

The Religion of Spiritism

(By GERALD C. TREACY, S.J., in America.)

No matter what the nature of the phenomena adduced in proof of Spiritistic claims, the message always remains the same. The dead are near and speak to those still in this life, bidding them take heart and not be disturbed by a temporary parting. Life continues on another plane. It may be the strange séance-events, levitation or materialisation, it may be table-rappings or voices or automatic writing or clairvoyance, back of all these is the message that is to convince an unbelieving world that the dead still live and are in touch with the present life. "There can be no doubt that the study proclaims to mankind the existence of another world. To the Spiritist it is a literal truth that spirits walk this earth. . . Spiritism claims to be able to remove every doubt." This in brief is Horace Leaf's statement in his psychic primer. If Spiritism is not a religion it is merely a branch of science and its adherents refuse to admit that. So it was that Conan Doyle proclaimed it a new revelation. As regards its religious aspect Spiritism is in its infancy. It does not claim to reveal everything, yet it would set aside the tenets of other religious beliefs or at least make them square with the results of the seance, or go into the discard.

Eternal Punishment is Outlawed by All Scientific Spiritists.

In fact eternity does not enter into the question of punishment or reward. "We have been so habituated to the notion of eternal punishment of a uniform type, that unjust as this must be, it makes it hard to appreciate a more just view." This, of course, means the Spiritistic view which amounts to this: Life on the next plane is taken up where it ended on this plane, a soul is neither better nor worse in the moment after death than in the moment before death. There are progressive grades of purification. The life led on another plane where the spirit inhabitants dwell is very much like the life we lead on earth. There a perfectly rational life is led among scenes and people that are known and loved. Horace Leaf, after explaining this to the aspiring psychic, adds: "Even if this were not true it certainly seems quite natural that it should be true. For what could be more foolish than to imagine men and women passing from one state of existence to another entirely unlike it? All the trials and sufferings of life would be purposeless and meaningless. It is impossible to conceive nature breaking down in so unaccountable a way." It is, then, as a naturalist and not a "credulous supernaturalist" that the Spiritist points the way to the new religion. When compared with the teachings of other religions he maintains he can offer the only rational explanation of an after-life.

Death, Then, is Merely a Journey to a Land Afar.

While the very wicked suffer, at least for a time, and are forbidden intercourse with their friends in this world, the average soul is so happy that it would not consider com-

ing back to earth. In every form of communication with earth the spirits of the departed play the lead.

"It is the spirit people who manifest to the clairvoyant, speak to the clairaudient, control the automatist's hand and materialise. No greater error prevails than that Spiritists call the spirits up. Whoever undertakes to investigate will soon see the folly of this notion. The departed are far more anxious to communicate with us than we are with them."

And here we are driven back to the same position: the Spiritist ever insistent that spirit identity and spirit intelligence are really palpable facts. Certainly the latest published records in proof of spirit identity as found in the appeal to automatic writing and cross-correspondence disappoint the impartial critic. It is over the same line of argument. And the open mind is forced to the conclusion that back of the "revelation" may be subjective or subconscious imaginings or satan, but it surely is not the spirit claimed by the psychic devotee; at least identity is never established satisfactorily.

It Needs No Astute Reasoning

to see that a body of revealed truth committed to a teaching Church is an out-of-date religious theory to the Spiritist. He is opposed to present-day Christianity, while declaring his adherence to the teachings of Christ. He even goes to the extent of declaring the Divine Founder of the Church a medium. The truth that the Prophet of Galilee taught is now presented in a manner suitable to modern times. The medium wherever found and proved reliable is the modern apostle. Conan Doyle is fearless in proclaiming the religious element. He is quoted by Robert Mountsier in the *Bookman* for January, 1918, as saying:

"The situation may be summed up in a single alternative. The one supposition is that there has been an outbreak of lunacy extending over two generations of mankind on two continents, a lunacy that assails men and women of character and intellect who are otherwise eminently sane. The alternative supposition is that the world is now confronted with a new revelation from Divine sources which constitutes by far the greatest religious event since the death of Christ, a revelation which alters the whole aspect of life and death. Between these two suppositions I can see no solid position. Spiritism is absolute lunacy or it is a revolution in religious thought, giving us as by-products an utter fearlessness of death and an immense consolation when those who are dear to us pass behind the veil.

As a New Revelation It Destroys the Divinity of Christ

and makes religion consist in sentiment and the doctrine of the square deal. Its first apostles held to a personal God but side by side with the vagaries of modern philosophy we detect the tenets of Pantheism entering into the teachings of the more intellectual exponents of the cult. Myers, for example,

is a Pantheist and at once the great modern Spiritistic religious teacher. Individual salvation is a developing process tending ultimately toward absorption into the World Soul.

While quite impossible to correlate and fuse the religious tenets of Spiritism into a connected whole, enough can be gleaned from the mass of doctrines proposed in recent days to understand that Christianity's essential teachings must go down before this new cult. By Spiritistic revelation Christianity will be purified. Purification, according to Spiritistic progress, means destruction of belief in a Divine Saviour as well as in a personal God. Hence no Sacramental system and no Church Faith based on Divine revelation goes by the board. Science is the court of appeal. Yet there is a sad lack of scientific proof for this cult that prates so glibly of science. Fraud and deception have marked its path from the beginning of its history, and it bears a meaningless message to those who are groping for truth.

It would be idle to claim that there have been no well-authenticated cases of weird happenings in the seance or the private circle.

It is in the Interpretations of these Phenomena that we take Issue with Spiritism.

Genuine science cannot accept the hasty conclusions of modern Spiritistic writers for the subjective element is so strong that well-balanced proof is entirely lacking. Above all the sincere religious mind cannot believe that the culmination of the Sermon on the Mount is the incoherent muttering of the modern medium. If Revelation is God's message to man surely its content must be definite and authoritative, and the credentials of the messenger must be such that the open mind will be drawn to hearken and to heed. The history of modern Spiritism bears no brief for truth. Its court of appeal is the seance or the private testimony of the over-wrought mind. Margaret Cameron in her "Seven Purposes" has unwittingly struck a stinging blow at the cause of the cult she is championing: "By night my mind was in a turmoil, my nerves on edge." This sentence speaks volumes. It makes the alternative rejected by Conan Doyle loom up threateningly as a warning to those who would trifle with fire. Robert Hugh Benson made the same point in *The Necromancers*, as has E. F. Benson in his recent novel, *Across the Stream*. Sanity goes when Spiritism possesses the human mind. God is not in the seance or the medium or the automatist. For the Spiritist God is not Truth.

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