. According to some adherents of the Movement it matters very greatly. In a book called *Jesus Christ at Work*, by R. A. Bush (1929), we are informed that the position of Jesus in relation to the Spiritualist Movement was frequently the subject of questions. Communications were said to be received to the effect that 'the acceptance of the Master as their prince is a source of great potency. You may also accept him without reserve as one to serve. He is a mighty potentate in these realms to lead multitudes to the Light.'¹ It is true that the message was only Unitarian: 'He is a created Being like ourselves.' Yet the advice is given: 'Love him with all your soul and with all your might, and follow him whithersoever he may direct.'

'Psychical Research,' says one of its ablest investigators, Sir William Barrett, 'though it may strengthen the foundations, cannot take the place of religion. . . . For, after all, it deals with the external, though it be in an Unseen World; and its chief value lies in the fulfilment of its work, whereby it reveals to us the inadequacy of the external, either here or hereafter, to satisfy the life of the soul.'²

Conan Doyle was strongly opposed to Sir William Barrett's opinion that psychical research is quite distinct from religion. The novelist urged that Spiritualism teaches us of the continued life of the soul, of the nature of that life, and of how it is

influenced by our conduct here. 'If this is distinct from Religion,' said Conan Doyle, 'I must confess that I do not understand the distinction. To me it *is* Religion—the very essence of it. But that does not mean that it will necessarily crystallise into a new religion. Personally I trust that it will not do so. Surely we are disunited enough already. Rather would I see it the great unifying force, the one provable thing connected with every religion, Christian or non-Christian, forming the common solid basis upon which each raises, if it must needs raise, that separate system which appeals to the varied types of mind.'³

On the other hand, Lady Glenconner fully realizes the mischief inflicted on their own cause by its advocates when they attempt the impossible task of imagining it able to fulfil the functions of religion. 'It must be admitted that Spiritualism has never been more readily debased than by its adherents, who have known too well how to blast by praise. Some contrast it with Christianity. They mistake their candle for the sun.'⁴

Spiritualism of this kind appropriates to itself considerable elements, though by no means the fullness, of the Christian Religion. Sir Oliver Lodge has written in a similar strain. He maintains that 'highest of those who concern themselves directly with this earth, of all the myriads of worlds in infinite space is One on Whom the right instinct of Christianity has always lavished heartfelt reverence and devotion. Those who think that the day of that Messiah is over are strangely mistaken. It has hardly begun. In individual souls Christianity has flourished and borne fruit, but for the ills of the world itself it is an almost untried panacea.' 'My own time down here is getting short: it matters little: but I dare not go till I have borne this testimony to the grace and truth which emanate from that divine Being.'

This reverential estimate of Christ, this appreciation of the value of the Messiah to humanity, falls beneath the creed of Christendom, yet it is an open-minded recognition that Spiritualism cannot dispense with Christianity. It is plain that a Spiritualism which attempts by itself to be the religion of the future is not the Spiritualism which is accepted by a large proportion of its own adherents and advocates.

¹ P. 14.

² *Psychical Research* (1911).

³ *The New Revelation*, 67.

⁴ *The Wonders of the Saints*, 12.