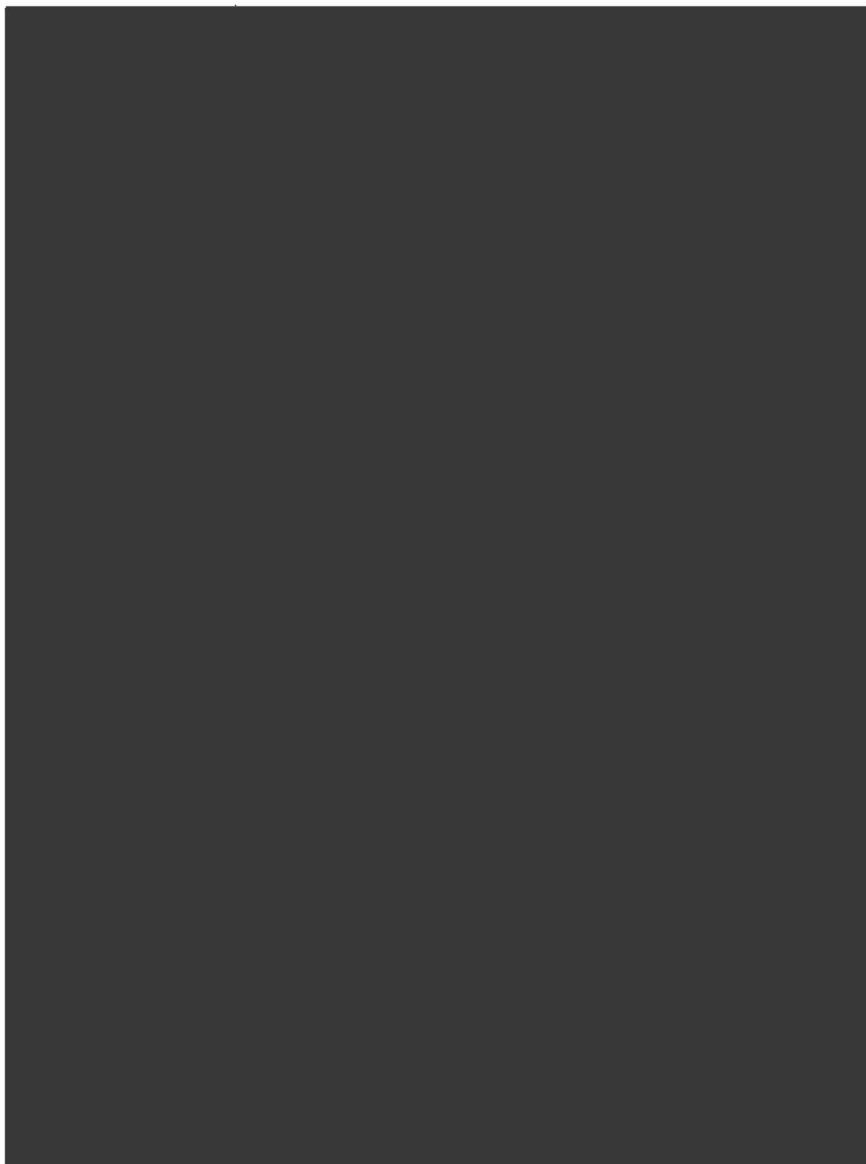


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THE EVIDENCES OF SPIRITUALISM.

"SPIRITUALISM, if true, demonstrates mind without brain, and intelligence disconnected from what is termed a material body. . . . It demonstrates that the so-called dead are still alive; that our friends are still with us though unseen. . . . It thus furnishes that *proof* of a future life which so many crave."¹ The present article may be taken as a denial of these theses.

Three great gulfs, to be crossed by three separate labours, divide the spiritualist from his Land of Promise. His first task is to prove that the "phenomena" are real. He must show next that they are not the abnormal work of human spirits. But, when these obstacles are passed, a third closes the way. He has to leap from the fact of non-human intelligences to the goal of immateriality and immortal life. It is this alone for which the common spiritualist cares, and my object is to show that, if all else were done, this at least is hopeless. Let us accept without question the phenomena as alleged. Let us admit that these "demonstrate" minds extra-human and in communion with ours. But, arguing from these premises, we utterly deny the further conclusion. It does not follow that these minds have no material bodies. It does not follow that the dead are really alive. We have no right on this evidence to believe in any future; and, if we believed in it, then on this evidence we should be fools if we craved it; and, if the reader cares to traverse a dry chain of arguments, he will see with what poor fancies the spiritualist is fed.

I will begin at once with a fatal objection. In the premises of the spiritualist there is nothing at variance with the conclusions of a gross and thorough Materialism.² The materialist regards souls as the adjectives of what is senseless. They come and go with, and they depend on, collocations of bare matter. But the spiritualist has found souls not dependent on the matter which makes human bodies, and he forthwith concludes that these souls are bodiless or are clothed in "ether." He has argued in short from a vicious alternative. He starts with "Souls exist not dependent on the matter connected with *our* souls," and he rushes to "Souls exist without anything that can be called matter at all." But, now, suppose that there is matter different from ours, and which normally is not perceptible, and we have a pitfall into which the spiritualist has fallen blindly. He either has argued wrongly from his premises, or else, where he knows nothing, has assumed omniscience.

(1) Wallace, *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, p. 212.

(2) In order to avoid misunderstanding I may say that I do not advocate materialism. I might add, with some prospect of being misunderstood, that I object to spiritualism because it itself is an outcome of materialistic tendencies. It is merely another sort of materialism.

As to what matter is we might dispute for an eternity and fail to agree; and the difficulties are not simply made by metaphysics, but obtrude themselves in forms like those of "fluids" and "ether." But by "matter" we commonly mean a reality extended in three dimensions, which can be moved, and can move, and can cause sensation. And we are used to suppose that there is no matter but that which we normally perceive, or which forms one system with what affects our senses. But, if we reflect, we see at once that this supposal rests on nothing. There is no logical objection to the possibility of several kinds of matter, which, for us at least, do not even form one system, which all have several spaces of their own, and which do not move one another at all. How, indeed, *could* we be sure that there is not matter which fails to affect us, but which, if different ourselves, we at once should perceive? ¹ But, if so much is possible, then I would suggest something else. This matter, which usually is indifferent to our own, may under unknown conditions move and be moved by it. It may thus affect our organs, as well as our environment, and again in its turn be affected by ourselves. But if matter of this kind were organized and so got souls, then these souls would depend on corporeal movements. They would be embodied, and yet, though commonly invisible, might in abnormal states communicate with us, and produce all the facts ascribed wrongly to spirits. This hypothesis is consistent with a thorough materialism, but it covers every part of the alleged phenomena. And if the spiritualist retorts, "It is an idle hypothesis," not idle, we shall answer, if it accounts for the facts, and in itself entirely conceivable. But your naked spirit is perhaps not logically conceivable, and at any rate is also a mere hypothesis. And it is not the hypothesis which best accounts for the facts.

We ourselves have souls and bodies, and we perceive certain facts, assumed to be the effects of souls not our own, which yet, because like *our* effects, show that other souls exist. And we press on with this conclusion in spite of the fact that we have failed to find the intermediate bodies. Now we agreed to take this failure as evidence that the facts are not effects of *our* bodies; but the spiritualist wants to go much farther than this. He argues, "Not dependent upon *our* bodies, and therefore upon *none*, quite bodiless and 'ethereal.'" And this is irrational. For, in the first place, nothing excludes the idea that there are bodies not normally obvious to ourselves; or, in other words, such bodies are *possible*. And, in the second place, the evidence suggests that they are *real*. First, the analogy which we must use from the embodied soul is a ground, *à priori*, for expecting a body. And what is the evidence *à posteriori*? In the end it all resolves

(1) Mr. Wallace (*Miracles*, p. 45) agrees that there probably are "forms of matter and modes of ethereal motion" other than those which our senses enable us to recognise.

itself into effects on matter. There is not one shred, and there could not be one shred, incapable of being so interpreted. Nay, a great part, and apparently the part most relied on, could hardly be taken as anything *else*. Effects upon our matter have to be explained. Are they better explained by a different matter or by a naked ghost? Tables are moved, finger-marks and foot-marks are printed on sawdust, and furniture is shattered by a force of several horse-power. "And what need," exclaims the spiritualist, "of any further witness? Behold the manifest ghost, not corporeal nor corruptible, and a pledge of our immortality." And here argument ceases. The analogy suggests, and the evidence points grossly to another unknown body; and if the spiritualist still clings to his naked soul, yet he cannot call it the one hypothesis which is possible. He cannot deny that every particle of the evidence can be explained by a soul embodied in matter. Thus, if we allow that non-human intelligences exist and produce our phenomena, we are as far away as ever from bodiless spirits. These intelligences may depend upon material motions; the materialist will urge that they are corruptible and mortal, and that, whether better in other respects or worse than ourselves, they are alike in this, that they arise and perish.

But the spiritualist will reply, "Your alternative is false. We are not forced to choose between matter and ghosts. The spirits are not bodiless any more than we are, but their bodies are higher and of ethereal substance. Thus though impalpable they are potent, and though active indiscernible, and such bodies are a warrant of immortality." For myself I must reply that if they were ever so thin, I do not see how that brings them nearer to spirit. If they are extended and movable they are probably discernible, and most assuredly we have no hint that they are anything but mortal. The possibility that they are *not* so is an idle fancy for which the facts alleged give no sort of excuse. This "spiritual body" is a foolish imagination. It inhabits our space and yet is not material. It is attenuated to that degree that it passes through matter, and yet is indivisible and everlasting. It is not quite a solid and not quite a spirit, nor yet quite a gas. It is inexplicable and not wanted to explain anything else. Once admit that matter may exist and not normally be perceived, and then its thinness or grossness becomes irrelevant. Admit, on the other hand, it is thin past earthly thinness, and it still is material and still discernible.

We have started by assuming the existence of active non-human intelligences, and we have so far seen that the conclusions of spiritualism are not rational. There is nothing to suggest that these souls are bare of bodies, but the evidence goes to show them both embodied and mortal. And we saw that this result is in no way shaken by the gratuitous chimera of a spiritual body. It may now, perhaps, be

worth while to ask some questions as to the *nature* of these souls. Like ourselves they have bodies, and these bodies at least are presumably mortal, but can we know more? Is there anything to tell us if, as compared with ourselves, they are higher or lower, more or less spiritual? If we consider first their material performances, it is clear that they do much which we cannot do. And this certainly has weight. On the other hand, when we ask if they can do the things which we accomplish, the evidence fails us. And if, further, we inquire if our ordinary life may not seem to them extraordinary and even miraculous, we have no information. We are not able to tie knots in an endless cord, or to pass through a keyhole, and that is in their favour. On the other hand, they have never made anything useful or done anything great, and so far as we know, they could not if they would. Again, living as we do in two different worlds, what is common in one may be astonishing in another. If they pass through our keyholes perhaps we pass through theirs, and should bewilder them if, like ourselves, they were wise enough to wonder, or if our high matter could affect their gross bodies. But these are all idle fancies, worthless imaginings. We have no evidence which directly indicates that their bodies are either lower or higher than ours.

But when we ask as to their souls, I think we get a little light. When we weigh the probabilities, the balance does move in a certain direction. There is reason to think their souls *lower* than ours, and taken on the whole, less intelligent and feebler. Of course they perceive what we do not perceive, but so, to some extent, do the lower animals. That they perceive *all* that we perceive, or on the whole *more* than we do, there is no evidence. The unusual need not be higher, and to them we do not know what is unusual. And it would never do to say, "But we ask questions and they none, and therefore they know." They might ask no questions because they have no curiosity, no sense of defect, or desire for knowledge. Hence, if we keep to simple power of perception we cannot say if they are higher or lower. It is better to pass to what we can judge of—intelligence and general powers of reason. But when we judge by these, the souls we converse with are lower than ourselves, and we have no reason to believe in others which are higher. To the damning evidence of the so-called Spirit-Teachings no answer can be made. It would be unfair to say that the best of them are twaddle, and they perhaps may be compared with our own pulpit-utterances. They are often edifying, and often reasonable, and sometimes silly, and usually dull. Still to mention them in the same breath with the best human work would be wholly absurd. And it is an inferior race which can produce nothing better. The spiritualist, of course, has met this fact with an hypothesis. Our means of communication at present are

faulty, or as yet we have not lighted on the superior persons of the higher world. But these hypotheses are arbitrary. They are based on the prejudice which they are meant to support, and they have no other basis. But throw prejudice aside, and judge simply from the facts, and the result is otherwise. I do not mean that, like the spiritualist, we should treat the uncertain as if we had exhausted it, but I mean that, if we argue from what we do know, then the spirits are probably lower than ourselves, and we are offered no reason for belief in any other and higher spirits.

We have now seen that the spirits are probably embodied, and that their minds at least are inferior to our own. And like ours their bodies are too probably discernible, and their souls, the adjectives of those physical aggregates, must too probably perish. And assuredly the materialist laughs in derision. You may count it a great thing that thought does not depend on the matter of the brain, but what if it rests upon something more coarse, something that you would hold still more despicable and vile? Your new revelation of these latter days has given us something to hope and something to live for. It has reinstated the soul and re-established religion. But in these latter days religion rests on converse not with spirit above us but with spirits beneath us; and our hope is one day to be made like these spirits. Such spiritualism is not spiritual, such religion is mere superstition, and it conflicts with the best aspirations of the soul in a way in which modern materialism does not.

Spiritualism, so far as we have seen, is exploded. Admit its facts and its conclusions do not follow. If there are souls, not ours, behind its phenomena, yet these souls are not bodiless nor are they immortal. And presumably they are inferior to our own; they give us nothing to admire and nothing to hope for. But the spiritualist will urge that I have left out of view a main part of the evidence. I have said nothing of the testimony borne by the spirits, and I have neglected the great fact of spirit-identity—the proof that our relations still are alive, and that therefore we shall live. The discussion of these points was put off for a time, since they involve some difficulties and require some patience. I will deal with them forthwith, and we shall very soon find that the testimony borne by the spirits is worthless. We shall go on to see that their identity is not proveable, nor, if proveable, a warrant of immortality, nor in any way comfortable. Let us first take their testimony.

From this we get information, edifying if not useful, as to the things both of spirit-land and of our own earthly life; but what specially concerns us is the assertion that after death we too go to spirit-land, and that life there is, or may be, much higher than here. Still testimony, as we know, may be false as well as true, and the question is whether in the case of a spirit we have got any reason

for supposing it true. I am compelled to believe that we have simply no reason. We have control neither over the facts deposed to, nor over the mind and character of the witness. But under such conditions any testimony is worthless; and, if the reader will have patience, I will make this point good.

Testimony, we must remember, does not supersede experience. It can never be an independent source of information, side by side and on a level with personal observation. For it must by its nature involve an inference, and that inference must be founded on our direct knowledge. It is an extension of our personal experience, but an extension that proceeds from and rests on that basis. We are indeed told that we have an instinct to believe, and that to take in mere assertion is to follow that instinct. And it is true that, when our mind is unformed and uncritical, the mere presentation of an idea to that mind is usually enough to generate belief. But then this is not the question. The question is not what we naturally do tend to believe, but what as rational beings we ought to believe. Should we accept anything and everything just because it is offered us by another intelligence? No one can maintain this. Well, but if we must discriminate and must use some criterion, what is it that we should use? Most palpably there is nothing but our own personal experience, and the inferences we can reasonably draw from that basis. And I think that every one in the end must take this view of the case or find he is using words without a meaning.

What, however, do *we* mean? Do we mean that a man is to believe nothing but what he has seen, and nothing that runs counter to his private experience? We are far from meaning this. What we insist on is that our reason for believing the witness must come in the end from our own direct knowledge. It is not that we are confined to private experience, but that this experience itself must warrant our leaving it by giving us a reason for going beyond. In the case of testimony what is this reason? It is an inference on our part to a mind in the witness which first is capable of having learnt the fact attested, and next is able and willing to communicate the truth. We in short infer that the mind of the other may in these respects be treated as our mind; and in consequence we have merely to test its statements in the way in which we test our personal observations.¹ Thus, when Mr. A. tells me of this or that event which lies outside the range of my own observations, what justifies my belief in him? It is, first, an inference to Mr. A.'s *ability*. He must have had a chance of observing, and must have used that chance rightly, from the proper point of view and without any bias. And how can I know

(1) I cannot ask here how far the results of private experience may be set aside on the strength of testimony. I admit that in some cases they must be thus set aside. I have said something on this question elsewhere.

this? Obviously from nothing beside my personal experience. Many links may intervene, but at last I must stand on my own knowledge of the world and of human nature. And it is the same when I ask about the truthfulness of the witness. I should not believe him unless I had reason to believe, first, that he can speak truth, and next, that he has no motive or unconscious bent towards deception.

Now the capacity and the desire of Mr. A. to speak truth must rest in the end on my *positive* observation. But his absence of motive for untruth and deceit rests, not only on that, but on something as well. It implies what may be called my *negative* experience, and it is based on an assumption. I assume that I know not quite *all* about the witness, but so much that, if he had a motive to deceive me, I should become aware of it. I assume that in my witness there exists no other life with other motives besides those which I discover. These, I think, are the criteria which we are forced to employ when we deal with unsupported human testimony. We do not always apply them with rigour, and, where the testimony is supported by our own experience, we are, of course, not compelled to be so exacting. But where the gravest results follow from simple depositions, there we do and we must bring our tests to bear strictly. Without tests such as these (the defenders of miracles will endorse so far what I say) there is no reason why I should either believe or disbelieve.

If we apply our criteria to the teaching of the spirits, we gain at once a momentous result. Their assertions go beyond our personal experience, and their testimony is not supported. Hence our criteria must be applied with unsparing rigour. Let us make the experiment, and see if the spirit-witnesses are not turned out of court. In the first place do the spirits know what they talk of, and have we got that assurance? I cannot think that we have. No doubt, being intelligent, they are aware of their immediate condition, but does their knowledge go much farther, and, if so, how far? May not much remain unknown to them which, if they knew it, would convict them of error? These questions cannot be answered, and hence (since we ourselves know nothing of spirit-land) we can in no way test the ignorance of our spirits, nor can we have trust in their information. This is enough, and yet even this is not all. We not only cannot gauge the defects of their observation, but we have a positive ground for distrusting their intelligence. From the data we possess we have been forced to conclude that the understandings of these spirits are lower than our own.

So far we cannot tell if the spirits are really well informed; and to this may be added a subsidiary doubt. When we communicate amongst ourselves we are sure that our system of signs is trustworthy. If it were not so the practical results must show it; and this is in the

end the sole test that we have. But when we converse with spirits have we got that assurance ; and if not, do we possess any other ? I will only allude to this doubt in passing, and will proceed to state a more fatal objection. If the spirits really know and are able to communicate, does it follow that they are *willing* ? May we suppose that they are truthful ? We must not do so without reason, and have we any reason ? With this question we arrive at a very noteworthy feature. It is admitted that some spirits are fraudulent and mischievous, but the spiritualist asseverates that others are sincere, and that *he* can winnow the false from the true. And, half dazed by his audacity, I can only reply, Produce your criterion.

Human testimony is sifted in part by our knowledge of the matters alleged, in part again by our experience of human nature, and by special information as to the character of this witness. The absence of a motive or a tendency to lie must either be shown or must else be assumed on a general presumption. And this is our criterion. But when we come to the spirits we can apply it no longer. We have no knowledge of our own by which to check their statements, and, what is worse, we know nothing about their characters. We do not know their moral natures ; and whether they have or have not a motive to deceive us, we are utterly ignorant. It is not too much to say that if they were spirits of evil, whose happiness was staked upon fooling us men, we might (so far as we know) have no means for discovering it. Such an hypothesis is baseless, I quite admit that ; but the hypothesis that the wish and the tendency of their natures is (where we are concerned) to speak what is true, is just as baseless, just as idle. We know nothing, and how then are we right to believe anything ? We have no light and no test. " But we are not to trust all spirits. There are good spirits as well as bad, and they tell us whom to trust." *O sancta simplicitas !* it is always the vilest cheats who are the only honest men. It may be otherwise in spirit-land, but perhaps it is worse. And if there are good spirits, we at least cannot distinguish them. Nor would the idea of collecting a mass of spirit-evidence, and of so using false statements to eliminate each other, be any less fallacious. We do not know that our sources of evidence are independent, and, if they were, there might be tendencies which produce the same lies on different occasions. We need not dwell on these objections. The plain fact is this—that human testimony is received upon certain assumptions, and that with a spirit these assumptions can no longer be made.

But the spiritualist may deny that we have any need to make them. He may say that our experience gives us a test. The spirits tell us things that we ourselves verify. They are found intelligent and faithful in some things, and that gives us a reason to trust them beyond. But this conclusion is irrational. If a spirit perceives events

through a wall and in the distance, if he sees what is hidden in the past or in the future, and we verify his competence, yet this, as we have seen, does not warrant him capable of any higher knowledge. He might yet be a witness not competent to speak of the things of Spirit-land. His capacity is not established by the strange and unusual. It is when he proves himself our equal in the highest that we have, that we should think him on our level. It is surely not by passing beyond my understanding that another goes the way to convince me of his. And the same with their truthfulness. By what logic does it follow that, if they speak truth in one thing, they will do it in another? That is the argument by which dupes are plundered perpetually. Suppose a spirit ready to deceive (and we admit many are ready), would he not first be found faithful so as to gain our confidence? It is only when we can assume that there is no other side to the character, and no other motive lurking in the background, that we can go from true in part to true in everything. And of course with a spirit this assumption is impossible.

To sum up the result: When a spirit bears witness of things beyond our world, we know neither his ability nor his honesty, and we have no kind of presumption in his favour. We have seen before that, apart from the testimony of the spirits, we must regard them as not bodiless and may suppose them mortal; and their testimony also has proved to be worthless. Nothing now remains save the bulwark of spirit-identity, and if that goes, the last defence of spiritualism has vanished. This bulwark at first sight looks somewhat imposing. We recognise in the spirits our dead friends and relations, and so are sure that they survive. But, if they survive, then we also shall not perish. We are all immaterial and all immortal, and with a destiny beyond the grave which may fill us with hope. But, unfortunately, the edifice has no foundation. We do not know that these spirits really are our friends, nor can we hope in consequence ourselves to survive. And, if we knew this, yet our friends may be material and mortal, and our heritage not joy but sadness and foreboding.

It would be a task alike ungrateful and useless to argue against that which some of us call "instinct," against the assurance of love and the impulse of affection. And to those who are persuaded that they converse with their dead my reasonings are not addressed; but to others I must show the flaws in the evidence. Even here amongst ourselves and in the daylight of the sun such a proof is not infallible. If, in spite of evidence, the mother can find her long-lost son in the gross palpable impostor, that I think should make us hesitate. In the deceitful twilight of spirit apparition we must not hope that our instinct will be proof. To satisfy others we must admit the chance of illusion and reasonably discuss the case on its merits. I will attempt to lay down the tests we should apply. Identity is a subject

not easy to handle, and the identity of a spirit with a deceased human being presents several difficult questions. And the spiritualist has, I think, advanced gaily on the surface without much thought for the pitfalls which make it unsound. Hence I must ask the reader once more to have patience, for, if we hurry the discussion at this point, we are lost.

How do we know here on earth that the man whom we recognise is really our relation? And, first of all, how should we prove it in a law court? We should show in the first place the identity of his mind, as evinced by memory and by sameness of habits, and in the second place we should point to the identity of his body; but on reflection we see that this latter carries everything, and that the sameness of body is the goal of our argument, to prove which indirectly or directly they all would be aimed. And the reason of this is (as we shall see lower down) that we cannot show, except by way of the body, the continuity of the soul. If the body exists it must exist continuously; but the continuous existence of another man's soul can be shown, if at all, only by a circuitous process. I shall return to this hereafter, and at present will but point out that for legal purposes the identity of the body proves the sameness of the man. Now the body is, of course, a material thing, a thing differing from other things, and puzzling us much by its change and its sameness. But we need not notice the special problems which it offers, and may confine ourselves to the question, How we show the identity of a material object. Is it enough to make out that it seems to our tests just the same as it was? No, that is not enough, for it shows no more than sameness of *description*. The identity of this or that material object depends also on the continuity of its existence. If, for instance, we could know that a coin or a diamond had been removed from our universe, then no test we could apply would ever prove it was the same and not another just like. It is unbroken existence, undivided persistence, that makes the identity of a material object.

Hence if we proved the continuity of our relation's body we should prove his identity. But strictly to prove continuity is impossible, and we must content ourselves with a certain probability. We try to show that at the end of various intervals a body like our relation's was present in the world, and that if, during those intervals, the body had been changed, we must have been aware of it. We try to prove that the facts are in favour of continuity, and that nothing suggests an opposite hypothesis. But we may meet a great obstacle, for throughout some part of the time in question we may be able to get no sort of direct evidence. Still our case is not hopeless. We are able to add an indirect argument. First, our relation is not known to be dead or elsewhere, and the man before us is like what our relation would have been, and his story is credible—hence he *may be* our relation.

And now, secondly, we produce our indirect proof. There is no one save our relation who could appear so like him, and therefore our man *must be* the person we seek. This decides the question.

Now our *must be*, it is obvious, rests on an assumption. We suppose ourselves to have such a knowledge of the world that we can be sure there is no fac-simile of our relation, or, if there were, that we should get to know it. We see the nature of our argument if we take the case of twins, so like as hardly to be known apart. If these twins, A and B, had been absent for even a moderate time, then, if no evidence could be got to show continuity, it might be utterly impossible to prove the identity of A or B. And this shows us the assumption which we commonly use. No one save a near relation could ever be so like, and, in this case before us, no such person is possible. Our assumption, perhaps, may be no more than probable; but we must employ it, or have no opinion at all. And, whether probable or certain, it rests entirely upon our experience of this world.

If we now return to spirit-identity, we shall find that we have got an important result. We cannot use for a spirit the same sort of proof that we use for a man. Continuity of body cannot be shown where no body exists, or where it exists ethereally and not in our world. And to argue from the exclusion of all other bodies is equally impossible. Hence, where we have no body material as mine is, the legal evidence for identity is quite out of place. This, I think, must be admitted, and the question is, Have we among human beings any *other* way of proving identity? I confess I cannot find one. Let us suppose that A and B have two wives C and D, and though the bodies of C and D seem still the same, that their souls are transferred. In this (impossible) case could we get to know the identity of their souls? I do not think that we could. A man might say, "This woman C is no longer my wife; she is at present not the same with the woman I married." But nothing could entitle him to find the soul C in the body D. For myself at least, I do not see what evidence could establish that point. And if so, we must say that without the same body the same soul is not provable.

We have so far made good that the identity of a spirit is not capable of the proof which we use amongst men. That, however, may not matter. The removal of the body removes a difficulty. "Our relation's soul is hard to recognise, when we know that his body is possibly elsewhere, and itself with a soul. But death strikes out the old body, and simplifies the question, so that knowledge becomes possible." A spirit appears to us like our relation in appearance, disposition, and knowledge of facts. That is really all the evidence, and is it enough? If we strike out the body it is the same evidence that we used to establish human identity, and so far it is valid. But unfortunately it stops at a fatal limit, for it wholly leaves out the indirect proof. We assume with a man that no other could resemble

him, since we know our own earth and the nature of its people. Without this assumption the inference is broken, and with a spirit the assumption would rest upon nothing.

The identity of an individual, corporeal or otherwise, does not consist in sameness of present description. If the same soul lived twice at the interval of a century, would it really be the same? Or must we not add continuity of history? But how with a spirit is such evidence possible? Shall we venture to assert that none could really be so like unless he were the same? Think for a moment of the unknown region of Spirit-land, and then judge if such assumptions are better than fancies. It would be easier if we knew that no spirit was anything but a man deceased. It would be easier, but still unlawful. For to us the other world is buried in darkness, and we know nothing of the dead, how they are changed (it may well be) and sadly translated. The proof that we seek for would have to lie in this, that after certain signs we should be forced to exclaim, "My kinsman or the devil." And we cannot reach this alternative. And moreover, even if the alternative were reached, we could not exclude the latter supposition. "The spirit may be a devil . . . and abuses me to damn me."

We are too ignorant to assume that from Spirit-land no counterfeit would come to mock us. We cannot tell that no spirit save the soul of the deceased could so put on his knowledge and wear his semblance. It is all wild imagination. If I asserted that each man has got his double in Spirit-land, sometimes seen during life, and which, lingering after death, amuses his kinsfolk, I should say it on grounds to the full as convincing. We cannot tell that no spirit is like our relation; we cannot say that no spirit is able to personate. But would they do it if they could? Well, we do not know their motives, and we cannot say they would not. Nay, there is some evidence that they do. The spiritualist himself teaches counterfeiting spirits, fraudulent and mischievous. True, he adds that we detect them by their own non-success, and by the help of those others, not fraudulent or (perhaps) still undetected. But, as we saw, this is illusory. Since we know nothing beforehand, the chances seem even that *all* of them are fraudulent; against the admitted fact that at least *some* do personate I see nothing to be set, and I will leave the reader to draw the conclusion. Nor will it avail to urge the extent of the deception, and to object that the scale is too large for treachery. It may be, for all we know, easier to cheat many than one. And if finally I am met by the personal appeal, Would not you after continual intercourse, after constant communion, be satisfied yourself that you held converse with the dead—I must reply that I cannot say what would stagger my reason and break down my intellect. But that is really not the question. The question is, what is reasonable for a man to believe; and I have tried to show the conclusion

which reason will justify. I do not despise feeling, but I cannot argue against it.

We can never know that we really converse with our relations, and hence we cannot tell that we ourselves shall survive. But even this is not the end. If we did recognise in the spirits our friends that are dead, that would not prove them or us immaterial or immortal, or exempt from worse than earthly afflictions. It would not prove them wholly immaterial, since they probably, as we have seen, have material bodies. Nor would their identity weaken that probable conclusion, for a soul might have one body and then, again, another, possibly without any loss of identity; or, if identity were lost, yet at least to us the appearance would remain. "Do you say, then, you admit that the soul is transferred, and is, therefore, independent?" Nothing need be transferred. The materialist holds soul to be a function of the body. Well, then, obviously if you were to destroy my body, and after a thousand years make another one like it, my soul must (so far as my consciousness is concerned) start afresh without a break and maintain its identity. When the pressure of the bone is removed from the brain, the consciousness begins from the moment of the blow; and if the patient were not trephined but destroyed, and ten thousand years hence a man like him were made, then, after an operation ten thousand years hence, the consciousness would start from the moment of the injury. You may object that the soul would not really be the same, and I will leave that undiscussed, but it would seem to you the same, and it would reply to the tests to which your "spirit" replies, and after all you would be wrong if you called it immaterial. And I argue from this that you are likely to be wrong when you deny that the spirit has a perishing body. You have given nothing to weigh against that general probability, which we saw was against you. Another body like in function explains all the facts, and a bodiless principle seems no better than a phrase.

Hence our relations are material, and are probably mortal, and we can draw no hope from their existence after death. They may say that they progress, but why should we believe them? In the first place, we have seen and conversed with but a fraction, and the rest are not known. Then, again, we cannot tell that our witnesses do not lie. And if they speak what they believe, how much do they know? How much of their own prospects, how much of all those creatures whom perhaps they never see? Their own intelligence is not high, perhaps now it is decaying, and their own degraded future they cannot forecast. Were they doomed to extinction, to mouldering dotage, even to something unspeakable, why suppose that they would know it? And there is an ominous circumstance. The souls of great writers, when called upon, indite, if not fustian or drivel, the saddest commonplace. And we reject them as counterfeit, but

perhaps we are wrong. Perhaps our Shakespeare after all and our Bacon and St. John were the genuine men, travelling ignobly through decrepitude to final dissolution. This is a fancy, but not more fanciful than the rest. And so we must say that, if our apparitions are really the deceased, they do not open the future nor give us hope that their lives will be long or desirable. And in the face of this result (if that were all that we had) there would be comfort in the death which gives peace in the grave. It is much to know the worst, and if we can say, "They are not troubled, for their poor private selves death is sleep everlasting, and the higher life which they lived lives on through their labour," then that worst is not bad. But to be sure that they exist, but not for how long, really to know nothing of the what and the how, it is this which makes death hideous. We are a prey to each "lawless and incertain thought," and, indeed, "it is too horrible."

Let us collect the result of our long discussion. We have seen that, even if we hold converse with the dead, yet that gives no hope of bliss beyond the grave, either for ever or even for a very little while. And we have no right to believe that we hold this converse. And, if we commune with intelligences, yet we have no right to take anything from them on trust. Further, though we may admit an intercourse with souls, yet these souls are not any more spiritual than we are, nor are they any less material or more immortal; nor again are these objections dependent one upon the other, but any one by itself is dangerous to spiritualism. Still, I fear that the result may be a feeling of too much. I fear the spiritualist may reply to these doubts by a counter-charge of general scepticism. I have indeed laboured to distinguish our ordinary inferences from the reasoning employed to establish the spirits, and it is on those distinctions that I would take my stand. Still that the spiritualist and myself may each understand the other, I will endeavour to meet a possible objection. "On your showing," I may be told, "though the spirits did exist and with a message for ourselves, yet they would have no way of delivering their tidings—or rather, though they delivered them, we never should be sure of it, or at least ought never to accept their testimony. And this position is absurd and is palpable scepticism."

I answer that I fail to perceive the absurdity, and while I defend an opinion, not formed for an occasion, but embraced long ago and tried by some wear, I would beg for a little the attention of the reader. I deny utterly the right claimed by the beings of one sphere to hold communion with those of another. I see no reason to expect any converse of the kind, nor is it incredible or unlikely that, if such converse took place, there should exist no means for the accrediting of testimony. We must not first make our fancies the measure of the universe, and then exclaim that the facts are absurd and impossible.

There is, of course, a prevalent and obstinate idea that signs and wonders can accredit a messenger, and that marvellous works can entitle a spirit to claim our belief for his depositions. The idea is most natural, but is a mere anachronism. No revelation can be authenticated by miracle or testimony, or by anything else but internal evidence. I do not mean that, if in England there now were a spirit both able and willing to be in earnest with miracles, to strike dead his detractors, to send disease on the unfaithful, and prosperity and health upon all his worshippers, that such a spirit ought to fail in establishing a following. For he could not fail, and religion (in this sense) would be rational, and atheism would be folly, and indeed would not exist. But then this is not the question. The question is whether anything which that spirit could do would make him a witness whom we ought not to doubt. When he told us of things quite beyond our experience, could we ever have a right to accept his bare word? And, if we reflect, we are compelled to answer in the negative. For in the first place we have no means of checking his account, and in the next place it is impossible to be sure of his mind, his ability and his desire to tell us the truth. It is impossible, since we see (or can know that we see) but a fragment of his nature, and the inference from this fragment to the whole of his being is quite illegitimate. And if I am told, "But we know that his strength is irresistible, and we therefore should believe," I can only reply that this is barbarous and childish, a survival from the logic of the primitive savage. If we believe this, we should hold that Mahometan fire-arms are a proof that Gabriel's feather wrote the *Koran*, or that the Athanasian Creed may be demonstrated by the power of Cockle's pills. But what is good for the negro is not so good for us.

No convincing revelation can now be made to us which is to stand on anything but internal merit. A revelation of this sort is by no means incredible, but what does it mean? It means that our souls are so assisted and enlightened that we perceive of ourselves that the testimony is true. The testimony, in other words, is not taken *as* testimony, and may not even bear that character, but is held on its merits as evidently true or certainly to be inferred. That is not impossible, nor unreasonable, nor even improbable. But an external revelation is a mere anachronism; it may weigh with the foolish and may persuade the superstitious, but others will not easily come to embrace it. And if religion is to depend on external evidence, then there can never be a religion for the most educated men.

Against the religion of the spiritualist, if we take it at its best, against his conception that is of the true aim of the soul and of its duty towards God, I have nothing to say. He stands far above the common level of orthodox Christianity, and if I thought that this

article would weaken his persuasion, that would cause me regret. And I wish the spiritualist to understand that my objections are not aimed at his practical doctrines. They are directed against his forecasts of our personal future, which, if true, could make no difference to our duties, and which he rests upon evidence entirely worthless. His premises could never establish his result. It is not his fault or his spirits' fault, but it lies. I am convinced, in the nature of things, that no proof of the kind which he attempts is possible. And if he replies that a religion must be something for the people, and that what to me is but a puzzle to them is demonstration, I must answer that I could not even for the sake of religion take part in his deception.

I will not assert, if we were quite sure of the truth, and were sure that our fraud would but tend to support it, that then we might not say, "Since the people must be deceived, be it ours to deceive them wisely and well;" but since the case is far otherwise, and since our fraud would take its place amid the uncleanly struggle of superstition and priestcraft, we ourselves must be defiled if we countenance deceit, and admit bad evidence for true conclusions. This in any case must be true, and there is something besides. Who is able to guarantee us against these spirits? They are not saying to-day what they have sometimes said before, and who knows but hereafter they may say something else? I do not trust these spirits however fairly they may speak. And I confess when I look back upon the annals of the supernatural, I cannot feel quite easy. It may be very well to say, "I have found no devil yet. I have no fear of bogie."¹ The orthodox "Bogie," I agree, if alive, is now quite decrepit; but we should remember from whence he had his origin. There are still terribly low strata in our poor human nature, and in the end I am afraid they might light upon a stratum of answering spirits. From the cold fires of the defunct some devilish phoenix might arise to hinder us, and to force us to victories which are too like defeat. We have a great deal to do, a great deal to make war against, and we feel that we have had enough of spirits. So long as any human duties are left to us, we are something too high to be their battle-field or their play-ground. But if we dally once again with superstition, if we leave the honourable daylight and once more follow after voices from the dark, then the sun has gone back on the dial of humanity.

Spiritualism has had so far a very easy game to play. Its facts have been canvassed much more than its inferences, and it has for the most part enjoyed a monopoly of interpretation. But when its data are established (if they ever are established), that monopoly will go, and it will, point by point, have to battle with rival hypotheses. I shall have succeeded in my purpose if I have shown that that battle is hardly begun.

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(1) *Spirit Identity*, p. 97.