

# SPIRITISM AND REALITY

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IT is inevitable that any period which follows a great war should be marked by an outcropping of spiritism from that intellectual underworld which is its usual abode. Men and women who have seen their sons disappear into darkness pathetically grope to find a road by which they can follow them, while still retaining their own bodies. The wizards that peep and mutter hold high carnival, and their hands are strengthened by the fact that there is logic behind the idea that there can be comradeship between the living and the dead. The wave of psychic literature which engulfed readers of English in the early twenties has spent itself; but the war-made converts to spiritism of that same period are still with us, still groping and fumbling, still seeking light in impenetrable darkness.

Spiritism is based upon the obvious fact that there can be comradeship between two personalities. Once it is admitted that the body of a man is not all of him, that there is something, call it what you will, that burns within him as a living flame in life, and has no connection with his dead flesh, you have a sound basis for a belief that there can be communication with the dead. The fact of death is a purely physical fact. It is the breakdown of the organs which provide food and atmosphere for the individual cells which make up our bodies, and nothing more than that. Its only effect upon the personality is to free it from connection with the body. It cannot in any way change a man's personality, save in adding to his fund of experience a new one, even though it be admitted that it be also an overwhelming one. The spirit of man cannot be fundamentally transformed by a physical experience.

One of the most mysterious things in human life is the fact of comradeship, and it loses none of its mystery through being so common that we take it for granted. Of course, most of our contacts with human beings are little more than mechanical. We pass out the small change of conversation, while we hoard as a miser the pure gold of our own personalities, and it is part of the social convention that we are not astonished when others do likewise. But there are times when the small change is forgotten, and the gold pours forth in a flood from both sides, personalities mix and

hold high communion with one another. This is common experience. Who does not remember the deep searchings of friendly hearts that marked his salad days? And the balanced comradeships of middle life that went deeper into the mysteries than discussion of golf scores and the comparative merits of Pontiac and Buick? The experience of man has always been that personality can hold comradeship with personality.

Since this is true of men while they are living, why should it not also be true of two personalities, one with a body and the other bodiless? The lack of a body cannot change the essence of personality, and it is in the field of that essence that true comradeship, in distinction from ordinary human contacts, exists. Here is where the spiritist makes out his case. He says that the contact of embodied spirit with disembodied spirit is not only theoretically possible, but an actual reality. He admits that the bodiless spirit is at a disadvantage in communicating with the physical world, through the fact that it has lost its bodily contact with that world, but asserts that through the "possession" of the bodies of others, or of material things, it can express itself on its old terms to human life.

There is too much evidence in support of this contention for it to be dismissed cavalierly. The history of séances in all their manifestations, from table rappings to trances, cannot be discounted by the brief statement that all mediums are frauds and all sitters gulls. The work of Owen and Lodge in England, and of Basil King in America, shows that there is, behind much obvious fraud, a residuum which cannot be explained away. Nor does it help matters to state that this residuum is a product of the subconscious mind, since this is simply substituting an abstraction of the professorial study for a citizen of the spirit world. It always calls to memory the legal explanations of Lawyer Evans Chew, whose genius lies in the fact that he can hide his lack of knowledge behind the most mouth-filling words that the Anglo-African language contains. The Society for Psychological Research can make out a case for its contention that disembodied spirits have been in communication with embodied ones. Although the final word has no more been said upon this subject than upon any other, a working hypothesis has been established which covers all the facts as we know them.

While all this may be true, it does not mean that the spiritist way is either a safe or the only way of communion with the spirit world. That it is not safe, is seen by the fact that the spiritist is in exactly the position of a man who hears his telephone bell

ring. Until he takes down the receiver and puts it to his ear, he is in suspense. Is it his wife, or his largest creditor wanting a cheque? Is it a large order for tractors coming in, or is it the office boy's sweetheart wanting to talk to the office boy? Is it his bishop, or his bootlegger? Since all men die, good, bad, and indifferent, the spiritist, be he medium or sitter, can never quite be sure what spirit he may call out from the deep. It may be Abraham Lincoln, but it is quite as likely to be Dr. Crippen. While a conversation with Lincoln might be an inspiration, it is certain that Crippen's presence would not only cast a temporary damper on the party, but might easily end by ruining the whole evening. There is a well authenticated case of two Nova Scotian women experimenting with planchette in a lonely farmhouse one winter's evening, who saw the pencil form the words, "I am from the devil. I hate you." Their interest in psychical research faded instantly. The literature gives many other instances of a similar kind. While the scientist can afford to take them as part of the phenomena which he is investigating, they give cold comfort to the mother who is passionately trying to get into touch with her dead boy, or to the husband who is stretching out eager hands to his wife. The spiritist path is not a safe road for broken hearts to travel.

That there is such a safe road, is a commonplace of the Sunday Schools. Christian experience has always discovered that contact with the spirit world, as represented by God Himself, is directly possible. There is such a thing as mystical communion with God which is quite as real and valid as the mystical communion which exists, for instance, between a man and his wife. The centre and heart of Christianity has throughout its history been a service based upon that fact, and even named with that name, the Holy Communion, nor can it be denied that the experience received at that service is real. This is not the place to dogmatise over theories of what happens when the Bread is blessed and broken. That field is the happy hunting ground of the theologians. The only point that matters is that something does happen. There is a Presence which is as real and definite as the presence of the person who kneels beside you at the altar rail, and this Presence has been the experience of Christians through two thousand years of history.

Of course, it may be argued that all the Christians who have been receiving the Holy Communion since Christ first instituted it have been deceived by their own desire; that they have been the victims of self-hypnosis, or some other long word. It is also possible to argue that the moon is made of green cheese, and no astronomer will be able definitely to deny that lunar theory. All

he can do is to point out that, as far as human experience of the moon and the rest of the universe goes, it is not a lactic protein. In the same way, the Christian has mystical companionship with his living friends, and has the same mystical companionship with God in Holy Communion. Call the experience what you like, nothing can destroy its reality and validity to the man who has undergone it.

If it is possible to have communion with God, Who is disembodied Spirit, it is logical to suppose that it is also possible to have communion with other disembodied spirits through the same channel. That such communion is the experience of Christians, is seen by the fact that a definite statement of it has, almost by chance, found its way into the service. The Preface to the *Sanctus* begins "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name. . . ." The emphasis rests on "all the company of heaven," and it is the experience of Christians that in this service the presence of that company, born to the new life, is as real as is the very Presence of God Himself.

Once more it may be argued that this experience is simply a pious delusion, and there is no answer to that argument, any more than there is an answer to the man who says that love between husband and wife is simply a matter of bodily satisfaction. But those who have had the experience do not need to argue. They know where reality lies.

There are, then, two possible paths toward contact with the spirit world. One is the spiritist way, which has obvious disadvantages, and the other is the way of the historic Church, which has all the strength of spiritism, and none of its weakness. To a world craving certainty, it offers experience. To a man who demands reality, it offers reality. In this it is profoundly true that the Way of the Cross is the Way of Light.