

Emma Hardinge Britten on Re-Incarnation

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“The Doctrine of Re-incarnation” by Emma Hardinge Britten, in *The Spiritual Scientist* for May 20, 1875 (Volume 2, Number 11), pp. 128-9, and (for Part 2) May 27, 1875 (Volume 2, Number 12), pp. 140-41.

“To the Editor of The Spiritual Scientist:

In compliance with the wishes of numerous of my own correspondents and your admiring readers, I ask the privilege of presenting a few thoughts on a subject which has of late been, like many other obnoxious and repulsive *side issues* (original) -- ruthlessly engrafted upon the pure and fruitful soil of Spiritualism. Excepting perhaps what is popularly termed “Free love,” no other theory seems so irrelevant (sic), and certainly none more fraught with baneful tendencies than that of which I write, namely, the doctrines styled “Re-incarnation.”

It may be asked, what have any side issues to do with Spiritualism at all, and why should any irrelevant vagaries of modern idealism be foisted on the world as the outgrowth of the Spiritual movement? To the latter question, I reply, -- because the side issues of which the earnest and thoughtful Spiritualist has the most cause to complain, have chiefly been promulgated by spiritual mediums, speakers and writers, and hence, both within and without the ranks of Spiritualism their expression has naturally been identified with that of communion of spirits, which is authoritative only because it is based upon facts, but which may become as mischievous as any other fantastic creed or man-made dogma, when it is suffered to drift into the sphere of unsupported theory. To my apprehension, Spiritualism, in its strictest sense, is a demonstration of the soul's continued existence after death; a series of facts proving that under favorable circumstances the disembodied spirit can communicate with the embodied; the disclosure of an immense range of new powers common to the human soul in both spheres of existence and the opening up of a vast vista of glorious possibilities concerning that soul's future destiny, entirely at variance with man's preconceived opinions of the hereafter as derived from creedal faiths, or theological teachings.

That these sublime revealments (sic) -- based as they are on stubborn facts, and verified by the experiences of the best minds of the age -- must involve the most radical and momentous changes of opinion concerning human law and conduct, no analytical thinker can deny, but that they necessarily imply that those who have been privileged in their reception shall unhesitatingly discard all that they have previously deemed true and sacred, and forthwith accept all the wild schemes and disruptive propositions which

fanaticism or licentiousness may think proper to announce as an "inspiration from the spirits," is an idea so transcendent of the modesty of nature and subversive of that order which has hitherto been regarded as Heaven's first law, that it seems a duty devolving upon those who have hoped most from Spiritualism, labored most faithfully on its behalf, and suffered most from the follies which have deformed its beauty and perverted its uses, to unite in the demand that its true nature and functions shall be more carefully analyzed, and its true genius more thoroughly defined and understood.

Leaving other "side issues," however, for the present, and limiting my attention to that one which above all seems most calculated to shake the Spiritualistic theory to its very foundation, and substitute in its place a doctrine as doleful and repulsive as the theologic faith in a final Heaven and Hell, I turn to the subject of Re-incarnation, which however innoxious (sic) it might be when presented to the world as the dream of a speculative theorist, startles us out of our brightest hopes and fairest prospects, when it comes to us from the lives of those who claim to speak from the very self-same authority upon which our superstructure of spiritual faith is upreared.

Besides the voluminous writings of Allan Kardec, Miss Blackwell, and others claiming to be media for spirit-teachings in Europe, we have in America the utterances of some of Mrs. Conant's spirits in the Banner of Light communications, and last but not least, our much admired fellow-worker in the spiritual vineyard, Mrs. Cora Tappan.

Some twenty years ago, when Mrs. Tappan (then Cora Scott) became entranced, under the influence of spirits who manifested their claim to credence by an eloquence, power and wisdom, far beyond the young medium's capacity, she taught the doctrine of endless *spiritual* progression; the impossibility of any retrogression, and repeatedly declared in her inspired trance speeches, that there were various spheres of spiritual being, in which all the requirements of the human soul for reform, purification, and development, would be fully satisfied. Among a vast amount of spiritualistic literature now in my possession, I have an abundant record of this lady's past utterances, and in not one is to be found the least allusion to the doctrine of Re-incarnation, or any return of the soul to earth except in the character of a ministering and communicating spirit. Judging by the superior excellence and marvellous character of her earliest Addresses, these statements are fully as worthy of credit as those of her more mature years, and yet the latter wholly contradict the former, and that on a point so infinitely important as an item of religious belief, that I must be pardoned for citing them as startling illustrations of the shape in which this Re-incarnation theory is suddenly cropping up among us.

In some discourses given by Mrs. Tappan in London, within the last few months, the controlling intelligences announce the doctrine of Re-incarnation in the broadest sense. In one Address, of quite recent date, uttered in irregular rhymes, far inferior in style and tone to many of this lady's published poems, the speaker claims to be influenced by a spirit who alleges that he had first appeared on earth in the most ancient period of the Hindoo dynasty. After describing several consecutive "twelve births," in what we must

infer were different forms of humanity, he proceeds to declare that he became an Egyptian, the one who planned and helped to build the Pyramids.

Then he appears as one of Egypt's Shepherd Kings, and, after another succession of births, is re-incarnated in the person of Saul, Israel's rebellious king.

More successions of "twelve births" follow, after which the wandering soul becomes a Jewish child, encountering and being blessed by Christ in Jerusalem; then a martyr to the Christian faith, then a Christian priest, then somebody else, and somebody else still; then Michael Angelo, busy in building St. Peter's at Rome; and after sundry other transmigrations, not clearly stated, he becomes a poet, and the author of those exquisite lines on God, so familiar to all readers of Spiritualistic literature, commencing,

—
"O, Thou Eternal One, whose presence bright
All space doth occupy, all motion guide,
Unchanged through time's all-devastating flight,
Thou only God, there is no God beside." ¹

After sundry other wanderings—detailed in rhymes, which too surely prove that his poetic afflatus has not improved since the above quoted sublime lines were written—the text goes on to say that through all these long centuries of re-incarnation, the main object of the pilgrimage has been to discover his twin soul, counterpart, or affinity; a final union with whom completes his destiny, resolves him into a fully perfected being, and henceforth he becomes a saviour and tutelary spirit to the human race. Now, if this remarkable address were put forth as a mere poetical rhapsody, the hearers and readers thereof might accept it for its simple worth in a literary point of view; but, as I understand it, it is given as a statement of facts, on the authority of a spirit controlling Mrs. Tappan; and not only giving, through her lips, his own autobiography, but weaving it into a series of addresses preceding and succeeding it, all of which claim to teach, upon spiritual authority, the same doctrine of Reincarnation (sic).

If we are to lose our belief in the existence of the soul after death, upon the communion of spirits, and one of those methods of communion is trance speaking, mark the dilemma which the acceptance or rejection of this one medium's utterances alone would place us in? (sic)

Either we must believe that Mrs. Tappan or her spirits are deceiving us. If the medium is false, whom can we trust? If the spirit, are we in any better plight? Allan Kardec is alleged by his admirers to be no less trustworthy than Mrs. Tappan. Miss Blackwell is equally regarded as a mediumistic oracle. If they are false; why are not all media the same? If the media are all unreliable, from whence comes our Spiritualism, and what becomes of our authority?

¹ From "God" (1784), by the Russian poet Gavriila Romanovich Derzhavin (1743-1816), translated by John Bowring (1792-1872) in his *Specimens of the Russian Poets*.

All our knowledge of spirit-life and being, all that we have learned or think we have learned, during the last eventful twenty-seven years, of what we have fondly deemed communion with the beloved ones gone before — depends for its acceptance on the integrity of the media through whom the communications are received, on the truthfulness of the beings who actually do communicate. There can be no half measure about this proposition; as on a careful review of the characteristics which mark spirit communion, since its first advent through the Rochester knockings, it is a simple impossibility to believe the mediums capable of originating all the immense mass and variety of test facts that have been given through them, often involving the private histories of thousands of persons with whom they could have had no acquaintance: either we must invalidate the authority of the communicating spirits, or come to the conclusion that we have not yet arrived at a sufficiently definite standard of truth in spiritual communion — that we are at fault in the matter of what to reject and what to accept, and we are too often priding ourselves upon having progressed beyond the A B C of our spiritual faith, when we have not in reality learned fairly how to recognize the A when we see it.

Apologists for contradictory communications are perpetually reminding us that the immense diversity of life, character, and condition in the spirit-world, like that upon our earth, is amply sufficient reason to account for contrariety in the communications. In matters of opinion and theory, even in descriptions of the spirit-life and land itself, this is certainly true; but when media undertake to give us consecutive biographies of the spirit speaking through them, and boldly proclaim their identity with divers of earth's deceased notables, are we to believe or disbelieve them — which?

If we disbelieve — the whole fabric of our faith, as built upon the integrity of our media, is shaken. If we accept — human individuality, identity, together with the whole realm of earthly loves, friendships, and ties of kindred melt into the illusion of a fleeting dream. There is nothing real, nothing permanent; self-consciousness itself is a myth. Every successive death is an annihilation; and instead of a long and shining list of immortal saints and philanthropists, poets and painters, martyrs and heroes — earth's history is made up of the biographies of a few wandering sprites who keep stretching out their Histories through all time, and reproducing themselves under all manner of protean forms and circumstances.

The hapless believer in Re-incarnation can be as little sure of himself or his own identity, as his most intimate acquaintances are for him. He has not a chance to know who he is himself; who he was yesterday or who he will be to-morrow: and as to the precious ties of parentage, or the divine impulses of family love, kindred and friendship, they are all floating emotions to be blotted out in the grave, and lost in new successions of new lives, new relationships, new deaths, and succeeding oblivions. The most remarkable and certainly not the least indefensible part of the Re-incarnationist's theory is, however, not only that they have no facts on which to ground their assertions, like the majority of their fellow-believers in Spiritualism, but that they infer there must be countless millions of spirits communicating through other channels who have no knowledge of Re-incarnation, and even emphatically deny its truth.

Can the controlling spirits of the Re-incarnationists be the only ones enlightened on such a stupendous item of the soul's destiny ?—an item which if not common to all, must be known to all—and that in realms where such changes must be perpetually going on as would render ignorance of the subject impossible?

If we may trust other media as reliable as those whose authority we have cited, Michael Angelo has been just as busy in America as in London; and yet, when questioned on the subject by his American friends, he can only remember having been engaged in building the Pyramids and fighting the battles of the Israelites as King Saul, when he vaticinates through the lips of one medium in London. Were I disposed to treat this subject from a ridiculous rather than a serious stand-point, I should find food enough for my purpose, even in the hazy attempts at a theory put forth by the best defender of the doctrine—Allan Kardec himself. As it is, I only desire to remove this fungus from the pure and wholesome soil on which we as Spiritualists have upreared our beautiful temple of faith, so fraught with hope in eternal progression, eternal love, individuality and self-consciousness. It is with him alone, Mr. Editor, that I shall ask leave to offer a few more arguments on this subject in a future paper.

(begin Part 2)

In my last article I gave a surface view of the necessity, if not the actual duty, imposed on Spiritualism to investigate and *prove* (original) either the truth or falsity of the doctrine of Re-incarnation, if they would have acceptance from the world, as teachers of those principles of spiritual existence, which so pre-eminently distinguish the philosophy of Spiritualism from the dogmas of Theology.

The very corner-stone of Spiritualism is FACT, or the substitution of knowledge for faith. We who are Spiritualists do not surely believe, but absolutely *know* (original) that the spirits of men once embodied on earth, live and communicate. We know this, first: from a set of sensuous demonstrations for which no earthly cause can be assigned, but for which the demonstrations themselves render us good and sufficient reason to attribute to spiritual beings. Next: because an immense mass of intelligence has been given through modes which mortals could not themselves have originated; and finally: because the intelligence so rendered has been identified with certain individuals once embodied upon earth and proving their claims to be acknowledged as its authors by the tests of special individuality which mark the communications.

Now if the mere philosophy of Spiritualism were to be arrayed against that of Christianity, Buddhism or any other form of theologic faith, it would have to depend for its acceptance on the reasonableness of its theory or the credibility of its authors: but Spiritualism cannot thus be pitted against faiths whose existence is dependent upon a past record. The very lynch-pin of Spiritualism is its ability to supply those sensuous, demonstrable and ever present facts, in which every form of mere credal belief is wanting, and for the lack of which they are crumbling into dust, and losing the adherence of the most analytical minds of the age. When therefore a mere theory is

propounded from the very camp of Spiritualism, and those whom the world has been accustomed to look to as the apostles of a doctrine based upon facts, and presented with demonstrable evidences of its truths, undertake to use their facts as a cloak to cover their theories -- Spiritualism retrogrades into the same realms of shadowy belief which enshroud so many forms of sectarian faith, and prevents no more claims of acceptance from the reasoning mass of investigators than Christianity or Buddhism.

If Spiritualism is to advance beyond its phenomenal facts to the dignity of a philosophy, or the inspiration of a religion, it must not lose sight of its harmonious relation to its phenomena, nor descend from its lofty vantage ground of knowledge, into the vale of misty theory. Alan Kardec, the great apostle of the doctrine of Re-incarnation, while giving some of his opinions on the authority of spirits, does not hesitate to base his central idea of Re-incarnation upon *theories* (original), which he commends to his readers' acceptance, because he deems them reasonable, and assumes that they alone can account for the order of creation. His devoted follower, Miss Blackwell, no less than his sympathizers in America (few though their numbers be), are for the most part mediums, and propound their Re-incarnation theory upon the authority of what they claim to be spirit teachings. The chief, in fact the only difficulty in this case, is this: Those who have been accustomed to find in the plain, demonstrable facts of spirit communication a complete solution to all their theologic problems, and an anchor of assurance on which to rest their hopes of immortal progress and happiness, find themselves again entangled in a mass of contradictory theory by this new feature of spiritualistic revelation, and as remarked in my former paper, must either discredit the media whom they have been accustomed to rely upon as heaven-inspired messengers of truth, or question the worth of spirit communion as a source of information at all.

It is in answer to very many earnest souls, faithfully seeking for the truth and nothing but the truth, that I have been induced to call attention to the groundless character of the testimony which the apostles of the Re-incarnation theory rely upon, not one item of which affords the profound analyst a shadow of evidence that their theories are correct.

The few mediums through which this doctrine is now communicated have been many years before the public, and their earliest utterances imply a faith wholly at variance with their present creed. They used to teach the soul's progress in the spheres and not on earth. They used to teach, that knowledge came through inspiration from spirits -- not that *spirits were obliged to come to earth to gain knowledge* (original). These, and various other items of a similar kind, should induce those who insist on pinning their faith upon mediumistic utterances, to inquire which, is the most reliable -- the inspirations of young, untutored minds, which like tablets of virgin wax, are free from the lines of previous impressions, and ready to receive whatever the new and original ideality of the spirit would care to communicate: or the vague opinions which float in the air around the atmosphere of every new reform, and from time to time find lodgment in the minds of those psychologic subjects who are susceptible of impressions from any source -- mundane or spiritual.

Again: which should the seekers of truth rely on, -- the fantastic theories of a few, whose present teachings are antagonistic to their former utterances, or the world-wide realm of intelligence which has distinguished and characterized the communications of tens of thousands of spirits during the earlier years of the great American outpouring? What one can make out of the vague, incoherence, and inconsistent theories of the Re-incarnationists, is not very likely to make many converts to their doctrines, nor to embarrass, for any great length of time, the unity and proficiency of the spiritual movement; still most propagandists of an idea are enthusiasts, whom it may not be possible, even if it were necessary, to convert from error. Such was Allan Kardec, such do I firmly believe to be Miss Anna Blackwell. Both undoubtedly were, and are sincere; and all who are candid seekers for truth are not only justified in analyzing their doctrines, but in doing so, set an example which not a few of the fossils (sic) of conservatives would do well to imitate.

Having done so myself and found the theory of Re-incarnation, to my apprehension, as well as that of hundreds perhaps thousands of others, a doctrine more loathsome, horrible and repulsive than even annihilation itself, I, and those who think with me naturally begin to sift the evidences of its truth, and finding them theoretical merely, would gladly dismiss them altogether as the unquiet dream of a fevered sleep, did we not find the hateful shadow thrown across the very path whose radiance has so lately beamed out upon our darkened way, from the sun of spiritual revelation. To disprove the doctrine of Re-incarnation, however, it does not seem necessary to sound its shallows, or analyze its fallacies. Its chief enemy is Spiritualism -- that is, Spiritualism properly understood, and its facts carefully separated from the theories of its adherents.

Before I close I shall ask permission to add a few citations from some of those records which, as being the first we have received from the spirit world in this generation, and coming when our minds were utterly unbiased, in fact, in total ignorance of the spirit world in this generation, and coming when our minds were utterly unbiased, in fact, in total ignorance of the spirit world altogether, or even what a spirit truly was, may be taken as of far more value than our present heterogeneous mass of revelation given the authority of "thus saith the spirit" and uttered by those, who having grown familiar with spiritual things, think they can venture to interpolate where once they feared to tread.

In 1848, M. Alphonse Cahagnet published a work entitled "The Celestial Telegraph, or Secrets of the Life to Come," being a series of revelations given through several excellent somnambulists, which M. Cahagnet magnetized for medical purposes, but with no view of obtaining the wonderful and startling intelligence which his subjects in the magnetic state volunteered.

M Cahagnet's testimony is all the more reliable as he entered upon his work as a magnetizer with no preconceived ideas of spiritual existence, nor the slightest expectation of receiving the astounding views of spirit life which his "Ecstatics" communicated. All was new to him, and original with them. They often manifested in the presence of the most distinguished and learned visitors. They were tested severely far more than any of our media in the present day, and while describing the spirits of

deceased persons in such vivid terms and with such correct minutiae, as to convince every investigator of the truth of what they discredited, they also gave an abundance of detail concerning the life of the spirit, the spheres of spirit existence, the scenery, houses, occupation, and destiny of the human soul, the nature of God, &c.

In all these descriptions, not one word of Re-incarnation is ever hinted at; on the contrary, when believers, or possibly mere questioners on that subject, asked the communicating spirits whether it was a truth or if the soul was ever again reborn in mortal clay, the answer of EVERY SPIRIT through every somnabulist, was invariably and emphatically in the negative. Some spirits, and especially those who have been for centuries in the spheres, or "in Heaven," as the phrase went, laughed at the idea of Re-incarnation, argued against its possibility, and wondered why mortals would cherish such a ridiculous and unnatural theory. Like the great majority of the spirits who have subsequently communicated in the American outpouring, the intelligence, through Cahagnets' Ecstatics, taught that all knowledge *came from* (original) the spheres of spirit life through inspiration; that progress was amply provided for in the spheres, and could be far better ultimated (sic) there, than on earth.

Not to elaborate farther on this one point of testimony, let us recall the teachings of Dr. Justinus Kerner's Ecstatics and we shall find them exactly to the same purpose. Similar views are propounded through the inspirations of Madame Hauffe, the celebrated Seeress of Prevorst, and lastly, when the spirits in America gave their first communications, and that to the most receptive, unbiased, and therefore reliable media of the day, -- they taught universally, one mortal life and death for all; progress through the spirit spheres even for the very lowest and most degraded of souls. They frequently brought spirits to circles for teaching, and with a view of aiding them to progress. They constantly related the results of these progressions, and gladdened our hearts with narratives of progressive lines in which the spirits were represented as having undergone ages of experience in the spirit spheres, before the consummation of purification and happiness could be attained.

Let it be remembered that in our first communications with spirits we were far more critical in demanding tests and analyzing evidence than we are at present. Without citing further authority, therefore we who are Spiritualists have the right to assume that Modern Spiritualism in its purest, most demonstrable and reliable phases, is a complete refutation of the assumptions of the Re-incarnationists, and without applying the scalpel knife of criticism to the many fallacies they teach, it is enough to say they pretend that the spirits know nothing and can learn nothing in the spheres, and have to be born again on earth to gain knowledge no less than to achieve happiness, that their temporary residences in spirit life are passed in spheres of erraticity (sic) or wandering, where *they only know enough to learn they must be born again before they can advance one step further* (original). Comment on such a theory as this, in the light of our modern spiritual revelation, is unnecessary.

It is almost humiliating to think that such stuff shall be put forth among our spiritual literature, enunciated from spiritual rostrums, and remain uncontradicted by writers on

the spiritual philosophy, for fear of offending somebody, or stepping on some eminent Spiritualist's favorite corn. The history of civilization is the history of INSPIRATION. Poetry, painting, music, sculpture, the martyrs of religious history, the heroes of national history, all providential lives owe their genius, beauty, and strength to the light of inspiration; and when inspiration comes from the earth to the spirit world, instead of from the spirit world to the earth, we may believe that the sun of our solar system derives his resplendent beams from the shimmer of our street gas lamps, and borrows the flicker of earth's tallow candles to feed the immensity of his realms of flaming glory.

In some future article I shall revert to this subject as an additional evidence of the follow -- nay, the manifest injury -- which Spiritualists perpetrate when they suffer their great and glorious revelation to be drifted about by the winds of idle, theoretical speculation; and that for fear the sovereign individuality of some great I, should be hurt by the presumption that Spiritualism needs any other definition or limit than his or her own opinion. Already we have seen every folly under the sun, even vice and rude obscenity, thrust before the community under the garb of that Spiritualism which should be synonymous with purity; and now we see it mistaken for a mass of stuff more abhorrent (sic) in its teachings than the demonic theories of Calvinism. Is it not time that we should begin to understand what Spiritualism is not, as well as what it is? Hasten true Spiritualists to the rescue, if you would be found worthy of the high and exalted privilege of ranking as soldiers in that army which does battle against folly, fanaticism, vice, and error, with the sword of Truth forged in Heaven, and lent by angels to mortals in the shape of Spiritualism.

Commentary

Like other of EHB's periodical appearances, this text deals with **the** central concern of EHB's life as a Spiritualist propagandist: the establishment and defense of Modern Spiritualism as a fact-based, scientifically-sound alternative to faith-based alternative belief systems (here Christianity, elsewhere other systems, including that of the Theosophical Society).

As EHB was wont to repeat through her entire working life, magnetism and psychology (that is, the existence of the aether as a medium for propagation of spirit, and the ability of both endowed mortals and spirits to occupy and make use of properly-prepared mortal consciousness) are the twin pillars of Spiritualism. The submergence of the third force underpinning Spiritualism, ancient Freemasonry (as opposed to its "imbecile descendent" modern Freemasonry), is of course implicit in the two-pillars metaphor, and its submergence is deliberate.

Magnetism and psychology were, in EHB's view, established scientific realities, whereas Freemasonry was not (although she worked assiduously to put ancient Freemasonry, as she understood it, on a scientific footing, during her life, in *Art Magic* and elsewhere). EHB shared with Huxley, Tyndall and other rabid anti-Spiritualists a belief in the existence of an undetectable medium -- the luminiferous ether -- through which electromagnetic energy propagated². And EHB shared with other scientists (social and hard) a belief in the susceptibility of consciousness to outside influence. When EHB claims a scientific basis for Modern Spiritualism, she is operating largely within the bounds of then-current scientific theory and experimental practice, within the bounds of medical science (such as it was), and within the bounds of epistemology.³

The core problem, throughout EHB's career as a propagandist for Modern Spiritualism, was what is known technically as **epistemic warrant**: on what basis could Modern Spiritualism make claims about the truth-value of its teachings? Inasmuch as MS competed not as one faith among many, but as a scientific faith for a scientific age

² Her espousal of galvanic medicine and spirit photography should be seen in this context. In both cases, EHB felt herself to be within the boundaries of "modern science" inasmuch as the efficacy of galvanic medicine and the appearance of spirits in spirit photography could be explained via electromagnetic propagation. Whether she saw the medium of propagation as a fluid or a gas, depended on the exigencies of the situation.

³ That she would live to see mesmerism reduced to hypnosis and suggestion (Charcot's *Clinical Lectures* were published in 1878), and to see the theory of the luminiferous ether discarded by science (the first Michelson-Morley experiments were published in 1887) as demonstrably incorrect, produced in her later work at least three things: a return to her occultist positions of the mid-1870s and to an "ancient tradition" from which to draw epistemic warrant, a bitterness toward orthodox science for what she saw as its refusal to acknowledge the "rightness" of MS in the matters of mesmerism and psychology, and a retreat into personal, authoritative testimony as "one who knows". It also explains in part, I believe, her decision to retreat from the international stage after her last appearance at a major US camp meeting in 1884.

against (untenable) “credal” belief systems, this question was central to everything EHB did as a propagandist for MS.

There are really only three bases for epistemic warrant (rational warrant, that is): empirical observation/experience (which unfortunately does not scale, and calls into question the veracity and perspicacity of the subject observing/experiencing), arguments-from-authority, and logical inference (the watches-imply-a-watchmaker model).

EHB employed all three bases for claiming scientific standing for Modern Spiritualism during her career as a spiritualist. MAS and NCM are examples of her attempts to scale empirical evidence, in a persuasive framework, through publishing, as is, in a different way, GL. AM and FFF are both attempts to make her case from authorities, as (again) is GL in a different way (GL establishes authority for TAOAM/Louis de B-----/Sirius).

EHB rarely made use of logical inference, though she was quite fond of inductive arguments, particularly in her periodical work, and in her lectures (as far as we can determine from transcriptions).

As Paul Feyerabend pointed out many times, where reason ends, there is rhetoric. And rhetoric is properly the province of the propagandist: deploying persuasive techniques where logic and evidence are insufficient to carry the day, absent entirely, or contradictory to the aims of the propagandist.

In her piece contra reincarnation, EHB is wrestling with the essential difficulties of the dominant epistemic warrant of MS: the communications, through media, of unembodied spirits, and the problems that arise when either (a) media communicate inconsistently, or (b) media are found to be communicating fraudulently. Seen properly, the piece is not in fact a critique of reincarnationist claims -- it is rather an argument about the chaos and descent into unknowability that will result, within MS, if reincarnationist claims are allowed to stand, and/or propagate.

In other words, it is a warning, rather than a dissection or a critique. EHB correctly identifies that the knowing-subject (individuality, as she has it) is essential to the epistemological model of MS, both as receiver-of-communication (and evaluator of truth), and as medium. If we cannot recognize the personality of the communicating spirit, we cannot evaluate the truth of its claims -- the problem is that simple, and that profound. Hence, any belief that assumes or asserts the loss of individuality, memory, personality (all that makes a spirit unique) also fundamentally undermines the spirit communion’s epistemic warrant. Reincarnation cannot be accepted, on that basis alone, EHB argues.

Beyond that, EHB continues, it is unacceptable -- from a doctrinal perspective -- for media to introduce, wantonly or otherwise, new ideas into the MS belief system -- whether they do so as authorities (as EHB was, at this time, doing with AM), or whether they do so under spirit guidance. Here EHB has to tread a narrow and careful line,

between the Scylla of “obsession by submundane spirits” and the Charybdis of “fraudulence”. Tappan, Conant, Kardec, Blackwell -- the motive she attributes to them must remain unstated. They are “in error” but they cannot be either obsessed (for that would be to admit the viability of the obsession theory, and open up the entire record of spirit communications to attack on those grounds), nor can they be consciously-motivated, for that would be to imply fraudulence (something for which EHB has had her hands slapped several times in *The Spiritual Scientist* at just this time), which sows discord amongst the MS faithful, as well as to call into question other communications through these media, which are earlier, orthodox and of evidentiary value, in EHB’s view. In this essay, EHB comes dangerously close, on several occasions, to invoking that which she is nominally arguing against: the need for doctrinal compliance and consistency of communication among media. Later (but not much later) this notion of doctrinal compliance -- powerful and seductive -- will surface in EHB’s thinking as a “school for prophets” at which the young, untutored minds she invokes here would be schooled in orthodoxy.

Finally, this piece circles around a theme that I believe was much on EHB’s mind in 1875 -- the voluntary, affiliational nature of MS to date. The teachings of MS were, up to this point, largely consistent but -- adopting the skeptical posture for the sake of clarity -- were so only because media freely chose to collaborate for the good of the movement. That voluntary collaboration and compliance was already eroding, at this time -- EHB is not the only leader of the movement, in the mid-1870s, to bemoan the prevalence of fraud, and the appearance among the ranks of media of tricksters and con artists, and she will be a vocal proponent of standard methods and practices for media -- the exclusion, for example, of dark cabinets from the medium’s repertoire -- when that topic moves front and center in UK Spiritualist circles, largely through the agency of E. Dawson Rogers and Stainton Moses, in the early 1880s.

And without doubt, at this point in her own personal trajectory, involved with Blavatsky and Olcott, drafting (or editing as the case may be) *Art Magic*, and witnessing what amounted to apostasy on the part of founding media -- Cora Tappan, Mrs. Conant and Anna Blackwell -- EHB smelled division in the air. Reincarnation might be the thin end of the wedge, or a test case for rallying the movement back to its fundamentals; her own position on reincarnation, both here and in later writings, is of two parts: “not proven” and “if true, dangerous and destructive of MS.” When the division came -- really, at the time of the founding of the first TS -- EHB attempted to operate on both sides of the division (compare her writings in *The Banner of Light* with those in *The Spiritual Scientist* during this period), and attempted to carve out a third way that was neither orthodox MS nor the belief system of the second TS (on the basis of AM, GL and their authorities), before becoming, as Deveney has it, one of the leaders of “the amorphous opposition” to the Theosophical Society.

